NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS
OFFICIAL 2008 BALLOT

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

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MORE OF THE SAME

(DEMOCRAT)
BUSINESS AS USUAL

(GREEN)
DON’T HOLD YOUR BREATH

(LIBERTARIAN)
NOT A CHANCE

(SOCIALIST)
YEAH RIGHT

(REAL CHANGE)
TRY AGAIN

ALSO INSIDE

What’s Happening to America?: Bill Ayers, Chalmers Johnson, Amiri Baraka (page 11)

Grad Life: Coming Down from the Ivory Tower (page 6)
November 2008

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FROM THE editor’s desk

The Road Ahead

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

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

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

His health care policy, for instance, while potentially a first step in the direc-
tory, increases the need for a single-payer system. Obama, nearly every health care plan proposed by a major party candidate in the last twelve years, woefully inadequate. It does not-
thing to tackle the fraud and waste of pri-
ivate insurance companies, while offering little help to businesses, whose health care costs, make it increasingly difficult to compete with their foreign counter-
parts who operate out of countries with nationalized health care. The reasons for this are so obvious that it almost goes without saying: the health insurance in-
dustry is one of the most powerful lob-
bies in the nation and both candidates have received ample contributions. Like-
wise Obama’s position on military spend-
ing is arguably mainstream conservative and is almost indisputable from McCain’s. Like McCain, Obama supports an increasingly large military and mili-
tary budget. Loren Thompson, a defense analyst with the Lexington Institute, told McClatchy Newspapers that “Tempera-
mentally, Senators Obama and McCain are very different on defense. But when you read the details of their defense posi-
tions, they are remarkably similar,” adding “Whether we get Obama or McCain, we will get a bigger military.” None of this is to suggest that there is no differ-
ence between McCain and Obama, but only to suggest that their similarities are greater than they may seem, and that like all major party candidates, they are both bound by the corporations and lobbies that have paved the way for their can-
didacies. As Amari Baraka passionately points out in this issue of the GC Advo-
cate (see page 14) the differences are im-
portant and criticizing Obama is a coun-
terproductive exercise. However, despite the obvious policy differences and the more obvious ideological and even intel-
lectual differences between the two, we must be wary of placing too much hope in a candidate who, like his Democratic and Republican brethren, is so deeply ensconced in the corporate political sys-
tem. Like other Democratic politicians before him, Obama, should he win on the 4th, will likely find himself so tied to the real Democratic Party platform that the possibility of meaningful change will be-
come quickly lost and/or watered down among the give and take of the political process. Like The Wire’s Mayor Carcetti, whose ideological enthusiasms are de-
voured by the calculations and compro-

dises of the Baltimore political machine, Obama’s real political potential may just quietly fade once he gets into office. In this sense it will be critically important that, at least in the corporate political sys-
tem, the real impetus for change is not going to come from the Democrats or the Left.

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

Correction

Nikolas Kozloff (honest)

Last month’s book review in the Advocate, “The New Left Looks East,” was accompanied by a photograph of a man erro-

neously identified as Nikolas Kozloff. In fact, the photograph was of Steve Stein, a leading authority of Peruvian history. The Advocate regrets the error.

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Turn the musings of your mind into manna for the masses. Write for the Advocate.
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The Other November Election

MICHAEL BUSCH

As Venezuela prepares to mark the tenth anniversary of its Bolivarian Revolution, Hugo Chávez has little cause for celebration. His stewardship of the state economy has largely resulted in failure: income inequality is on the rise while poverty reduction has not kept pace with the country's unprecedented oil returns. Basic food staples—such as milk, eggs, and meat—are scarce, raising fears that an impending food crisis looms on the horizon. Violence is rife. Venezuela's murder rate, which tallied over 12,000 homicides in 2007, has grown so ruinous that the country no longer releases official data. Internal disturbances from burgeoning secessionist movements have threatened state stability. Moreover, recent government policies appear incapable of containing the political effects of the 2002 coup. In the last year alone, Venezuela threatened war with neighboring Colombia, repeatedly ratted its saber at the United States, and most recently, tossed Human Rights Watch observers from the country after the organization issued a critical report on regime transgressions.

With the country suffering under the weight of political turbulence and a deteriorating economy, Venezuela's November election could produce a significant shift in the balance of national power. Indeed, some analysts have argued that the winds of change are gusting through Caracas with increased momentum. To be sure, Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution looks vulnerable to defeat. The economy is in serious distress; public support for the Chávez regime is waning; state nationalizations have repelled potential investment; and government policies have largely re-focused to conform to the necessities of reality. Yet in all likelihood, Chávez will escape the impending vote with minor losses. The Bolivarian regime stands to benefit from a confluence of at least three factors that will maintain Chávez's power in the near term. First, and of greatest concern, is the country's seeming transition to authoritarianism. Chávez has declared a state of exception that has allowed him to extend executive power and bar political opponents from participating in this month's election. Second, Venezuela's newfound oil wealth that remains finds itself in shambles. Though it seemed as if an opposition movement might take shape following Chávez's December referendum defeat, any hints of continued momentum are waning. Finally, and most importantly, Chávez will benefit from the strongest buffer against electoral defeat: his populist politics. Though the recent drop in oil prices will likely force Chávez to scale back his state-spending on the poor in 2009, the government will not consider any reductions until after the election. Indeed, Chávez has increased spending as the elections draw near. As in the past, this will translate into victory at the polls.

Venezuela's Troubled Economy

The election comes at a particularly tumultuous period in the country's recent history. While a number of factors have been isolated to explain Venezuela's current problems, the locus of trouble is the economy. Until the global financial crisis this fall, the surging price of oil on international markets had dramatically expanded Venezuela's economy which result in inflation spiking to dangerous levels. Venezuela currently suffers from the highest inflation rate in Latin America, and forecasters see no end in sight. Experts expect it to climb past its current rate of 35% by year's close, which would rank Venezuela's towering inflation second only to Zimbabwe in the global economy. Compound- ing these concerns is the weak value of the bolivar, Venezuela's newly-introduced currency. The bolivar fuerte was launched with the objective of curtailing Venezuela's inflationary economy, but has had the opposite effect. The "strong bolivar" trades on the black market at less than half its nominal value, and without warning, Chávez will benefit from the strongest buffer against electoral defeat: his populist politics. Though the recent drop in oil prices will likely force Chávez to scale back his state-spending on the poor in 2009, the government will not consider any reductions until after the election. Indeed, Chávez has increased spending as the elections draw near. As in the past, this will translate into victory at the polls.

Breaking News: Chancellor Goldberg Receives Hefty Pay Increase

In answer to recent state-led cuts to the CUNY budget, the Board of Trustees tightened its belt further by bumping Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's annual salary by $55,000 (a 14 percent increase). This brings the chancellor's yearly pay to just under $500,000 a year. When his housing stipend (10%) is thrown into the mix, the chancellor's total income amounts to an additional $100,000 per annum.

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

CCNY Student Activists Finally Get Their Day in Court

Just when you thought the bad old days of the Rudolph Giuliani years were dead and gone, their ghosts have returned to haunt former student activists at City College—and just in time for Halloween! On October 27th, a federal jury began hearing a case that dates back a decade involving student activists that took on former CCNY president Yolanda Moses. Three students filed a lawsuit against Moses for installing surveillance equipment inside the college's Morales-Shakur Center, home to campus and community activist groups. At the time, local organizations were mounting a campaign against the Giuliani administration's plan to give at aellis@gc.cuny.edu, or by phone at (212) 817-7284.
power, Chávez built his political platform on attacking the established order as the source of the nation’s problems. He criticized the ruling regime for their willingness to mortgage Venezuela’s future on the economic policy prescriptions of so-called Washington Consensus neoliberalism, and promised radical reforms if elected. Once in office, Chávez initially delivered on his pledge to jettison the decrepit state institutions of the Punto Fijo era. In their place, he established alternative political structures that promised to deliver much-needed social services to the extensive ranks of Venezuelan poor.

On top of these concessions, Chávez outlined a comprehensive reform agenda for state overhaul to be implemented throughout the duration of his presidency.

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

Unsurprisingly, then, a key component of Chávez’s redistribution scheme is nationalization of Venezuela’s natural energy sector. The government has moved aggressively to reclaim control of its oil fields, and the profits they produce. In April 2006, Chávez ordered the expropriation of eighteen oil operations and the cancellation of over thirty operating service agreements. In the aftermath of these state takeovers, Venezuela renegotiated terms of agreement with all the firms but three, which increased taxes on profits to 50 percent, and placed 60 percent of operations under direct governmental control.

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

Chávez moved to gut PDVSA of its senior management early in his presidency, however. Following the failed coup against him in the spring of 2002, state oil employees staged a work strike that ground the country’s oil sector to a halt. Chávez responded by firing 18,000 striking PDVSA employees, a move that effectively cut the company’s workforce in half. Employees left with more than their pink slips. According to one former PDVSA president quoted by journalist Christian Parenti, “Those workers took with them tens of thousands of years of experience, types of embedded experiential knowledge that cannot simply be purchased.” Since then, official numbers show that the company’s production has been cut by over 700,000 barrels per day. Outside expert observers argue that these numbers grossly underestimate the slowdown by at least a half a million barrels per day more.

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

Ideals and Reality

Yet at the moment economic indicators increasingly suggest that real living standards in Venezuela must fall, and Chávez has responded with aggressive policies designed to raise the living standards of his constituents. Most recently, the president celebrated International Worker’s Day by announcing a thirty percent wage increase for all Venezuelans, noting “there is no socialism without the working class.” At the same time, Chávez made plain his intention to lighten the burden of labor by reducing the national work day from eight hours to five. The government has also subsidized the public’s consumption of food and basic goods through government-run supermarkets that purportedly serve eleven million citizens. Moreover, the state has launched job creation schemes outside the oil industry to relieve economic stresses generated by unemployed sectors of the population.

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

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

**November Forecast**

Increased state financing of programs aimed at Venezuela's poor is especially important in the face of a perceived reduction in popular support for the Chávez regime. While in the past Chávez has enjoyed the buffer of widespread popular support against the hands of Venezuela's deteriorating economy, public confidence began evaporating in 2008. Chávez's declining popularity took shape most startlingly this past December when voters dealt him his first electoral defeat in a referendum that would have significantly expanded presidential powers. Chávez's loss, however, was not in itself a major stumbling block for the Bolivarian Revolution. Chavista abstentionism, however, was startling. The government lost the referendum by a hair's breadth, yet 44 percent of Chávez supporters chose to stay home during the election. Another three million voters, who had supported Chávez in his reelection bid earlier in 2007, voted against his platform in December. Since then, a survey profiled the defection from the Bolivarian regime has undermined government stability. First, General Raúl Baduel, former Venezuelan Defense Minister and close aide to Chávez, publicly broke with the president. Baduel attacked Chávez for failing to meet the growing needs of Venezuela, and claimed that Chávez was leading the country down the road to authoritarianism. Then came accusations from Chávez's ex-wife Marisabel Rodríguez that the president had harbored dreams of dictatorship, and needed to be stopped from consolidating further power in the executive. Rodríguez's public show of opposition was followed by the refusal of the Podemos Party, long a key supporter of Chávez's Bolivarian coalition, to continue supporting the president.

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

"Imagine if the opposition groups managed to win...the state of Miranda, the state of Carabobo, Zulia, Tachira, Anzoategui...the next step would be war, because they would come for me," he warned in June.

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

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

The most startling evidence beying a potent, "unified" opposition took the form of recent demonstrations protesting the president's August decrees. In stark contrast to the marches against Chávez's December referendum—rallies which drew tens of thousands to the streets—recent demonstrations have attracted paltry numbers of participants.

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

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

**Adjunct Project**

**Adjunct Project Wants You to Have More Money!**

RENEE MCGARRY AND JESSE GOLDSTEIN

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

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

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1. First, contact human resources at the campus where you work. Tell them you would like them to stop withholding Medicare and Social Security taxes and that you would like to inquire about reimburse-ment for the taxes that have already been withheld. If they give you any problems, you can explain that this exemption is in the internal revenue code: IRC 3121(b)(10), or in IRS Publication 15 page 35. If they are not going to be able to refund everything that you are owed, you can ask them for a statement, explaining what they are able to refund, if anything.

2. Second, if you haven't gotten all the money from your employer, you should file IRS Form 483 (at- tached). You must file a separate Form 483 for each tax year that you are seeking a refund for. The IRS asks that you attach a statement from your employer (explained just above) but if you cannot get a statement, then instead you can just attach your own statement that says you tried but were unsuccessful.

The top of your statement should have "your social security number -1040-the year in question" ex: 123- 43-1234 – 2010-2008.

Third, for each Form 483 that you file, attach a W-2 form for the appropriate year, or your most recent pay stub – as evidence of the withheld taxes. If you do not have the W-2 Form for the year in question – you can get this from the IRS – they should have all of this information on file for the last three years of tax returns. Call 1-800-829-1040 or visit one of the IRS centers listed on the back of this sheet.

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

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

Let's make a better CUNY! The Adjunct Project wants your involvement!
ALISON POWELL

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

Immediately before coming to the Graduate Center, I was a fundraiser for a nonprofit focused on ending the death penalty—at times a Sisyphean task. My involvement in the movement arose, strangely enough, through research I’d undertaken in a graduate class on theories of corporeality. The course nurtured in me a sense of the ethical significance of the body to be executed, and I was appalled to learn that the executions in the nation, and nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his books to help disenfranchised youth. Though he maintained his innocence in the killings for which he received the death penalty, he was executed on December 13, 2005. I returned to my program troubled with the implications of considering the death penalty in the context of such esoteric theory. I had really enjoyed asking, and formulating tentative answers to, questions such as “How were public executions related to medical advances in the late 1850s?” Meanwhile, con- demned inmates in our own country—economically disadvantaged, subject to the racism and classism of their juries, burdened with incompetent representa- tion—were being executed via state-sanctioned lethal injection. A few books (including Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood) and one documentary (The Execution of Wanda Jean Allen) later, and I left my program, packed up my car and sped away to a job in California. It would be dishonest and self-aggrandizing to pretend it was solely altruism that led me to such a decision. I craved a break from the teaching/non- earning lifestyle, from the loose-at-ends non-sched- ule of grad life, and it was easy to trade the bleak winters and conservative politics of Indi- ana or Missouri for the ocean, redwood forests and anything-goings-of-San Francisco). In general, taking a break between graduate programs is something I recommend.

Over the next two years I met heroic individu- als—appellate lawyers, religious leaders, the families of murder victims who oppose the death penalty, staff who every day brought optimism to their work. But writing copy for direct mail appeals to members, or designing a new t-shirt, I found myself wistful about my life in grad school. Like everything else, graduate school churns out self-deprecating, embarrassing situations (like my first literary seminar when I pronounced Borges with a hard “g”). Still, our primary obligation is to read what we would (hopefully) already read anyway, and then be intimidated but in- spired as scholars in the field talk to us about the work. I now do a whole lot of my work in pajamas and I do it whenever I want. Social justice work, though, does provide a very real sense that your work has an immediate impact. Trying to fight the death penalty in the United States is tough, but we saw measurable progress. At Planned Parent- hood, there was satisfaction leaving every day having armed some sixteen year old girl with bilingual safe-sex pamphlets and contraceptive information. But I think the idea of a fundamental difference between social work and academia is, to some ex- tent, a false dichotomy. Coming from a conservative state, I was at college before I learned to be skeptical of politicians and demagogues, to marvel at the power of individual resistance, and to understand the complexity of institutionalized sexism and sexism, inadequate distribution of wealth, and the abysmal conditions in our prisons

For the vast majority of us here at the GC, we don’t get the direct satisfaction of seeing how our own actions help to solve various social problems that concern us (I should note that I’m thinking very much as a person in English lit; it may be easier to visualize a connection to social change coming from the disciplines of history, so- ciology or the hard sciences). There is no death of students here where you’re helping to integ- rate their politics into their lives as academics (the upcoming election happily disregresses a number of seminars; buttons abound), and we should keep in mind how our work contributes to the “greater good.” Having visited San Quentin, I truly believe that hav- ing read Foucault and Bentham allowed me to com- mune with what that’s all about. In another way; that experience has helped me nurture the long view (not to be confused with the “Oh my, it will be fifty years before I pay back my student loans” long view) and to see that our work, which can at times feel absurdly narrow, has implications far beyond our own disciplines. As teachers, for example, asking our students to analyze everything from Legally Blonde to the Canterbury Tales encourages them to wrestle with their environment in a more empowered, complicated way.

While ambivalence about the potential for change through the ivory tower may be natural, the work of uni- versities is to improve our critical faculties and sense of history. What universities contribute isn’t only the result of overtly sociopolitical theoretical stances— queer theory, feminist studies, African-American studies, Chicano studies, etc. But even the very act of asking highly specific and refined questions has ethical merit with powerful implications. As the world becomes increasingly general and high-speed, we participate in a global consumer culture, reaching for what’s in front of us without discipline or reflection; well, if we don’t exactly resist that—if we, too, participate in it—we at least complicate it by avoiding the split-second re- sponse I mean, nothing English lit scholars do is fast. We can’t position ourselves as consistently integrat- ed and relevant to the nonacademic world, not prac- tically, not yet. We want to: there’s a healthy desire to demolish the ivory tower. But it seems important to remember that, as college teachers, researchers and writers, we are somewhat removed from the 9- to-5 world of commerce, government, service industries or (as my radical, social-justice careerist friend called it) the “nonprofit industrial complex.” It’s easy for us to think about what is intimidating and taxing about being a graduate student, and we fetishize a bit the fact that we work in the “nonprofit” way a that way that something rings false. Sure, at times reading Hume or prepping for a seminar at the Shakespeare conference makes me want to hole up in my increasingly shrinking liv- ing space, watch Almodovar movies and drink inad- visable quantities of red wine. But maybe I bemoan the work to feel a teeny bit less guilty about what I’m not doing—collecting signatures, handing out sand- witches, organizing protests. I’d bet all 35 square feet of my living space that GC students fret more about the problems facing our nation today than your aver- age twenty-something; yet we spend our time on de- coding the Romantic ethical imagination or reading 16th century antitheatricalist texts that have seemingly little relevance to the problems of poverty right outside our doors on 5th Ave.

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What's So Democratic about American Democracy?

ADVOCATE STAFF

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

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

Where are the Voters?

One of the most fundamental problems that threatens the legitimate functioning of our current democracy is, quite bluntly, the sheer lack of participation among most eligible voters. Despite the great advances in voting rights of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the incredible progress about our democracy is, and has been, the limited number of citizens who choose to actually participate at the polls. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)—an intergovernmental organization that helps to build global democracy—“voter age population” turnout in the United States in 2000 was only 58.6 percent. Compare that to the Russian federation, in which voter turnout for 2000 was 78.6 percent, or Azerbaijan, which came in at an astounding 71.2 percent in 2003.

According to National IDEA, “Nine of the top 20 countries [for voter turnout] are European (seven Western and two Eastern), six are African, three Asian and two Oceanian.” Not surprisingly, North and South America are conspicuously absent from this list. In fact, since 1945 the United States ranks only 139 out of 200 countries in voter age population turnout, averaging only 48.3 percent for the postwar period. Although critics of this systemcontest that a study of actual “voter eligible” voting trends, which would exclude the millions of prisoners and parolees who are ineligible to vote in forty-eight states across the country, as well as the number of non eligible non citizens living in the United States, would offer a fairer assessment of the actual voting rates than “voter age” turnout, the numbers are still pretty dismal. If we measure voter turnout by the “voter eligible” population, the figures go up to close to 53 percent in 2000, but that is still barely a little more than half. In other words, of the millions of people eligible to vote only slightly more than half are willing to even bother to go to the polls. According to IDEA, the United States, often invoked as the pinnacle and defender of global democracy, is in the bottom third of one of the most basic measurements of a healthy democracy. Angola (88.5 percent), Uzbekistan (88.2 percent), Taiwan (70.1 percent), Lebanon (60.2 percent), Venezuela (77.2 percent), Iran (67.6 percent), and even the Palestinian Authority (75.4 percent) vote legally and population widely. Hamas government the Bush administration helped Israel to oust in 2006) all have greater voter turnout than the United States. How is this possible?

Two of the most significant reasons for this dismal low turnout include a general sense of apathy and a sometimes open and active distrust of campaign politics more broadly. In a two party, winner take all electoral system like our own, huge percentages of the electorate view themselves as neither Democrat nor Republican—those individuals whom the media likes to call “independents”—are left without any seemingly legitimate representation of their own political values. In addition to this tremendous lack of political options, the absence of any significant democratic involvement previous to the general election, such as the party selection of primary party candidates, including the almost total absence of general participation in congressional primary decisions, leaves most voters with the sense that their vote is a meaningless choice between two often hand-picked and largely identical candidates. Worse yet, their opinions, concerns, or needs seem superfluous to the machinations of the political parties and corporate sponsors that help to generate party tickets and manipulate party agendas with various and intense forms of lobbying. Because of this perceived and often actual sense of distance from the most important aspects of the political process—that is, actually choosing who gets on the ballot to begin with—a majority of voters opt out of the system altogether, with only a small majority voting in the general elections.

In fact, to the extent that most voters are actively kept on the margins of the political process, there is also the more obvious and unsurvy fact that political campaigns, especially in the presidential elections, have become largely substance-free political theatre and comic entertainment. Consider for instance the inordinate amount of attention given to the stupidity, sex appeal, clothing choices, and Midwestern accent of McCain’s running mate Sarah Palin. Although it is important for voters to get a strong sense of the character and intellect of all of the candidates involved in any election, the overemphasis placed upon Palin’s lack of qualifications (don’t get me wrong, she is clearly unqualified) is more often than not a distraction from the real issues. Likewise, the mudslinging of the McCain campaign and the ridiculous amount of attention given to Obama’s name, his supposed ties to Islam and the radical Left are, as Ayers, are all explicit forms of political obfuscation. Indeed, these obfuscatory tactics seem intentionally designed to distract the voter and eliminate the possibility of actual political discussion, which, for most voters, is something they do not want to simultaneously please as many donors on both sides of any given issue as possible—is anathema. The fact that American voters are turned off by these tactics, even as they happily indulge in them (consider themselves as if they’re voting to Saturday Night Live’s ratings because Palin was chosen as vice-presidential nominee), is not surprising. In many ways, we get the democracy we practice, and the more politicians continue to practice active forms of distraction, the fewer voters there will be who are willing to tackle the issues on their own and find themselves capable of taking a stand one way or the other.

Tactical Disenfranchisement

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

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

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Although there are few ways to test the hypothesis, it is possible that these two gaps correlate to the two biggest disenfranchisements of the 20th century, the first ending only after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, with the second beginning shortly thereafter, with the devastating and exponential increase in prison populations, which disproportionately affects African-Americans.

Many ex-convicts are allowed to vote, sometimes immediately after leaving prison; sometimes, after they have finished their parole; and sometimes after a specified amount of time, many of them never realize this and few, if any, have the means or the time or the way to make it clear. This means that of the millions of ex-convicts the US produces many of them are perpetually kept from voting for the rest of their lives.

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

According to Hacker, HAVA, in its attempts to “clean up” state voter rolls, has opened the door to a new form of implicit disenfranchisement through the process of “purging” the voter rolls of poor and African-American voters. In key battleground states like Florida and Ohio, state governments have sought to eliminate illegal voters from their voting rolls in ways that have resulted in a widely disproportionate number of black and brown Americans being removed from the rolls. In Ohio, for instance, election officials scrubbed voter rolls by sending out letters to all registered voters and then removed the names of those voters whose mail was returned. According to Hacker, of the 95 cases prosecuted in the U.S. from 2002 to 2005 where one individual voted once and was prosecuted simply because they were ineligible to vote. Even counting these ineligible but honest voters, Hacker points out, is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg.

Even more sinister, in Florida, election officials, simply compared the names and social security numbers of registered voters and removed all of those registrations that showed any discrepancies between the two. Although this might sound fair on the surface, Hacker explains that “the Social Security Administration is un- able to match submitted names with any social security number that has been reported to it.” This means that in addition to any illegal or redundant registrations that might have been appropriately eliminated, Florida may have “accident- ally” purged 28 percent of their voter rolls, as in Ohio, where poor and African-American voters were disproportionately affected by these purges, Hacker reports that “while black voters made up 13 percent of the scanned pool, they comprised 26 percent of those whose registration was removed. While whites were 66 percent of the pool, they were only 17 percent of the rejected group.”

One of the most recent and malicious manifestations of this ongoing attempt to suppress voter turnout of minorities, especially African-Americans, can be seen in the current controversies surrounding supposed acts of voter fraud. The tempest in the proverbial teacup over the fraudulent activities of some ACORN employees, for instance, has been more damaging to Republican operatives to run a last ditch effort to intimidate and scare away as many Obama voters as possible. Of the very small number of actual voter fraud cases processed in the United States, the majority of them were simple mistakes, such as accidentally filling out a registration form twice, or felons voting who did not un- derstand they were not allowed to do so. According to the New York Times in 2006, 95 cases of voter fraud brought before courts in the United States between 2002 and 2005. Of those 95 cases, 25 were acquittal or dismissed, while at least 40 were com- mitted by party officials, candidates or election workers. The actual number of individual voters convicted of fraud, who actively tried to cheat the system by voting twice is only about 30. How- ever, of these 30, the New York Times reported that 18 of them were simple examples of ineligible voters voting. In other words, the 95 cases prosecuted in the U.S. from 2002 to 2005 were cases where one individ- ual voted once and was prosecuted simply because they were ineligible to vote. Even counting these ineligible but honest voters, Hacker points out, is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg, for it is only the tip of the iceberg.

What to Do?

Obviously there are no magic bullet solutions for how to fundamentally im- prove our democracy. Real democracy takes time, effort—enormous amounts of it. One of the biggest challenges that this generation must address is to develop the Fifteenth Amendment was passed. Indeed, the voter fraud scandal cur- rently being hyped up by the Republi- can Party is actually far more insidious and harmful to our democracy than any one of the described above. Voter reg- istrations and votes from the grave. The Republican strategy, since it realizes it cannot fairly win many key swing states in 2008 has been to aggressively protest voter registrations with the im- possible task of disqualifying anyone who was eligible to vote in 2008 if they are currently living in prison populations, which dispro- vided to create and maintain cur- rently saying to the public, this is a special and important day. Likewise, although highly controversial, passing state laws that make voting mandatory and non-voting subject to a small, but largely unenforced fine, would also help to create and reinforce the sentiment that voting is not only a right but a duty. This legislation would also send the message for democracy to function well it must provide universal representation.

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

More important than all of this, how- ever, is the need for increased importance of democratic participation in public schools. All children should be taught the importance and the respon- sibility of participating in their own governance, whether at the local or na- tional level, and more funds should be provided to create and maintain cur- riculums that promote democratic par- ticipation and values.
Forgetting Iraq and the Discourse of Responsibility

STEVEN PLUDWIN

There are no longer any innocent words.
— Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power

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

Over the past couple of years, the dialogue surrounding Iraq has shifted on all sides of the political spectrum. A discourse of responsibility—insisting that Iraqis be held accountable for their own country—now provides the framework within which our discussions about Iraq take place. Resounding from the echo chambers of political pundits from right, left and center have been calls for increased Iraqi responsibility regarding everything from security, to the curtailment of violence and the financing of reconstruction.

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

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

Responsibility, Violence and Iraqi Identity

The concept of responsibility is Janus-faced. While on the one hand, we instinctively need to assign blame, to attribute guilt, and determine levels of culpability, it is not clear that the attribution of responsibility to an individual or group of individuals will be commensurate with reality. It is not always the case that the subject labeled “responsible” is truly the responsible party. Hence, responsibility is marked by a certain ambiguity because rather than simply calling our attention to those who should be held responsible, the ascription of responsibility may actually serve...
to produce the subjects it marks. As a result, any time responsibility, or the lack thereof, is attributed to an agent, it presents a reason to reflect on who is being labeled and why.

Given this context, Iraqis are asked to assume a greater share of the responsibility for their country's continued inces-

santly. But who exactly are the "Iraqis?" Instead of simply reporting or reflecting objective reality, such statements produce a unified Iraqi subject—one that blurs the lines of ethnic and religious cleavages. They serve to further distort what is taking place in Iraq by speaking in terms of a fictive universal Iraqi identity. This practice of naming is a political act of the first order; an exercise of power that recalls Nietzsche's argu-

ment in the Genealogy of Morals that "The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should conceive of the origin of language itself as an expres-

sion of power on the part of the rulers." The power to name an event or a group of individuals is the power to construct identities and meaning. Thus, to inscribe the discourse of responsibility on Iraqi bodies is to establish a bifurcated framework wherein those who take responsibility for themselves, their future, and their nation's future. Conversely, as Alyson Cole argues, those who fail to take responsi-

bility for themselves are placed within the category of abnormal, resentful and pathological. It is within this later category that the discourse of responsibility places Iraqis.

Furthermore, calls for increased Iraqi responsibil-

ity are often coupled with a focus on their inability or unwillingness to do so. For instance, Senator Carl Levin emphatically stated that "Iraqi leaders have not met their benchmarks to share power and resources, to modify de-Baathification laws, to schedule elec-

tions and to work with the Americans." Similarly, Bryant Bender of the Boston Globe writes that "the in-

ability of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense to assume full responsibility for providing life support to its more than 100,000 troops marks a setback in the slow pro-

cess of turning over greater responsibility to the Iraqi government." Underpinning these statements is the implication that failures in Iraq continue because of government. "Underpinning these statements is the principle that America's failure. This reimagining of Iraq facilitates a psychological displacement as to where responsibil-

ity actually resides. Most importantly, Haass' statement sets its sights beyond the present by calling for the need to alter the "narrative" which "leads us to the conclusion that the United States can be read as an attempt to shape collective memory in the present; an act of crucial importance for the nation. "

In response, Renan, in his essay, "What is the Nation?" referred to the nation as "a soul, a spiritual prin-

ciple, sustained largely by the "possessions in common of a rich heritage of memories." Renan asserts that collective memory that provides the nation with a foundation that bridges the past to the present and links the present moment with a vision of the future. Through a narrative of the past a group of individuals can come together to constitute a collective body. It is the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves that turns individuals into citizens or sub-

jects; providing an adhesive for a disparate group of "us". To know itself as a "We." Haass' statement reflects the act of constructing a narrative, a story through which Americans will remember their nation's role in the Iraq War.

However, while every nation needs a particular knowledge of the past, what kind of knowledge is, of course, utmost importance. Nietzsche believed that "cheerfulness, a good conscience, belief in the future, the joyful deed—all depend, in the individual as well as in the nation on there being a line that divides the vis-

ible and clear from the vague and the shadowy." His notion that "we must know the right time to forget as well as the right time to remember," highlights the fact that a nation's existence is contingent upon not only a collective, but a selective, national memory. Such a disjunction suits itself to "historical error." The imperative is not only, never forget, but in addition, forget to remember. But while the art of forgetting is critical to the na-

tional imagination, what exactly is so imperative to forget? What is it that requires such collective amnesia on the part of the nation? In response, Renan maintained that "the principle that the nation actually resides in the national foundation by bringing to light "deeds of violence." Selective memory and collective forget-

ting then become essential means of disavowing past incidences of brutality effectively reflecting Margaret Atwood's contention that "we tend to remember the awful things done to us and to forget the awful things that we did to others." This type of discriminating re-

lationship with the past is perhaps best exemplified by the juxtaposition of 9/11 to the Iraq War. While our memory of 9/11 as an event of unprecedented importance and collective purpose remains indelibly burned into the national psyche, our understanding of the Iraq War, from its inception to the present re-

mains muddled.

Every moment of remembrance for the nation is simultaneously an instance of forgetting precisely because memory fashions the past in a way that pri-

oritizes a specific way of seeing history. The construc-

tion of national memory is a political project, where, to echo Alessandro Portelli, "the nation is nothing more than what comes after politics; it also becomes the stuff of poli-

tics." As a result, the current discourse that surrounds the conflict in Iraq forces us to ask not only what is remembered, but how it is remembered. How will we remember Iraq tomorrow? A year from now? Twenty years from now? Moreover, what will we forget?

What's Really Lost?

We return now to the question that marked our beginning. That is, how do we know, how do we make sense of, what our present is? Proving "Iraqi in-

nocence" or "American guilt," is not what is at stake here. Instead, my goal has been to illuminate how our reality is mediated and shaped through discourses of power and how these discourses construct identi-

ties, engendering ways of seeing, remembering and forgetting. With all the talk of responsibility there is, of course, everything that goes unsaid. This forces us to ask what gets lost in a discourse that attempts to reposition responsibility and inscribe other agents with its obligations.

When officials speak about the absence of Iraqi leadership or the need for Iraqis to assume greater responsibility, the United States effectively casts the Iraqis as delinquent and erases their status as victims. The mounting civilian casualties, the refugee crisis and the problems of national displacement are hidden from clear view. However, despite the great lengths to which the United States goes in its attempt to reposition the locus of responsibility from itself onto Iraqis, gaps between rhetoric and reality remain. The discourse and the reality, to invoke the language of Fanon, follow the dictates of "mutual exclusion." Such a distinction, according to William Gut-

ner's question of "who counts as human." Whose lives count as lives? And finally, what makes for a griev-

able life?" To be able to recognize the significance and trauma of what Iraq and all Iraqis have collectively undergone in the past five years might provide an entry point into an important dialogue about Iraq's present and future responsibility.

Pierre Bourdieu once wrote that "from a strictly linguistic point of view, anyone can say anything just as the private can order the captain to clear the la-

tines; but from a sociological point of view, it is clear that not anyone can assert anything or else does so at his peril." I propose that it is imperative to assume the role of the private in our discourse in order to assert all that the dominant discourse omits and attempts to silence. By struggling against the for-

getting of the current moment, regardless of the po-

tential dangers involved we begin to piece together a more comprehensive picture of what is actually tak-

ing place, producing a better understanding of what our present is. This commitment will no doubt guar-

tee the development of counter-narratives, despite attempts to ensure otherwise.
What’s Happening to America:

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

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- Chalmers Johnson
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Chalmers Johnson

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

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

The political blunders, serious mistakes, and governmental failures of the last eight years so discredited the administration of George W. Bush that his name was barely mentioned at the 2008 Republican convention. Even John McCain chose to run as a candidate of “change” despite the fact that it was his own party’s misgoverning that elicited those demands for change. Bringing the opposition party to power, however, is not likely to restore the American republic to good working order. It is almost inconceivable that any president could stand up to the overwhelming pressures of the military-industrial complex, the extra-constitutional powers of the sixteen secret intelligence agencies, and the entrenched interests they represent. The subversive influence of the imperial presidency, the vast expansion of official secrecy, and the irrational commitments of American imperialism (761 active military bases in 151 foreign countries as of 2008) will not easily be rolled back by the normal workings of the political system.

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

Of these two realigning elections, the one that elected Roosevelt is more important for our purposes because it ushered in one of the few truly democratic periods in American political history. In his latest book, Sheldon Wolin, a Princeton political theorist and analyst of American democracy, holds that “Democracy is about the conditions that make it possible for ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs.” However, the founders of the country and virtually all subsequent political leaders have been hostile to democracy in this sense. They favored checks and balances, republicanism, and rule by elites rather than ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs.

It is this history that makes the election of 1932 so exceptional. “The sovereign people,” Wolin contends: were fully entitled to use governmental power and resources to redress the inequalities created by the economy of capitalism. That conviction supported and was solidified by the New Deal. A wide range of regulatory agencies was created, the Social Security program, and a minimum wage law were established, unions were legitimated along with the rights to bargain collectively, and various attempts were made to reduce mass unemployment by means of government programs for public works and conservation. With the outbreak of World War II, the New Deal was superseded by the forced mobilization of the entire economy and the conscription of much of the adult male population. For all practical purposes the war marked the end of the first large-scale effort at establishing the tentative beginnings of social democracy in this country.

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

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

Chalmers Johnson

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The question of whether we will become a nation among nations and a people among peoples, or rather insist belligerently on our right to be the uber-nation and go out, then, in the proverbial blaze-of-glory is palpable, immediate and real

BILL AYERS

“The Politics of Teaching in an Unjust World”

During the heat of the 2008 battle with Senator Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Party nomination for president, Senator Barack Obama was asked who he imagined Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. would support if he were alive today. Without hesitation Obama answered that he didn’t think Reverend King would support or endorse either one; King, more characteristic, would be in the streets building a movement for peace and justice, holding everyone’s feet to the fire. That strikes me as right. Lyndon Johnson, the most effective politician of his generation, was never in the trenches. Although he did pass the most far-reaching legislation in history in response to a robust and in many ways revolutionary movement in the streets. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was neither a labor leader nor an activist, and yet he presided over critical progressive social legislation in a time of radical labor mobilization in shops and mines and factories across the land. And Abraham Lincoln was not a member of an abolitionist political party, but reality—including in effect a general strike of enslaved human beings—forced emancipation to the forefront of American politics. Each of these three acted at a moment of crisis and expanding possibilities, each responded to radical grassroots movements for social justice on the ground.

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

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

We must agitate for democracy and push hard for human rights, learning to build a new society through our collective self-transformations and our limited everyday struggles. We must commit to the common good even as we take a full and realistic measure of reality. This means making a concrete analysis of real conditions, finding ways to make connections between and across specific movements—war and warming, peace and labor rights, queer freedom and human rights—and positing alternatives. We must see ourselves as the work in progress, and in this we must begin by working for social, economic, and environmental justice in order to build a movement that is a movement for social, economic, and environmental justice.
opposing war and surveillance and caging in favor of more education, more health care, and social security for all. In these efforts the competing impulses and ideals that animate our history are on full display: rights and liberty and the pursuit of human freedom on one side, domination and conquest and repression on the other; education, health care, and some degree of economic security throughout life in close contention with war, surveillance, and containment.

We live in a time of empire resurrected and unapologetic, militarily powerfully expanding and triumphant, war without justice and without end, growing disparities between the haves and the have-nots as economic dislocation wracks the world, white and male supremacy entrenched, basic rights and protections shredded, fear and superstition and the mobilization of scapegoating social formations based on hierarchy and the threats of violence, on and on. The powerful cannot rule in the old ways, ordinary people are unwilling to pursue solutions in the old ways, and a missing piece of the puzzle—a radical new vision and program—cries out to be discovered through action. We live as well at the eclipse of the American empire—Randy Newman sings that “The end of the empire is mess by mess and this one is ending like all the rest.” The question of whether we will become a nation among nations and a people among peoples, or rather insist belligerently on our right to be the iber-nation and go out, then, in the proverbial blaze-of-glory is palpable, immediate and real. The trauma of contradictions that is America. All of this pushes us toward becoming authentic actors and active subjects in our own history. And none of this, of course, is easy or automatic, all of it demands, in Gramsci’s famous dictum, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” We might harvest some hope now in the growth of opposition to militarism and war. Or we might be inspired by the growing reparations and prison abolition movements, or the rising immigrant rights movement that is re-framing the question of work and rights as well as the stirrings of working people everywhere on earth, or by queer people courageously pressing for full human recognition and rights. But mainly hope resides in a simple self-evident truth: the future is unknown, and it’s also entirely unknowable. History is always in the making, and we are—each and every one of us—works-in-progress. In this open space we are constructing togetherness and community, we are sure to electrify and confound and fascinate us. This is the heart of education which, at its best, rests on the twin pillars of enlightenment and liberation, knowledge and human freedom. We want to know more, to see more, to experience more in order to do more—to be more competent and powerful and capable in our projects and our pursuits, to be more astute and aware, more fully engaged in the world we inherit and that we are simultaneously designed to change.

Education in a democracy must be considered distinct from education under a dictatorship or a monarchy, and the distinction matters. After all, school leaders in fascist Germany or communist Albania or medieval Saudi Arabia are all agreed that students should behave well, stay away from drugs and crime, do their homework, study hard, and master the subject matter of their courses. Or we might recognize the fact that there is something more—more: the attempt to develop in students and teachers alike the ability to think for themselves, to decide what is black and what is white, what’s false and what’s true. Teaching in a democracy is geared toward participation and engagement, and it’s based on a common faith: every human being is of infinite and incalculable value, each a unique intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, and creative force capable of asking: Who in the world am I? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed? Education in a democracy is characteristically eye-popping and mind-blowing—it’s about opening doors, opening minds, inviting students to become more capable and powerful actors and choice-makers as they forge their own pathways into a wider world. But much of what we call schooling forecloses or shuts down or walls off meaningful choice-making. While many of us long for teaching as something transcendent and powerful, we find ourselves too often locked in situations that reduce teaching to a kind of glorified clerking, passing along a curriculum of received wisdom and predigested bits of information. A fundamental choice and challenge for teachers, then, is this: to acquiesce to the machinery of control, or to take a stand with our students in a search for meaning and a journey of transformation. To be a prison guard or an educator. To teach obedience and conformity, or to teach its polar opposite: initiative and imagination, the capacity to name the world, to identify the obstacles to your full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known demands. Education as the practice of freedom.

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

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

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

Educators, students, citizens, and activists must press in this period for a new kind of education based on the principle that the fullest development of all will be the condition for the full development of each. This new education advocates an end to sorting people into winners and losers through expensive standardized tests which act as pseudo-scientific forms of surveillance; an end to starving schools of needed resources and then blaming teachers for dismal outcomes; and an end to the rapidly accumulating “educational debt,” the resources due to communities historically segregated, under-funded and under-served. All children and youth, regardless of economic circumstance, must have full access to richly-resourced classrooms led by caring, qualified and generously compensated teachers, and assessment must be in the service of student learning and teacher effectiveness. K-16 education is an urgent priority and a fundamental human right.
er—people will begin to experience themselves as powerful authors of their own narratives, luscious actors in their own dramas, the essential creators of their own lives. They will find ways to articulate their own desires and demands and questions. In this space everyone will live in search of rather than in accordance with or in accommodation to. This is the key to a democratic future.

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AMIRI BARAKA

“Forward is Where We Have to Go”

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

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

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

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

Jesse Jackson’s two runs for president were admissible, and a necessary part of the sleighhammer of black politics from the 50’s through the 80’s. And just as that force created the visible use of Colin Powell and Condeleeza Rice as negro “bushes” within the right-wing establishment of US bourgeois politics, none of that was possible without the black movement itself, as contradictory as that might seem. The internationally perceived racial conflict in the United States was the most glaring contradiction to US claims to being the only righteous angel of world politics. Jesse

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

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

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

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

Black politics will only disappear when the black majority disappears, and even the wish fulfillment of New York Times “liberals” can never achieve this, nor the creepy self hatred of those inconcegoges the Times wants to anoint as “post-black.” Still the question of Obama’s candidacy is a quite different consideration.

As I have said in print and in the flesh at many forums, the foundation of Obama’s successful candidacy is his 90 percent support from the Afro-American people, a fact that I’m sure he understands. Obama also un
derstands that it is the rest of the American people he must reach out to, no matter how his attempts to do this are questioned, even by black people. After all, 90 percent of 12 percent is not enough to win the presidency.

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

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

What we must be aiming for at the present level of US politics is a people’s or popular democracy, rather than the stinking example of its pimpablility. One could hope that an Obama victory would be powerful enough to maintain the cor
correct orientation of any national coalition of multina
tional forces to win this election and help steer the ship of state.

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

Ultimately this political period will be characterized by what kind of politics the US and progressive Americans can put together to secure Obama’s elec

tion and push him ever to the Left. Hubert Harrison, the black socialist, wrote in the New York Call in 1911: “politically, the Negro is the touchstone of the mod ern democratic idea. The presence of the Negro puts our democracy to the proof and reveals the falsity of it…True democracy and equality implies a revolu
tion …starting even to think of.” So the question of “Black Politics” must be inextricably bound to pro
gressive politics in this country and just as we fought as black people and with progressive allies of many nationalities even to vote, or for that matter, to drink out of public drinking fountains or ride anywhere in a bus, so it is this same “Black Politics” that will help us tackle our current national problems. Black politics in its most progressive meaning is the struggle for a people’s democracy here in the United States. This is what the Obama campaign asserts boldly. We must see that it continues to do so right into the Oval Of
cice and beyond.

Amiri Baraka

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sic history and criticism, including Blues People: Negro Music in White America, (1963), The Dutchman (1964), Black Magic, po
cens (1969), and Somebody Blw Up America (2001).
Recent stories of America's relatively abrupt fall from "exceptionalism" typically trace the corruption and incompetence of the executive branch. Much of this commentary focuses on the abuse of executive power during the administration of George W. Bush. The majority of it has come from journalists, pundits, or insiders near the White House (think Richard Clarke, Bob Woodward, or Frank Rich). In their narratives, the nation's problems came from a relatively small group of political appointees that grossly abused the power locked into unelected positions of government: Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft, Alberto Gonzales, and so on. By this point, we're probably too familiar with the awesome corruption, decadence, and ethical decay exposed within the military/industrial complex—the CIA, the NSA, the EPA, the Interior and Justice Departments, the Pentagon, and so on.

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

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

If you want to understand the problem with democratic institutions, these books fol- why? They examine the role played by George Mason University economics professor Bryan Caplan echoes Thomas Franks' central question: why do people vote against their economic interests? For Caplan, however, this question pertains to those voters who vote for protectionist trade policies. They don't do this because they are ignorant. They're "ir- rational." They process information emotionally. They "tune out" information that upsets their beliefs.

If democracy fails, it's because it does what voters want. In short, voters want to feel good about voting. Their choices are irrational, and therefore democracy cannot behave rationally. This is his main argument against those folks who think democracy could be better if people were more educated. On this point, he seems to score.

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

During the McCarthy hearings in 1952, only 19 percent of the population knew what the Foreign Service did. In 1986, only 30 percent of the population knew Roe v. Wade had to do with abortion. It goes on. The effect of all this information could mean a few things. First, it appears that a majority of citizens have been ignorant of political events and the political process for a long time. Second, this knowledge implies that the education system is seriously flawed. Or, finally, it may be that people do, in fact, choose to vote based on emotions rather than reason. Since Caplan is an economist, he cares most of all about voters' ignorance of economics. If they could purge their basic biases about economic behavior, the political process would work better. This would happen because politicians could finally start implementing policies they know work for the long term, instead of trying to satisfy voter feelings about, say, jobs going overseas.

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

It's almost too easy to point toward the current economic crisis as a response to Caplan's own "pro-market bias." First, his old reference to the "invisible hand" refers to competition and greed among individuals. It does not refer to the combined, abstracted greed that powers a hundred-billion dollar company like, say, AIG or Lehman Brothers. Imagine that one of the figures the invisible hand tries to regulate is a small-income, black-female household in Cleveland. The other figure is a gigantic insurance company with thousands of employees all coordinating their activities to exercise the most exacting, overly clever, and seemingly sophisticated set of policies ever imagined to produce wealth. The invisible hand can probably nudge the grandmother fairly easily with a sub-prime contract: follow your greed and get this house re-fi-nanced. But the same invisible hand would probably get its fingers broken trying to stop AIG. What Caplan doesn't account for is that gigantic corporations, like monopolies or trusts, are not equal to an individual. They have more power, more authority, more choices, more information, and thus their unchecked greed can do more damage. It's not proportional. So when he criticizes voters who elect representatives that can express their antimarket bias, he neglects considering the way it might "balance" the greed he finds so productive.

Caplan might remember, too, the decline of union power during the neo-liberal era. If laid off workers can no longer organize, isn't it logical to assume they might elect protectionists to office during times of economic crisis? In other words, they're choosing to be "irrational" economists because they're actually ra-
tional workers and consumers. Just because the milk and toys can be made cheaper in China, that doesn't mean the labor-saving "innovation" of cheap Chinese labor is preferable. The milk and toys could have been made safer in the United States. Furthermore, the American importation of Chinese labor is the result of anti-Japan hysteria, even when trade deficits with Japan during a period that the anger of humiliated people can turn ugly fast. Shenkman believes the issue could be confronted by questioning the intelligence of the population. He suggests a sustained, popular critique of the entire sacred mythology surrounding the Constitution's notion of "the people." This critique is acceptable in private conservation, but not in public debate or in the media. It's certainly not going to appear as a question in a debate, or in a post-debate wrap-up. The question about the one most intelligent and powerful of all species: what do you think? But the question can never be: how intelligent are those that think it—and maybe even how racist they are? "The fallacy of "our civic religion" is to treat all voters as equal. The reason the Constitution removes so much power from the people, Shenkman argues, is because the framers didn't trust the people to make good decisions—they relied too much on their crazy emotions. For Shenkman, the biggest myth broken in modern times was liberalism. The shocking right-wing rise of an evangelical Moral Majority and neo-liberal economic platform has angered liberals in the past four decades, and acutely so during the Bush term. What these movements displaced, however, was a progressive belief in a rights-based US society. Thus, the shock was about the conservative "reaction" to the Civil Rights Movement, "which laid bare the racist beliefs of thundershout majorities of white Southerners". It was a campaign of civil rights activism. When the "masses" got the vote in the 19th century, politicians had to dumb-down their tactics. They began using "fake imagery, slangs, songs, torchlight parades, and bombastic rhetoric." For Shenkman, the most dangerous of a simplistic phrase designed to generate an emotional charge from the masses. This is the connection between the real evangelicals who supported Bush and the "secular" evangelism of those who believe in Obama. Politics and religion trade on the fears of the disadvantaged. To control them, they say places a couple decades of Civil Rights administrations and the polarization of rich and poor, but it's worth considering whether the social issues voters use to vote Republican reveal a gray zone of the Republican base. The white suburbs of America's racist heartland: the South and the Midwest (Pennsylvania to Kansas). It's not a stretch to imagine that significant white Republican swing voters in the suburbs are basing their decisions, in part, upon race. After all, even when accounting for their recent diversification, the suburbs remain especially segregated in the south and more so in the Midwest. Many Americans live in de facto apartheid neighborhoods—the legacy of white flight, which was the legacy of Jim Crow segregation, which was the legacy of slavery. If race is the reality of how class is lived, as Stuart Hall has shown, then suggesting red states vote along class lines is also to suggest red states also vote along racial lines, at least in part. There has always been that fourth, unnamed party of white supremacists among the Reagan coalition, and among the American population. For Shenkman, the most dangerous of a simplistic phrase designed to generate an emotional charge from the masses. This is the connection between the real evangelicals who supported Bush and the "secular" evangelism of those who believe in Obama. Politics and religion trade on the fears of the disadvantaged. To control them, they say...
One must be careful with how one approaches the work of Elizabeth Peyton. It is too easy to dismiss her, to fault her for her own seemingly bottomless devotion to the seductions of youth and beauty as Sarah Valdez did in her review of Peyton’s 2001 show at Gavin Brown. In that review Valdez wrote that Peyton was “aghastly vacant” and that her paintings hung “around like so many posters of celebrities on a pining teenager’s bedroom wall.” Her wispy, dreamy figures do recall the analogy that Valdez made: their fashion school-like illustrative qualities lend them an inherent weightlessness that seems the stuff of wistful infatuation. And yes, it’s true that Peyton loves her subjects. She admitted as much in a recent New Yorker profile by Calvin Tomkins, when she remarked: “I really love the people I paint. I believe in them, I’m happy they’re in the world.”

Her enthusiasm for those she paints is apparent, and at the risk of being sentimental, this enthusiasm is not a negative. If anything it is refreshing in an art world that has not only taken to viewing any sort of unironic enthusiasm as dubious, but seems to believe that aggressive disinterest is somehow an aesthetic stance that equates belligerence with intelligence. Peyton’s love, though, is also distracting. It detracts from her paintings, taking them out of the realm of painting and transforming them into devotional objects. Her gaze often feels clouded by her worshipful relation to those she paints.

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

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

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

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

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The idea to do an opera about the atomic bomb was the brainchild of Pamela Rosenberg, who in 2002 was the politically-minded director of the San Francisco Opera. The genesis of the bomb's music, however, came much earlier, in a childhood experience of John Adams: “I do remember as a kid—I don’t know how old I was, maybe seven or eight years old—living in the most secure, Stephen Spiel- bergian, idyllic village in New Hampshire… getting into bed one night, and my mother gave me a kiss and turned out the light. I heard a jet plane way, way high up in the sky, and I went into a panic, because I wondered if that was the Russians coming to bomb us.” Adams’s experi- ence, the vague but numbing fear of nuclear annihilation, was the expe- rience of the entire baby-boomer generation, who grew up during a cold war and an era of widespread paranoia, symbolized most poignantly by the bomb itself, whose invisible waves of radiation threatened skin and sanity alike. As Norman Mailer has put it in his 1957 essay “The White Negro,” the bomb ushered in a new phase in the history of human consciousness; a kind of psychic frac- turing occurred where normal Ameri- cans would go about their everyday lives of getting and spending, all the while aware, on another level, of the possibility of the instant, impersonal, absolute extinction of the race. Such beme-thoughts provided the psychic materials for Adams’s bracing score in Doctor Atomic, which opened at the Metropolitan Opera House on October 12, and runs through November 13.

The opera is Adams’s third, and continues the composer’s commitment to giving operatic treatment to controversial social and political issues that have deep significance in the collective American psyche. 1987’s Nixon in China (the title is a pretty much sums up the plot) was the beginning of a collaboration between Adams and the adventurous director Peter Sellers. 1991’s The Death of Klinghoffer, which stages the hijacking of the passenger liner Hector Lavoe by the Palestinian Liberation front, brought heavy criti- cism including charges of “romanticizing terrorists,” which drove Adams away from the medium for over a decade. Doctor Atomic, the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the making of the first atomic weap- on, is perhaps a less politically charged topic, though certainly no less psychologically unnerving. While it was first staged by Sellers in San Francisco in 2005, the Met’s version features an entirely new stage de- sign by Penny Woolcock, a British television direc- tor whose film version of Klinghoffer helped mitigate some of the earlier criticism of the opera. Woolcock’s vision of the stage is stripped down, as she eliminated Seller’s chaotic, electron-like dancers. In fact, there is relatively little movement on stage, the visual dy- namism coming more from electronic gymnicks like the digital projections of mathematical equations and Japanese bombing targets grafted onto the oversize windows of the Oppenheims’ bedroom. The over- worked, strung-out physicists even nap at one point. The story spans the tension-filled two weeks in the summer of 1945 before the first testing of the weap- on, scheduled for July 16 in Los Alamos, New Mex- ico, the site Oppenheimer would name “Trinity” in a deeply personal nod to John Donne’s Holy Sonnet “Batter my heart, three-person’d God.” Here Donne’s famous poem serves as the text of Oppenheimer’s aria, which ends the opening Act. The line “bend / your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new” is addressed not to God, but to the bomb, which hov- ers menacingly over the stage, suspended by wires. Not surprisingly, the focal point of the entire opera is the soul of the enigmatic director of the Manhattan Project, who was a brilliant physicist with the heart of a poet, and whose struggle is here projected in Faust- like magnitude.

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

Scene two takes place in the bedroom of Oppen- heimer’s house in Los Alamos, late in the night, where Oppenheimer tries to calm his wife Kitty (played by Sasha Cooke), who tries and fails to sustain her hus- band’s attention. The two briefly connect through po- etry: Kitty sings Muriel Rukeyser’s “Three sides of a cone” and Oppenheimer again responds with Baudle- laire. In these tense times, the emotional heights of poetry are the plane on which husband and wife can briefly meet. After an argument, Oppenheimer leaves and Kitty is left alone to contemplate the uncertain fu- ture. In the first act’s final scene, the eve of the testing date, the weather turns ugly at Trinity, and the har- rel-chested military supervisor of the project, Gen- eral Leslie Groves (Eric Owens), stampedes around the stage, frustrated by a meteorologist’s predictions of continued storming. Oppenheimer warns of the possible dangers of testing in storm conditions, and then, in an attempt at comic relief that can’t quite carry off, teases the General about his weight. Groves leaves, and in what is certainly the emotional climax of the opera, we find Oppenheimer alone with his creation, singing Donne’s sonnet. The Act ends with what is perhaps the opera’s most effective tableau: the bomb is lowered into view and hangs suspended in air, a pool of yellow light on its upper left corner, and as we gaze at the illuminated sphere we perceive the linkages between the spherical weapon, the phys- ician’s brain, and the earth itself. A moment of reflec- tion ensues: is this the end of the road for technologi- cal man? The curtain falls.

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

Two hundred miles from the test site, the Oppen- heimer’s Indian maid Pasqualita (played by Meredith Arwady) croons a lullaby to their child. “In the north the cloud-flower blossoms! And now the lightning flashes,/ And now the thunder crashes,/ And now the rain comes down!” The baby sleeps but the storm rag- es deep into the night and Adam’s music rides along in its electricity. The radio rumblings gain in promi- nence, asdoes the title: “China” (the title itself employs a chine-sounding “emergency music”). The French horns and trumpets, the oboes buzzing pedal tones below, strings swir- ling wind spirals above. The General Leslie Groves has disregarded all warnings about the storm, and the test shot is scheduled for 5:30 am.

At this point, Donn’s poem seems to warp. Nar- rative fizzes and the audience wait with the scien- tists and the generals, the Indians and the children. There is nothing, really, left to do. In a brilliant move, Adams emphasizes the deathly slow pace of the final day with a choice bit of minimalism, introducing an arrow of clocks which tick away underneath the or- chestra, looping in an out of sync—not one count- down but many… an infinity of countdowns. The physicists, in a touch of black humor, make predic- tions about the size of the explosion: how far will the heat travel? Will the radiation reach their families? Will the earth’s atmosphere catch fire and the planet burn? Suddenly, a shot is fired… It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.
While puppet theatre probably makes up less than ten percent of the theatre I see, it makes up a much higher percentage of the memorable theatre I see. Year after year, production after production, the "object theatre" continues to amaze and delight me with its extraordinary ingenuity, craftsmanship, and infectious joy in their medium. Despite bouts of enthusiastic cheering from myself and other small-time reviewers, though, the audience for this work remains small. Even as puppets make their way into more and more mainstream events, from Broadway shows to the Metropolitan Opera house, shows performed primarily by puppets have remained marginal even within the already marginal downtown theatre scene. It sometimes feels as if the field of puppet practitioners is growing at a rate much faster than puppet audiences.

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

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

The story of Kalauli/Ko'olau, a nineteenth-century Hawaiian man who died of leprosy (Hansen's disease), is a sad tale indeed. Tom Lee's Ko'olau, is a very sad tale told with a great deal of joy and ingenuity. It is also a powerful refutation of the notion that there is not a legitimate mechanism for expressing emotional impact. In 1892, Ko'olau moved—with his wife Pi'ilani and their son Kuleimanu—to Kalaula, a remote area of Kauai in order to avoid being moved to a leper colony by the Provisional Government (the Republic of Hawaii had not yet been formed, but Queen Liliuokalani had already been overthrown by plantation owners, with the aid of the United States). When a local sheriff attempted to capture him, Ko'olau killed both the sheriff and the two Provisional Government soldiers who accompanied him. After first Kuleimanu and then Ko'olau died of Hansen's disease, Pi'ilani quietly buried them both and returned to her family home.

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

Tom Lee's puppet theatrical Ko'olau is a beautifully crafted, highly emotional iteration of the story that draws on a variety of puppetry and musical traditions. Lee focuses less on violence and disease than on the bond that holds this family together as they fight to live and die together, on their own terms. The puppetry techniques employed are divided into two spaces. The foreground characters, Ko'olau and his family, are represented by a variation on Japanese kura- lua ningyo (cart puppets), a kissing cousin to bunraku puppets. Puppeteers sit on wheeled carts, the puppet's feet resting on the feet of the puppeteers. Lee takes this variation one step further by moving their feet, the feet of the puppets seem to be walking. While kuruma puppets are often elaborately painted and costumed, Lee has simplified the aesthetic of his characters with a rough-hewn style he says is intended to evoke the woodcuts and other crafts of Hawaii.

While the kuruma-based Ko'olau family occupies the foreground, the background is dominated by a large screen, onto which layers of shadow, light, and video are projected. As the audience moves around the cart, Lee has designed the shadows and projections to reflect the hand-carved elegance of Hawaiian prints. Unlike the cart puppets, the shadows and projections are not built on any particular tradition but are an amalgamation of technical fines that are familiar to anyone who frequents contemporary art scenes in Hawaii.

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

With little-to-no dialogue, Ko'olau's aural elements come primarily from live musicians who line either side of small auditorium. As with the puppets, the instruments draw from a melange of world-music traditions, mostly Asian, with a particular emphasis on Japanese music and the occasional nod to the music of Hawaii. Lee, like many of his contemporaries, borrows so gleefully and unapologetically from his contemporaries that he inevitably opens himself up to accusation of cultural appropriation. The subject of Hawaiian, however, inoculates him from such charges to some extent; there is no ethnic majority in Hawaii, and while Ko'olau's 19th-century islands were not quite the islands we know today, they were already a place where cultural influences from Japan, Portugal, and many other nations held sway.

There has long been a thread of theatre theory that claims theatricality must be as invisible as possible if the audience is to become emotionally involved with the narrative on stage. This idea has been perpetuated, in part, by misreadings of Brecht's writings, and by simplistic statements like "Wagner turned the house lights off; Brecht turned them back on." It is not my intention to enter into such debates here, but it is sufficient to say that the same audiences who smiled delightedly at Lee's ingenuous craftsmanship could be heard sniffing back tears at the death of Kaleimana. One of my favorite puppet theatre companies, Drama of Works, have made a name for themselves both as creators of their own work and as curators and supporters of the work of others. The company's Artistic Director, Gretchen Van Lente, produces the sometimes-monthly "Punch" puppet jams and, once a year, right around Halloween, puts together even an event that the Carnival of Samhain. This year's Carnival of Samhain runs for only three days (November 6th through November 8th), and misses the more spine-tingling potential of both October 31st and November 4th, but promises to be an exciting event nevertheless. An eclectic mix of puppet and burlesque acts that run the gamut from the genuinely creepy to the semi-silly gothic farce, the Carnival of Samhain may well be the best way to dispose of $15 in early November.  

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


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The 2008 Election and the Media

TIM KRAUSE

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

The very speed of events in this election is itself a marvel. We’ve had the twenty-four-hour news cycle for at least fifteen years, but rarely before have political events crowded so thick and fast into the months, weeks, and days. Indeed, the news has been so frenetic that the vividness and immediacy of each moment, each image, each gaffe and attack on the candidate of the moment before the white-hot fire of the perpetual campaign.

The last time I wrote for the Advocate, the news of John McCain’s multiple homes had just broken—this happened on August 21, a little over two months ago, but this is as far off from the present moment in campaign time as the mythical events of prehistory are from the modern day. Just in the last week, a flood of bad news has hit the foundering McCain campaign, from increasing reports of knives-out infighting among his handlers and staff to the bizarre story of Ashley Todd, who secured her own tawdry bit of Campaign 2008 lore, and this goes for even gimcrack and pasteboard Valhalla—like Governor Palin’s.

Palin, I think, is best seen as a hack, not in the sense of a “hack politician”—although she fills this role with gusto, You betcha! and she’s hackneyed to boot— but in the sense of a computer or tech hack: an unexpected trick of engineering or play that scrambles a program’s or tool’s wonted, designed-for specifications, opening up new, potentially useful and interesting, applications. Bizarre (if not treasonous) from the perspective of governance, McCain’s choice of Palin makes perfect sense as a fiendishly inspired reverse engineering of Obama’s media success, a desperate attempt—in the operational vacuum formed by McCain’s lack of either a consistent message or a well-organized, smoothly running campaign—to halt Obama’s groundswell of support at the end of the summer. That, like many hacks, Palin’s disadvantages have, in the scarce two or so months she’s graced the national stage, far outweighed her dubious advantages, has for many only increased her media appeal: in the campaign’s last week, vowing to “go rogue” and ignore the advice of McCain staffers, Palin reads to me like one of the doomed Nazi wives in Hitler’s Berlin bunker—Magda Goebbels, say, who poisoned her children rather than have them survive the death of the twisted dream that was the Third Reich—who still vowed to fight on against the victorious Russians and Americans, and who hoped, in those last, fiery moments of apocalyptic zeal, for the ragged, sprawling armies of schoolchildren and nonagenarians to save them from the rampaging hordes of Yanks and Slavs. In the course of singularly ruining her first political incarnation (following Churchill’s dictum that in politics, unlike in war, one may die many times), Palin has done something far better and finer: she has entered the hallowed mists of American parodic mythology, among the company of other now-lov-able freaks, burnouts, and demagogues such as Aaron Burr, Terry Eagleton, George Wallace, and George Allen. Valhalla was meant to burn at the end anyway, and this goes for even gemicrack and pasteboard Valhalla like Governor Palin’s.

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

1. “Wassup 2008?” from 60 Frames, which recasts the members of a famous (and famously irrat- ing) Budweiser commercial from 2000 as fellow sufferers in George Bush’s America. The chorus of screaming near the end is sublimely cathartic, a
much-needed purgation of the last eight years of war, economic collapse, environmental disaster, and existential dread: it might be too soon to start knowingly quoting, apropos of McCaın’s cam-
paign. decades, from the chestnut to the London to Dunis-
nance,” but when barely-remembeowed actors from an eight-year old ad, for Gods sake, team up to deliver a hilariously poetic exorcism of your Pres-
ident’s and party’s legacies, and deliver in the pro-
cess a two-minute film that is worth entire shelves of
Syrina and Lions for Lambs and In the Valley of
Elliot, Td say you’re fucked. (http://www.youtube.
com/watch?v=QpUCf5BofE)
2. McCaın’s ‘Lime Green’ speech of June
3, a cinematographically ill-conceived response to
Obama’s winning of the Democratic primaries, in
which McCaın was put against a sickly green background
that in the words of Blogger Atlinya made McCaın look “like the cottage cheese in a lime jel-
lo salad.” The green backdrop was mercilessly ap-
propriated by an army of YouTube directors, who
added backgrounds like the Hindenberg explosion
or an atomic blast to McCaın’s listless, uninspired
speech. (Original speech: http://www.youtube.
com/watch?v=AZRuaXqQYPY; search for “Mc-
Caın green screen” on YouTube for the hundreds of
parody videos.)
3. Tina Fey’s Sarah Palin. Sure, you’ve seen it a mil-
on times already. Fey’s dead-on take is great, as
well as a nice example of the confluence of old and
new media: the big moneys mass culture hack of
Palin’s Obama hack, saved by YouTube for viewers
who can’t bother with the crapfest that’s the tele-
vised program.
4. The Rachel Maddow Show, whose host, Rachel
Maddow, is the smartest, funniest, coolest, and
newest of the Bush-era television anchors-cum-
artisan entertainers. While her show perhaps
needs to fine tune a bit — Maddow’s a bit more ra-
dio than TV, and the show lacks the funnier bits
of, say, Keith Olberman’s Countdown, which
often plays as a meta TV show about TV — Maddow
is easily the most informative and engaging net-
work talking head in years.
5. “A More Perfect Union,” Obama’s speech on race
in Philadelphia on March 18, occasioned by the
firestorm of fake controversy generated by videos
of Obama’s pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright,
saying some quite vitriolic things about the Amer-
ican Dream. Obama’s speech was a classic pivot,
taking a huge liability and turning it into an occa-
sion for a meditation on race and history, in rho-
tic as finely crafted and deliberative as Lincoln’s
or Martin Luther King’s or Bobby Kennedy’s. (http://
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzp-zHdAtO)
6. “Vlad and Friend Boris Presents ‘Song for Sarah
for Mrs. Palin,’” a knock-off of both Borat and
Flight of the Conchords that still manages to turn
Palin’s nonsensical image of Vladimir Putin rear-
ning his head in Alaskan airspace into a tenderly
smutty joke, delivered in mock earnestness by two
faux-Russian troubadours who gaze longingly
across the frozen Bering Strait for a glimpse of
their beautiful neighbor Sarah. (http://www.you-
tube.com/watch?v=XR9V_acOgAg)
7. Racist McCain-Palin supporters on YouTube: I’m
loath to give more attention than they’ve
gotten, but for sheer WTF? anthropological inter-
est, and as a testament to the hatefulness and ir-
rationality of some few on the far right, these
must be seen, like the following clips from Strongsville,
Ohio, recorded on October 8. (http://www.you-
youtube.com/watch?v=Vg8Qm9d9w&feature=related)
8. “Barack OBollywood,” an inspired visual mashup
of images of Obama with cheezy-funky low-res
graphics effects and a hypnotically grating Bol-
lywood beat. Less a testament to Obama’s global
roots and appeal, or his supposedly postracial
politics, than an excuse for tripped-out silliness.
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-451Xm-
suy)
com, brainchild of genius statistician Nate Silver:
like Chuck Todd’s electoral math wizardry during
the primaries on MSNBC, Silver’s deep analysis of
polling data provides necessary hard facts among
the swirling blather of the punditry. How the site
will manage the post-election transition remains
to be seen, but this has been the best of the blogs
this year.
10. “La Pequena Sarah Palin,” perhaps the final ver-
dict on the Palin candidacy. I won’t ruin the sur-
prise, but those with finer sensibilities, or who
are easily offended (particularly by cross-dress-
ing little people), might avoid this. La Pequena
is perfectly sublime, a leering gargoyle on our
digital cathedral. (http://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=VY8k0EzGurwC)
Don’t forget to vote! B

Art Review
Continued from page 17
capture those she loves and hold
them forever, lest the ravages of
time claim them before she does.
Unfortunately, old time has caught
up with her subjects but Peyton,
surprisingly, has adjusted to this,
as reflected in her mid-career sur-
vey, “Live Forever: Elizabeth Pey-
ton,” at the New Museum. Those
that love Peyton will continue to
love her and those that hate her
most likely will not be swayed, as
their prejudices run too deep and
are often well founded. Yet those
who are willing to reconsider
their position on Peyton’s work
will not necessarily be rewarded
but will come away with the sense
that there is more to Peyton than
was previously evident.
Comprised of 104 works, there
are many paintings that will irk
Peyton’s detractors, from the
overly delicate paintings of Kurt
Cobain to the self-conscious char-
coal and ink drawings of Ludwig
II of Bavaria from her 1993 show
at the Chelsea Hotel. But some-
thing happened to Peyton’s work
starting around 2003; she seems
to have given up her fight against
time and has instead come to ac-
cept it if not embrace it. Green
Nick and Wald (both from 2003)
are simple colored pencil line
drawings that portray an em-
erging restraint. One would expect, based on her
work from the 1990s, that Peyton would make these
men more delicate than they are, instead Peyton
draws them as men and not as anachronistic Victo-
rian dandy fantasies. Peter (Peter Doherty) (2005) is a
starling watercolor on paper. Peyton has succeeded
in capturing the beaten up and worn out quality that
exemplifies Doherty, lead singer of The Libertines
and Babyshambles. His vacant eyes, a motif that fre-
quently appears in Peyton’s work, here make sense.
Doherty doesn’t feel longed for. The love is there but
it has been replaced by a sadness for the life he has
lived, his image thus become weight-
lessness, replaced by a real sense of, if not gravity,
then corporeality that before was missing. Jonathan
Jonathan Horowitz (2007) shows the artist Jonathan
Horowitz scruffy and middle-aged sitting in a chair.
This blue eyes are alive and intense. It is unclear that
in the past Peyton would have had the inclination to paint these
bright, real things as such. This is not to say that there aren’t stum-
bles, she still has an inherent preciousness and her paintings
from magazine images and mov-
ies feel like throwaway exercises, as
evident in the interesting but
ultimately empty painting of Mi-
chelle Pleifer and Daniel Day-
Lewis from Days of Innocence.
Yet it is not “girly art,” or at
least it is moving away from that,
as Roberta Smith concluded in
her review of the exhibition. And
though Smith ultimately gives “Live Forever” a positive review and
does not mean for her char-
acterization of Peyton’s art to be
a pejorative, she does Peyton a
disservice by classifying the work
as “girly.” For it is assertions like
this that only serve to reinforce
the tired idea that bearing one’s emotions for the world to see is
a distinctly feminine act. Peyton
is not an aggressive artist, she is
not Jenny Saville—a fellow por-
trait painter whose works are so
startling that one cannot help but
be overwhelmed by them—she is
instead a painter of softness and
emotion. Her art is imperfect and
at times too self-absorbed but she
is worthy of consideration because she strives to display
love as an actual thing. Camus
wrote of being in the custody of
love and the wonder of a loving heart.
It is our relation to these things that allows us to feel
an exalted emotion. While not Camus, Peyton none-
thless strives for the same thing in her work. We may
fault her for subject matter and longing but we must
accept the sentiment that she commits to. For in an
increasingly divisive and unloving world perhaps it
is enough to try, even if the execution is suspect, and
bring a little love into it. B
### Important Info about Your Paychecks

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


### CUNY Students Working at CUNY

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

- You are at least a half-time undergraduate, graduate, or professional student or you are at least a half-time undergraduate, graduate, or professional student enrolled in the number of credits or unit hours to complete the requirements of obtaining a degree offered by CUNY.
- The FICA exemption does not apply if you are not enrolled in classes during breaks of five weeks or more, including summer.

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

### Cost of Attendance Askew?

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

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

visit our fantastic website

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

### Chartered Organizations

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

### Departmental Allocations

DSC reps are reminded to spend their allocations and submit receipts by the stated deadline on the DSC website, [www.cunydsc.org](http://www.cunydsc.org). Please contact Co-Chair for Business Management, Chris Sula (dsc@chrisenolsula.org), to find out how much money your department is eligible for this year.

### Open Meetings Law, Quorum, Voting

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

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

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

### Graduate Council and Grad Council Committees

The Graduate Council is the decision-making body of the college, comprised of students, faculty, and administrators. (This is not to be confused with the College Council, which is the college’s student government.) Without substantial student attendance at Grad Council, student voices will not be heard. Additionally, we must continue to oppose efforts to limit student representation at the Grad Council. If you are a Graduate Council rep for your department, please be sure to attend all meetings (twice per semester) and notify your DSC rep if you can’t make it (DSC program reps serve as Grad Council alternates). A complete list of upcoming meetings is below.

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

### Plenary Guest Speakers

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

### Important Upcoming Dates:

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

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

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

Visit us online at [www.cunydsc.org](http://www.cunydsc.org).

DSC Winter Party: Save the date! December 12, 8:30pm, Room 5414.

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

### Cost of Attendance for CUNY and Surrounding Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Center</th>
<th>NYU</th>
<th>Columbia</th>
<th>New School</th>
<th>Fordham</th>
<th>Rutgers</th>
<th>Yale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>7,425</td>
<td>17,335</td>
<td>17,550</td>
<td>12,260</td>
<td>12,050</td>
<td>9,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>2,776</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books and Supplies</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>920-2,050</td>
<td>840</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/Misc</td>
<td>3,676</td>
<td>4,315</td>
<td>3,487</td>
<td>1,550</td>
<td>6,130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15,743</td>
<td>23,350</td>
<td>23,037</td>
<td>17,494</td>
<td>19,810</td>
<td>9,942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures based on the 9 month school year
* Estimated figures are based on student surveys and updates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics
* Housing figure includes room (rent, utilities) and board
* Based on Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (Each school produces their own estimate)
* Typical room, board, and fees for New Brunswick student living on campus
* Includes all expenses
In a move that has stunned everyone on 80th street except Jar-Jar Binks and a few other affirmative action hares, CUNY’s favorite and only chancellor Matthew Goldstein has declared himself Emperor of the entire CUNY galaxy.

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

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

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

“Actually Lord Bloomberg’s decision to change existing laws so that he can maintain his indomitable grip on the city was a real inspiration to the Emperor in his decision. We’ve even been encouraging Lord Bloomberg to disregard the election process and just stay in office indefinitely. I mean, I think it’s pretty clear from the man-on-the-street interviews on local news that everyone in the city wants him to remain mayor. The Emperor is a very powerful man and the Mayor is an extremely powerful man. So, we don’t see it as a contradiction at all.”

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

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

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

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

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

“As for marketing this decision so that people will accept it, can’t you already see it? Look who’s wielding god-like power at CUNY!”