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Mission Statement

With our monthly publication, Diskord, we intend to fill the void that exists between the student community, progressive causes, and the outside world at the University of Chicago.

Our publication will provide a centralized hub for progressives to voice their causes and activities to the greater student body.

We furthermore seek to underscore the relevance of campus student issues to real world current events through an accessible print publication.

Because of our monthly format we will provide in depth coverage and analysis of international, domestic, and cultural issues.

Also, we will provide a much needed progressive voice currently lacking in student media.

An integral part of our publication will be a calendar of events of interest to progressives in the University and larger Chicago community.
World News in Brief

News Briefs
by Adam Visconti

Europe
Ukraine- Pro-western Viktor Yushchenko has won the most recent Ukrainian Presidential election against pro-Russian opponent Viktor Yanukovych, after the Ukrainian Supreme Court invalidated November’s election because of massive voter fraud and intimidation. Following Yanukovych’s victory in the November election, deemed fraudulent by international observers, Yushchenko’s supporters shut down Kiev for several weeks with massive peaceful protests. Yushchenko has appealed for unity within the nation, specifically aiming at the Eastern portion of the nation which threatened secession after the invalidation of Yanukovych’s victory.

Spain- Spanish Prime Minister Jose Zapatero met with the Basque President Juan Ibarretxe to discuss Ibarretxe’s plan outlining a marked increase in the region’s autonomy. The Spanish government has already delegated a significant degree of regional autonomy to Basques residing in the Spanish portion of the western Pyrenees, notably control of their finances, police, schools, and healthcare. However, Ibarretxe desires Basque control of the region’s judicial system and representation on international bodies such as the European Union and United Nations. Zapatero claims that any further autonomy for the Basque would create a nigh sovereign state. Ibarretxe believes the Basque people should have the right to decide their own political fate. The talks ended unconstructively, with neither Zapatero nor Ibarretxe willing to compromise.

Afric a
South Africa- Sir Mark Thatcher, son of former United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, pled guilty to funding an airplane involved in a failed coup attempt on the government of Equatorial Guinea. Last year, Zimbabwe officials captured a group of sixty four mercenaries en route to kill Equatorial Guinea’s President Teodoro Obiang. The group, financially backed by Thatcher and other British sponsors, intended to replace Obiang with exiled opposition leader Severo Moto and reap millions in oil concessions from Equatorial Guinea, Africa’s third largest oil producer. Thatcher pled guilty to financially backing the coup attempt, but will escape jail time, only serving five years probation and paying a fine of around half a million dollars.

Nigeria- A three day general strike by trade unions in Nigeria has threatened to halt oil pro-
duction of the world’s seventh largest oil producer. The strike came in response to popular discontent within Nigeria over a 25% rise in oil prices for locals over the last year. Nigerian courts have rejected a court injunction presented by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo to avert the strike. Speculation over the possible disruption of Nigeria’s oil output of 2.5 million crude barrels per day has driven world oil prices to record highs. The trade unions have vowed to prolong the strike if the government employs violent strike-breaking tactics, as it has done previously.

Middle East
Palestine- Mahmoud Abbas, former head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in a landslide victory against challenger Mustafa Barghouti. Abbas promises a more diplomatic political approach than former president Yasser Arafat, calling for an end to violence in the Intifada and urging a renegotiation of diplomatic negotiations with Israel. Reciprocally, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon expressed a willingness to meet with Abbas. Albeit criticizing the continued use of violence in the Intifada, Abbas pledges to maintain Arafat’s minimum peace conditions of Israeli removal from the West Bank and Gaza strip, use of East Jerusalem as the capital for the Palestinian state, and a right for Palestinian refugees to return to their land in Israel.

Iraq- Government investigators from the United States have given up their search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, concluding that Saddam Hussein destroyed all such weapons a decade ago and lacked the capabilities of producing further weapons. The alleged stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction were a vital component of the justification for the United States lead invasion of Iraq in 2003. In other Iraq news, Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi stated that some regions of Iraq “will not participate” in the general election scheduled for January 30 due to insurgent violence. As of this date, over fifteen hundred coalition troops have been killed in Iraq and almost 10,000 wounded, ninety percent of those since the fall of Baghdad. An estimated fifteen thousand Iraqi civilians have lost their lives during the continued conflict.

Australasia
Indonesia- On December 26th an 8.9 magnitude earthquake occurred off the coast of Aceh, a northern region on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Over the next several hours powerful tsunamis devastated coastal regions of Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Maldives, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Malaysia. The sudden flooding resulted in over 158,000 dead and over an estimated 8 billions dollars of damage. Officials for the United Nations estimate over a half a million people injured, and several million homeless. Following the disaster, foreign countries pledged over 4 billion in aid, and recently, members of the Paris Club of affluent creditor nations have offered to freeze debt payments from the affected countries. Several hundred international aid agencies are assisting the survivors of the tsunami, working alongside government forces in the affected areas to provide essential supplies, repair infrastructure, maintain physical and mental well-being.
n response to September 11th, the United States has undertaken a historic overhaul of our national immigration control system in the aim of security. Xenophobic causes have gained a new guise of legitimacy as a flurry of security-focused policies and procedures now more strictly regulate the entrance of foreigners and more rapidly expel immigrants. In this new security focused climate, the issue of Southern border illegal immigration has been dubiously reframed as a national security concern, much to the dismay of human rights advocacy.

In March 2002, the functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service were delegated to the new Homeland Security Department as distinct sub-agencies: U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This reconstruction of immigration control as a focal national security prerogative coincides with skyrocketing reports of the extralegal detention and abuse of foreigners by immigration authorities. In 2002, Attorney General Ashcroft loaded all civil immigration databases into the national crime database used by government agencies for surveillance purposes, questionably jeopardizing the privacy rights of resident aliens.

What's more, this past year, the government expressed ‘security based fears’ about the officially estimated, 2,500 to 2,700 undocumented migrants who enter the U.S. daily across the Southern border. While it is arguable that control over U.S. land borders is a more pressing concern today than it was during the 1980’s or mid-1990’s when popular moral panics over landed illegal immigration captured the limelight, the current understanding of Southwest borderlands illegal immigration as a component of the War on Terror is severely misguided and misleading. Such post 9-11 developments raise fundamental concerns over the health of civil liberties in this country pre-eminent purposes, questionably jeopardizing the privacy rights of resident aliens.

This past August, the Homeland Security Department, purportedly in the name of national security, instituted an expedited removal policy for undocumented aliens caught within two weeks of entry, within 100 miles of the border. Expedited removal became a national immigration control procedure in 1997, but prior to this past August, was applied exclusively to checkpoints and airports, not interior lands. Under the new borderlands provision, aliens without proper documentation or otherwise in violation of immigration law are eligible for immediate deportation at the discretion of any Border Protection agent or official. Aliens deported are then banned from re-entering U.S. territory through legal means for five years.

While the Department of Homeland Security declares “the expanded use of expedited removal is primarily directed at those illegal aliens who are not citizens of Mexico or Canada” and claims national security priorities in the employment of the provision in the field, ambiguities have arisen over actual practices. The vast majority of undocumented aliens apprehended within 100 miles of the Southern U.S. border originating from “third countries” targeted by the Homeland Security Department, are Central American migrants – not the would-be terrorists the official rhetoric insinuates. Rights groups have attacked recent immigration policy developments as unjust persecution of these Central American migrants and furthermore of Mexican migrants, the vast numerical majority of undocumented aliens entering the U.S overland.

Expeditied removal has given unprecedented authority to field Border Patrol agents who now serve a role equivalent to an immigration judge. The Homeland Security Department has affirmed that involuntary deportation of persons with fear of persecution is not occurring but assurances seem empty as the immense legal power given to individual field agents opens a real potential for serious judgment failures. The poor U.S. record in asylum procedure, particularly, the not-so-distant systemic failures of the Central American humanitarian crisis, coupled with recent reports of extralegal abuses, warrants serious concern about human rights in U.S. immigration prerogatives in the Southwest borderlands. The institution of post 9-11 security policy.

A particular dimension of recent policy affecting Mexican migrants is the co-incidence of expedited removal with the start of a new Interior Repatriation Program coordinated by U.S. immigration authorities. The program flies captured Mexican migrants from Arizona directly back to central Mexico, where, according to the Homeland Security Department, migrants will be safe from the scope of exploitative smuggling organizations. This program, more so than just a stop-gap solution to a migratory stream with deep endemic causes, invites involuntary internal repatriation of migrants.

Policy makers seemingly collaborated to disseuade notions of unwarranted persecution of Mexican nationals this past August by simultaneously enhancing the Border Crossing Card Program for legal Mexican visitors alongside the punitive expedited removal provision. The Border Crossing Card program now formerly permits Mexican nationals to visit U.S. family for up 30 days, rather than just 72 hours. The Homeland Security Department finds the juxtaposition of the two new policies instructive to would-be illegal immigrants but it is unrealistic to assume the message has any impact. Mexican migrants have historically continued to come to the U.S for job opportunities that are lacking in their own country, despite many legal and policy attempts to thwart them. The Department’s dual policy implementation, if anything, underscores the directedness of expedited removal towards Mexican undocumented migrants, not the terrorists towards whom the policies claim to be focused and upon which they are justified.

Beyond the borderlands human rights implications of a post 9-11 security policy, it is important to evaluate the legitimacy of land border patrol as a measure in of itself in the War on Terror. There still remains an extreme gap in security efforts between our northern and southern borders, where the northern threat of terrorist crossing is conceivably just as great, if not significantly higher than across the southern border. Illegal passage across the southern border is extremely perilous and hundreds of migrants perish annually attempting. Insinuations that international terrorist organizations will infiltrate the U.S. by land through Mexico are highly implausible and a guise for government authorities and xenophobes to rouse public fear and openly persecute Latin American migrants. Not a single would-be terrorist alien has been captured in the Southern borderlands since the new policy implementations.

Given greater priorities of intelligence, asset seizure, weapons control, and military spending in the War on Terror, land border control should remain a relative low security priority. The construction of barrier walls, an annual multi-billion dollar budget, and the deployment of additional border patrol agents has not solved the problem of undocumented crossings into the U.S. Latin American illegal immigration is an endemic market and social reality that presents complex challenges to idealized notions of “immigration control” that have plagued the U.S. for centuries. Illegal immigration across the southern border wholly does not present a national security threat as has been constructed by the Homeland Security Department through subtle rhetoric and policy and by ordinary xenophobes elsewhere like Samuel Huntington. There are bigger battlefields in the War on Terror.

Terrorizing Immigrants/Immigrant Terrorists
Illegal Immigration & National Security on the Southern Border

by Kelly Kelleher Richter
Domestic Issues
by Gabriel E. S. Lifton-Zoline

As Americans, our public lands are at the core of national heritage and current cultural understanding. The Bureau of Land Management, the United States Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service co-manage approximately 600 million acres of American land and water. Most Americans are happy to give their share, through taxes and to a (much) lesser degree their time, as volunteers in helping to preserve our National Forests and Park Lands. The Bush Administration, under the guise of a “Healthy Forests Initiative” has opened the lands to industry, giving them unprecedented levels of access. Meanwhile, the Federal Agencies that preserve our public lands have been left to fend for themselves financially to do an effective job. Now any average American can get arrested for “trespassing on public land if they happen to do it at one of the 200 or so Federal sites that have been pegged as “Fee Demo” zones.

Over the past 20 years our various presidential administrations and congresses have continued the regrettable American way of business when it comes to public lands. They have consistently kowtowed to special interests by doling out huge subsidies to mining, gas, and logging industries, while telling the public these industries helped to pay the huge costs of preserving our forests, mountain ranges, grasslands, and tundra. We can no longer bear the costly race to destroy our natural world in the search for a quick and destructive buck. We, the citizens and owners of these lands, are increasingly asked to foot the bill, Bush and Company want us to pay as our forests are forever damaged, and the corporations continue to turn a profit.

Now the Bush Administration, with help from its industry-minded minions in Congress, has just renewed a little known federal program that requires Americans to “pay to play” on our public lands. Began in 1996 during the Clinton years “The Recreation Fee Demonstration”, or Fee Demo, program requires that U.S. citizens pay to access certain public lands. The fee program began quietly, when it was sneakily attached as a rider to the 1996 congressional budget bill by Ohio Republican Congressman Ralph Regula. Simply put, it asks people to pay 20 dollars to drive to the rim of the Grand Canyon, and 15 dollars to take a scenic drive through Yellowstone. While the fees may seem nominal, they are pricing some Americans out of the use of Public Land. The Fee Demo program is drawing the ire of many groups and citizens who feel that the Fee Demos are double taxation.

The program was designed to help forest managers generate needed income for their parks and reserves. The money collected by the Fee Demos stays in the parks in which it is collected, and is supposed to go towards maintaining existing facilities and back maintenance that has grown as congressional support has dwindled. Advocates claim that the money is desperately needed and essential to the management of the forests, the only way to keep industries’ greedy hands off the public’s property. But it isn’t working that way. Between 1996 and 2003 the Forest Service only spent 22% of the Fee Demo money on “repair and maintenance”, while 46.6% went to the costs of running and administering the program, not including the 12% for the nefarious sounding “Signage and Interpretation” (all this amid a charge that USFS was charging fees at over 1,000 sites, when it was supposed to charge at only 100.)

The issue may seem like small beans; we are after all emboiled in a war with an unidentifiable and ever-morphing enemy, so paying ten bucks to see some bison doesn’t rank high on most people’s lists. So far vacationers seem willing to tack on a few extra dollars to their already costly trip. But who gave the Administration the right to play Sheriff of Nottingham, using the forests for the gain of the few, and double taxing the common men and women of this nation, while simultaneously pinning out the same forests to the extractive industries, which willingly rape and pillage our lands?

Our public lands are our common heritage, plain and simple. They are a place that millions of Americans go to get away from their hectic lives, a refuge for strained species and habitats, but most importantly they are ours—not the Forest Service’s, not the BLM’s, not the Park Service’s, not the Bush Administration’s, and certainly not Ralph Regula’s. The most recent rider that Representative Regula (with help from Alaska’s Republican Senator Ted Stevens) slid past the American people has made it a crime to not pay the fees. It will now cost you six months in the slammer or $5,000—pick your poison.

The corporations that receive the benefits of the Bush Administration’s open door policy in regard to our public lands have attempted to make this an environmental issue by making it seem like only tofu eating hippies and EARTH FIRST! types are crying foul and whining about having to pay double. The logic is that users should have to pay for the upkeep, which isn’t a bad idea at heart. The problem lies in the fact that users are forced to pay twice while industry profits regardless. This is not a direct environmental problem, but an issue of proper governance, citizen rights, and an out of control governmental infrastructure that has built an unsustainable economy based on non-renewable resources.

The fees themselves are small—payable by most that choose to use the lands. The subsidies and giveaways that we support through our tax dollars and “multiple use” policies on federal lands are not. The Bush Administration has implemented a series of policy shifts that give away, at our expense, billions of dollars worth of unrecoverable land and resources. President Bush thinks that what is ours is his, and what is his is Eron’s, Georgia Pacific’s, and Newmont Mining’s. The Fee Demo program as is just another subsidy to help support the raping of our lands.

To ask citizens to pay to protect the lands they use and impact is not absurd. In theory it might seem reasonable to ask the millions of visitors to our national lands to pay to keep them clean and to genuinely preserve them for future generations, but in order for that to happen any and all fees collected should go to preserving the lands. Industry and their Representatives in government should also pay their way, or not play, just like the rest of us. Until that day not another cent should be paid to support a program that taxes the citizens to the profit of those who at the same time walk in the back door to destroy what we are paying to preserve.
The Cult of Reagan

Domestic Issues
by Ben Walsh

Long before his cowboy boots made their way up Pennsylvania Avenue on a rider-less horse, Ronald Reagan’s followers had been searching for ways to cement their idol in the American conscience. This urgent need to Reaganize America has motivated many conservative minds for many years, but something always got in the way, or so it seemed to an observer who had not shared their zeal for all things Reagan. Some conservatives seemed driven by the fear that Reagan would be forgotten and so set out to solve how best to promote his legacy.

The answer appeared at first in the numbers. The Ronald Reagan Legacy Project set out to have something dedicated to Reagan in every county in the United States. There may be more 3000 counties in the United States, but damn the torpedoes (and liberals)! If it were physically impossible to escape his name, there could be no way to forget Reagan. This goal led the Legacy Project to write an oddly threatening letter to my home county of Multnomah, Oregon, noting that we were acting with less than alacrity in naming something, anything after Ronny. Never mind Multnomah County (constituting most of Portland, Oregon) had never voted for Ronald Reagan in a general election. Never mind Multnomah County is part of the congressional district with the highest number of registered Democrats on the West Coast outside of Berkeley. No, what mattered was that we weren’t keeping pace in naming something, anything, a building, an airport, park or sewage treatment facility after Reagan.

Despite feverish conservative attempts to establish thousands of Reagan memorials, there was no clear idea of what the Reagan memorial would be. The Mall in Washington? Reagan, despite his own beliefs to the contrary, was neither a veteran nor a President whose importance matched Jefferson, Washington or Lincoln. Rushmore was whispered about, but mainly in the mental homes and the offices of Americans for Tax Reform. So the Reagan Legacy Project has turned its gaze to the most potent symbol of American power: our currency.

“We’ve found it!” many cried in Archimedean joy. Replace Hamilton with Reagan on the ten dollar bill. And so, to make room for their sunny star, it became open season on the first Secretary of the Treasury. Never mind that he managed to become Prime Minister in a government whose constitution provided for no such position. Never mind that Hamilton envisioned America’s economic might a hundred years prior to its emergence. Besides, what has Hamilton done lately?

This is quite a crazy idea; think about it for even a moment. It is a rare type of crazy idea. It is an instructive crazy idea. The diminution of Hamilton by conservatives is odd, given the great rhetorical, programmatic and philosophic debt American conservatism owes him. A regulated but free market was something very few of the founders understood and Hamilton did more than just understand it. He saw beyond the realities of the 1780s and ’90s and imagined a commercial giant to rival, and surpass, the greatest European powers. For over two hundred years, Hamilton’s ideas were conservative’s ideas and yet he has been summarily discarded by a wing of the Republican Party to the “ash heap of history”. That some Republicans so easily cast aside such a man illustrates the current nature of the conservative party in the U.S.

What has become clear about the current Republican Party is that its base has shifted far away from its birthplace in the Northeast. Reagan, far from the catalyst of a Western and Southern migration, was merely its exclamation point. With the geographic shift has come the rise of radical conservatives within the Party. Nothing, save a few Senators from the East, is left of the moderate Republicans. Nelson Rockefeller, a politician in many ways the modern heir to Hamilton, is scorned today by most of his party and nostalgically remembered by Democrats. When Rockefeller went, any remaining Hamiltonian tempera ment went with him.

And so, the modern Republican Party has come to be run by men who, like all good radicals, despise and deride all that came before them. More and more often, the current Republican Party has demonstrated itself to be composed of hacks and small-minded ideological bomb-throwers. Democrats may at this point get up onto their chairs and begin to laud their superi or intellects and tendency towards that marker of sophistication, complexity. (If you are doing this right now, the words ‘Michael Moore’ ought to bring you back down.)

At this point, despite what the summer convention might have told you, I should point out that John McCain still has a part in this party. Neither for that matter, does anyone who isn’t a true true-believer. All Kool-Aid stained lips are ruthlessly excluded. Hamilton obviously had no idea what Kool-Aid was but he was a free-thinker, often petulantly so, who had little time for the simple-minded and orthodox. In Grover Norquist’s mind, it seems that there are two columns of names, and among historical figures, Hamilton is not in the favorable one.
Cyber-dissidence in the new China

Newspaper headlines and magazine covers this past year featured three ubiquitous themes: the running battle against Al-Qaeda at home and abroad, the deepening chaos in the newly emancipated Iraq, and the meteoric rise of China into the world’s economic elite. Since Deng Xioping’s implementation of economic liberalization in 1978, China’s GDP has grown fourfold to 1.4 trillion dollars, and the country has become the third most active trading nation in the world, trailing only the US and Germany. This is, in the words of James Rydge of the Financial Times, “industrialisation and urbanisation at a speed unprecedented in human history.”

China has recently expanded its export manufacturing focus from industrial and light consumer goods to high-tech industries. The technological leap is visible inside China as well: personal electronics are now an indispensable facet of everyday life for many Chinese. There are roughly 300 million cell phone users in China, with 5 million new subscribers per month. Internet use has also shot up, evidenced by vast networks of cafes and broadband connections that offer web access for the citizens of China’s metropolises. A full quarter of these urban areas have populations of over a million. From only 10,000 users in 1994, around 70 million Chinese regularly log on today. There are an estimated 17.73 million broadband internet connections across the nation, many of which provide access to more than one person.

The middle class have been the prime beneficiaries of the nation’s newfound prosperity. Demonized during the Cultural Revolution as the perpetual enemy of the state and the movement, the bourgeois is gradually supplanting the peasant worker as the face of China’s growth and society. Currently numbering 100 million, they are by large consummate urbanites in the Western sense, and are growing in number and prosperity. It is important to note, however, that while 100 million people is an enormous social group, in relation to China’s overall population of 1.3 billion, the majority of whom are empowered, it is still a considerable minority. While they have provided the impetus for sustained development within China, the middle class has been stilled in its attempts to form a genuine civil society, an everyday culture that is independent from the machinations of the state.

More succinctly, the Chinese middle class are still struggling to foster a culture of free speech and dissent. This evolution contrasts to the emergence of free speech in South Korea during the 1970s and 1980s, and 20th century Turkey. History has shown how the increasing affluence and privilege of the middle class stimulates a desire for the independent expression of multiple perspectives, espoused primarily by the growth of a freestanding national media.

China, however, deviates from this path by virtue of its quasi-Communist authoritarian regime that seeks to exert stern control over all media outlets. While certainly true in the case of television and print media, the aforementioned ascension of mobile telecommunications and the internet pose dual threats to the state’s rigorous efforts to control the information its citizens are able to access. Government attempts at wiretapping were hampered by the vast increase in mobile phones, and further thwarted by the widespread practice of passing an old phone down to a friend or family member when purchasing a new model. Text messages offer another avenue for unmonitored conversations and information-passing: Weblogs and personal sites have proved capable of providing news and opinion from sites that the government security agency has deemed off-limits. The sheer scope of efforts required to block access to ‘seditionist’ sites in the amorphous landscape of the internet initially proved an uphill battle for Chinese authorities. The success of the pro-democracy rally of 500,000 people in Hong Kong in June 2003 increased speculation in China’s internal security and popular media about the possibility of a gradual liberalizing shift. However, recent events have proven contrary.

Despite vast numbers of internet users, Chinese internal security forces are busy scouring the web for material deemed subversive. Although effective government surveillance of internet activity failed to respond to early growth in use, a Chinese moderating apparatus of users has paralleled the more recent surge in web popularity. China’s internet infrastructure was built with direct government supervision, therefore all the internet gateways are government-owned; necessary surveillance and filtering technology was imbedded in the system from the start.

Beginning in 1999, 60 so-called ‘cyberdissidents’ were imprisoned in China, out of a total of 70 such cases worldwide. In 2001 and 2005, respectively, the Chinese government halted access to Geocities and Blogspot, two non-Chinese personal websites. In early 2004, the Chinese blogging services Blogbus and Blogcn were shut down entirely. Officials have barred access to around 10 percent of all global websites inside China. Repression of civil society’s democratic impulses have not been confined to the internet: the New York Times reported that three relatively liberal radio hosts quit one after the other this past spring because of continuous threats.

The flexibility of the Chinese government’s rhetoric concerning internal dissent in the electronic realm has its parallels in the corporeal world. Hong Kong is considered a political liability to Beijing because of its long period of British rule and the greater liberties its residents enjoyed under the former regime. Since the handover of power in 1997, there have been fluctuating levels of unease over the territory’s new Chinese governance status. Dissatisfaction reached its nadir in June 2003, when pro-democracy protests attracted a turnout of half a million people and captured the eye of the international press, causing the Chinese government to scramble to peacefully quell the unrest. Caught off guard once, China, during protests in June 2004 attended by hundreds of thou-

International Issues
by Ali Winston

The Chinese bourgeois has supplanted the peasant worker as the face of China.
the Northern Georgian province of South Ossetia has been embroiled in violent ethnic strife for the past two decades. A recent escalation of tension between pro-Russian secessionists and the Georgian government may soon invite Russian intervention in the troubled region and the possibility of full-scale war between Russia and Georgia.

In recent months, tensions between Georgian military forces and South Ossetian rebels have reached a tense stalemate. The South Ossetian rebels have been waging for reunification with Russian North Ossetia since the break-up of the Soviet Union but Georgia has considered regional secession a serious threat to statehood. Following the Beslan school massacre in Russia, North Ossetia this past September, Russia has grown increasingly preoccupied with security and stability in the Caucasus region, including Ossetia. This interest complicates the South Ossetian conflict by inviting the possibility of Russian military involvement to stabilize the region. If Russia does militarily intervene, the region may likely erupt into a full-scale international war zone, pitting Russia against Georgia.

The Connecticut sized region of Ossetia, straddling the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas, was historically an autonomous zone. In the early nineteenth century, the region was annexed by the Russian Empire. After the Communist Revolution of 1917, Ossetia was partitioned into two distinct zones of governance: South Ossetia became part of Soviet Georgia while North Ossetia remained part of Russia proper. Throughout the Communist era, Ossetians in both domains maintained significant regional autonomy given a distinct linguistic and cultural identity.

Shortly prior to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the autonomous South Ossetian government attempted to reunite with North Ossetia as a unified Russian region but Soviet Georgia rapidly crippled the peacefull move. In 1991, Nationalist actors in newly independent Georgia attempted to terminate Ossetian regional autonomy and suppress the Ossetian language to the much opposition. This having failed, Georgia then attempted to regain control of South Ossetia by force.

Over a year of intense conflict between Georgian military forces and Ossetian secessionists culminated in a Russian brokered ceasefire in 1992. Under the terms of the ceasefire, Georgia conceded regional autonomy to South Ossetia and Russia dispatched several thousand peacekeeping forces to the region. Despite these efforts, instability has continued to plague the region. Persistent fighting has destroyed the region's industrial economy and stimulated an exodus of South Ossetians northwards.

The Georgian government is responsible for a recent escalation in tension in South Ossetia following years of disrespecting regional autonomy. President Mikhail Saakashvili declared this past April to resolve the long-standing secessionist conflict by active military force. Since 1992, Georgia has taken a defiant approach towards autonomous South Ossetia, attempting to stranglehold the province by severing all economic and political ties, including shutting down state energy resources in the region (current power comes from Russian North Ossetia) and offering no economic aide or trade partnerships (South Ossetians gain a majority of their income from trade with North Ossetia and Russia). Georgia's hesitancy to permit South Ossetian independence is economic as well as political. South Ossetia straddles a region where the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is slated to transverse. This 5.6 billion dollar project scheduled to be completed this year, will constitute a significant boost to the Georgian economy as by becoming the principal means of transporting oil from the Caspian to the Mediterranean Sea. The BTC project has raised the international geopolitical significance of Georgia. The United States has even been training Georgian troops to guard against Ossetian and other rebels who may attempt disrupt pipeline production.

Georgia has been embroiled in many region-al secessionist conflicts since independence in 1991 – South Ossetia, Adjaria, and Abkhazia. Consequently, the state believes that compromising with Ossetia, let alone any other region, would set an example of weakness. Separatist success could lead to the de facto independence of around 17 percent of Georgia's total population.

While the Georgian government has found recent success in heavy-handed control tactics in region of Adjaria, where it ousted a prominent secessionist leader and brought the region back into the fold of mainstream Georgian politics, the government's belligerent resolve to reunify South Ossetia with the rest of Georgia by force has currently reached a serious stumbling block. A Russian complication appears on the horizon as well.

The specter of Russian political dominance has loomed heavily over Georgia in its regional conflicts since independence - Russia has been both overwhelmingly reluctant to relinquish power in the Caucasus, exemplified by two wars in Chechnya to suppress regional autonomy. Russia appears more than eager to regain a political foothold in Georgia via military action.

The Russian government has been an outspoken advocate for autonomy within Georgian Adjaria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and has facilitated the separatist movements with unofficial military support and heavy commerce. Russia furthermore has provided Russian passports to a majority of the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The recent outbreak of violence in South Ossetia in fact, is attributed by both Ossetian separatists and the Georgian government in part to "third force" aggressions—aggressions by Russian "peacekeeping forces" and Cossack mercenaries.

The events of Beslan this past autumn added a troubling dimension to the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict – the distinct possibility of official Russian military involvement in the South Ossetia to ensure regional stability and security in the Caucasus. After the September massacre, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed a series of government initiatives in Caucasian Russia to ensure stable and loyal governance. He instated authoritarian Soviet-style government in the Russian Caucasus by allowing only Kremlin approved governors to serve in regional provinces. He has ruled out negotiations with separatist groups in Russian Chechnya, choosing instead to install Moscow backed "elected" leaders there.

President Putin's aggressive actions in the sake of Russian national security forebode a serious international conflict in the Caucasus in the future. South Ossetia may well become the center point of a major conflict in Russia's new war on terror. Recent statements by President Putin reveal that he regards terrorism an international threat with no defined boundaries. He announced plans to invoke the Bush Doctrine of preemptive military action. The first nation President Putin plans to target in his war on terror is Georgia, a country Russia has long criticized for its leniency in controlling terrorists within its borders. Russian intelligence services recently tracked a call from a suicide bomber on a Russian airliner in the beginning of September to the northeastern Pankisi gorge area of Georgia.

South Ossetia is situated within the nexus of two countries who both desire regional stability but who are bitterly opposed to working through cooperative means with regional inhabitants, and each other, to attain it. Georgia's political aspiration of unity and its economic focus on the BTC pipeline require a pacified and loyal South Ossetia. Russia's desire for stability and security within the whole of the Caucasus region requires a static and thus Russian-controlled South Ossetia.

Diplomatically, the situation in South Ossetia doesn't appear to be diffusing in the near future. Both Georgia and Russia are maintaining significant forces in the region, and Russian President Putin still stridently supports the region's independence. Moreover, Putin's recent support of pro-Russian candidate Viktor Janukovych in the obviously fraudulent Ukrainian elections demonstrates Russia's eagerness to gain a footing within former Soviet satellites. With diplomatic negotiations stalled on all sides, the separatist conflict in South Ossetia appears just one Gulf of Tonkin style incident away from escalation into international war.
American Values in Action
Keeping an Eye on the Third World

International Issues
by Nick Juravich

Humanitarian action and foreign policy are paired often in rhetoric but rarely in practice. Political scientists around the globe, including the University of Chicago's John Mearshimer, agree that nations, despite the UN's lofty ideals, are fundamentally self-interested entities operating in a Hobbesian world. Consequently, poorer nations considered geopolitically insignificant by the great powers suffer massive humanitarian disasters and human rights violations with little aid or intervention. These countries seemingly don't merit the cost and human risks of engagement. The American response to the Rwandan genocide and Peruvian famines of the 1990s indicates the strength of such a belief.

Why do citizens of wealthy nations such as the United States allow our governments to ignore humanitarian offenses plaguing the third world? Prevailing opinion holds that humans are remarkably provincial, and that average Americans do not care enough about people beyond our borders to impel them towards concrete advocacy and action. Our leaders reflect our population's apathy towards the third world and its crises.

Apathy, however, is no longer a viable argument to explain inaction. This past month, ordinary Americans have poured huge sums of money into aid efforts for the people of South and Southeast Asia, whom most likely have never met, seen, or even read about until recently. They have done so at the behest of their local and national leaders, and with help from an unprecedented torrent of third world reporting by American news media.

Apathy certainly isn't, and perhaps never has been, the obstacle to American third world aid. Rather, simple public ignorance of the extent of global suffering, to the fault of our leaders and media, is the key obstacle. If Americans can be convinced to care about the tsunami victims, there is hope that the U.S. can become a nation capable of becoming a great provider of third world aid and relief because our people can work, publicly and privately, to make it so.

Nearly all Americans know of the devastation caused last month in Southern Asia by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami. Tsunami news has been on front pages worldwide, and both Time and Newsweek have dedicated front covers to the disaster. The monster waves claimed over 150,000 lives, displaced over a million people, and caused billions of US dollars in damage to cities, coastline, and resorts. All major news networks have been reporting hourly on the death toll, potential for disease outbreaks, and other shocking stories of destruction, mayhem and death.

The relief response to this disaster has been equally remarkable. Forty-two nations and international organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and the European Union have provided billions of dollars in aid. Private donors in eleven countries have provided additional hundreds of millions of dollars. United States Marines and Army Special Forces have arrived on the scene to speed recovery, as have troops from Australia, Britain, India, and Indonesia. American Secretary of State Colin Powell has graced many Southeast Asian Nations with his first visits ever to oversee American relief and aid efforts.

Powell, a veteran of several military engagements, said of the disaster, “I’ve never seen anything like this.” He has gone on to say that the U.S. is putting so much into the relief effort because “we believe it is in the best interest of those countries and it’s in our best interest... we’d be doing it regardless of religion, but I think it does give the Muslim world [most of the hardest hit nations are at least in part Muslim, including Indonesia, ruled by a predominantly Islamic regime] and the rest of the world an opportunity to see American generosity, American values in action.”

Powell is right. Aid and relief efforts are excellent ways to win the “hearts and minds” that have evaded Rumsfeld and Co.

But when did Americans probe our deep pockets to help this cause or that cause? Powell said it best: to demonstrate values in action, to win hearts and minds. There is an obvious, human rights and internationally minded case for aiding people at risk for disease, violence, and disaster in the third world, but there is a nationally minded case that is just as compelling. If America wants the military and moral authority to lead the world, it must be involved with nations that have nothing to offer but heartfelt thanks (as opposed to natural resources or continued next page
The best way to foster democracy, to encourage human rights, to build a truly safe world, is to provide a measure of dignity to suffering people wherever we can. Such action not only wins over those we help, it sends a powerful and honest message to the world about a global commitment to humanity. If American policy is truly to be international, American aid, in the form of money, time, resources, and soldiers, must be dispersed all over the world.

The potential for positive American involvement in the third world does not start and end with disaster response, but could be extended to action taken and aid provided to help prevent such disasters. Infrastructure can be created in impoverished nations to minimize the cost of life when unavoidable disasters strike. Third world governments with commitments to democracy and open elections such as Uganda could be supported and defended from rogue armies such as the Lord’s Resistance Army, which has displaced over a million people this past year. There is a great deal Americans can do with money, drugs, and personnel to stem AIDS’s rampage in Southern Africa, where life expectancy has plummeted 10-12 years over the past decade in Botswana (where 50% of women have AIDS or HIV), South Africa (where 27% of the population has AIDS or HIV), Swaziland, and Lesotho.

These are not simple problems to solve. Disaster relief is far easier than many of them, but they deserve equal attention, even if we know from the outset that the road to solutions is longer and harder. Arguments have been made that “ordinary Americans” don’t care about foreigners, but the recent events in Asia have quashed that notion. Furthermore, it can be said that the United States government does not have the money to provide aid to every third world disaster, but the outpouring of private support in cities and towns across America proves that the people, not the government, can provide funding for disaster relief.

The tsunami in Southeast Asia have drawn American eyes to the Third World. I hope that we keep them there. I hope a generation of Americans never forgets the images and stories from the disaster of the past week and is compelled to constantly look to Asia, to Africa, to Latin America, to develop a relationship with their nations and people that is more than occasional and atypical. I hope the ministers, coaches, and town leaders who stood up and called on their parishioners, teams, and citizens to open their hearts and pockets to those in need in the last week continue to do so, and that Americans continue to give with the generosity they have. I hope the media, rife with domestic stories, continues to report on the third world, and I hope our highest ranking politicians continue to lead American interest and efforts in the third world.

It seems unlikely, but if it can happen over the course of a few weeks in winter, it can and should happen more often. The American success in responding to the tsunami is indicative of possibility and promise—may it be fulfilled in the new and coming years.

**States Rights Not Just for Bigots Anymore!**

**Political Commentary**

by Brian Karfunkel

I used to be a strong Federalist. I still believe that, in most cases, a program that is good at the state level will be as good or better at the federal level, for the simple reason that more people can be helped by a Federal program than could be helped by a state program. The way our government is structured, it is far easier to enact progressive and liberal policies at the national level than to pass such reforms in all or even most of the states. However, I now believe that, politically, it is more productive in the long term to allow states and localities to have more control relative to the federal government than they do now.

It has become a cliché to observe that most Americans are evenly split politically between the left and the right, with the exception of a small percentage of swing voters. The effect of this is that tiny fluctuations in a small number of voters’ behavior can result in much greater ideological swing in the executive branch. A bill that is approved one year may be vetoed the next if it rains in Ohio or if there is a bad harvest in Iowa. Executive orders are rescinded and reversed, and international alliances shift on the whim of a startlingly small percentage of the electorate. One need only look at how drastically the national agenda shifted from Carter to Reagan, from Bush to Clinton, and from Clinton to Bush to see the effects of the bimodal nature of the electorate.

The frequent political oscillations at the federal level have several negative effects. First, it means that many policies that may be beneficial don’t last very long. Second, the effects of many policies only become apparent after long periods of time. Both good and bad policies may be reversed before they can reveal themselves to be good or bad, respectively. Finally, policy changes require costly structural changes as people, companies, and government agencies adapt to the new policies. The fact that the nation as a whole is almost evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans therefore harms the nation’s ability to enact good policy reforms.

In most cases, individual states are more homogeneous than the nation as a whole. In last year’s election, 15 to 20 states were swing states. However, more than half of these, states like Washington, Arizona, and Missouri, leaned towards one side or the other throughout the great majority of campaign season. States do occasionally change in their prevailing political leanings, but such changes tend to be gradual and based on changing populations, not the whims of a small number of centrists. When states enact reforms, these changes are more directly in line with the views of a majority of residents than reforms at the national level. Reforms that are supported by larger majorities last longer.

Furthermore, residents of a state are more likely to at least give a new policy the benefit of the doubt if it comes not from an edict of the federal government but from their own state’s government. People can relate to other members of their state better than to people from other states in other parts of the country. A New Englander has a lot of difficulty understanding how so many people in the Deep South can believe in things like teaching creationism in schools and flying a Confederate flag over a government building. States that are geographically closer tend to be more similar, but even among neighboring states there can be wide differences of opinion. Massachusetts residents can’t understand why people from New Hampshire are so averse to levying a minimal sales tax so they can remedy what their own state Supreme Court has deemed an inexcusably under-funded education system.

When a Congressman from Texas proposes a certain bill, or a President from Texas signs a certain bill, it is entirely reasonable to expect that people from Massachusetts would feel that Texan (Republican), have been imposed upon them. However, though a resident may disagree with a policy of their state government, they are more likely to be able to understand where the opposition is coming from, since the opposition consists of their friends, their coworkers, and their neighbors. Being able to...
## The Aim of Multipartisan Politics in Diskord

### Aditya Habbu, Politics Editor

The two major problems with the way politics are discussed in accessible forums today: I never hear anything new and the points I do hear are not well argued. We are left with very few substantive sides to take in the free market of political thought. In the rush to elicit centrist votes, mainstream media gives no credence to ideas that are outside the political norm, preferring arguments that are emotionally impassioned but lack intellectual backbone.

We all come to media with a system of beliefs such that if you want to convince someone of something it is easy enough to appeal to beliefs. But in doing so, you alienate others. We have gotten to a point in political publication where we merely appeal to the broadest beliefs instead of trying to explain why an idea may be worthwhile for those who do not share our beliefs. The art of convincing the other side that our ideas may be valuable and helpful appears dead. No one is interested in positive policy but merely fighting the bad guy.

Does that mean that we should all just love each other and agree on everything? No not at all. Diversity in the free market of ideas is what has made America so successful. My biggest fear is that a monopoly is quickly developing such that ideas that do not fall into line are being forced out of the public discourse. Non-norm ideas are treated as if they are absurd. This is true not only of original ideas, but also of unique arguments. If one makes an argument divergent from the standard rhetoric one is considered a heretic.

To bring divergent viewpoints into the public eye, we will run two articles each issue written by members of a council of six people each from a different political background (Revolutionary Socialists, Young Democratic Socialist, Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Objectivists). Each issue, two members of the six person panel will write an article on why they support a certain policy and another pair will argue against one another on a different policy issue.

The aim of this section of Diskord is to hear the new and compelling ideas and arguments of underexposed political or philosophical bends. I want to hear political analysis from perspectives and a knowledge base I would not be able to find in other places. Most people are not political scientists or philosophers and most people interested in political science and philosophy seems to find discussing politics beneath them, in part because they see many things as obvious that others do not. I hope to hear more from them in this section.

I really would like to get as wide a range of ideas and opinions as possible and I would really like to cover the political spectrum as completely as possible. I would hate to think the world is missing out on your brilliant ideas because you have not gotten around to writing an article. If you have an idea, email me (adityah@uchicago.edu) we can talk about it. You don’t even have to write the article but I am interested in hearing what your ideas are. Of course, ideally you would write an article but discussion is where it begins.

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| Understanding the other side's point of view and admit that both sides agree on more than they disagree on, one can more easily accept otherwise unattractive policies. |
| States are more politically homogeneously the nation as a whole, different states will pass different but stable laws. If states are allowed to exert more influence on federal monies and are less restricted by federal mandates, we will see more states with liberal positions and more states with conservative positions. In this way, each individual state will be a laboratory for democracy. We will be able to see which policies are good and which are bad. As a liberal, I naturally believe that liberal policies are better than conservative policies, though I would expect that there are some instances where that is not true. If someone can point to Alabama and say, “See, this worked here because it is a sound policy,” I will listen. Similarly, I would hope that a conservative in Alabama would look at policies that have worked in Massachusetts and allow themselves to change their position. If Massachusetts passes a universal healthcare program that does not result in astronomical costs and efficiently covers the health needs of our population, it will be easier to convince other states to enact such a proposal than it would be to convince the federal government to make such a reform without a successful model to trumpet. I expect that liberal policies will have better outcomes than conservative policies, and thus it is better for liberals in the long run to allow different states to explore different policy alternatives. When subjected to a process of political natural selection, liberal policies will survive and indeed be made stronger by that very process. |
| There are several problems with state and local control. The first is that individual states have economic circumstances that are peculiar to them. In Massachusetts, because we have a high median income and a high level of education, we may be able to support a universal healthcare program, but a state like Mississippi will not. Indeed, it is unavoidable that state’s individual characteristics will limit which policies are feasible to varying degrees. However, Massachusetts doesn’t have a high level of education and income by accident. Massachusetts has a high level of education because we have, for many years, devoted resources to the development of a good education system. We have a successful economy and high median income levels in part because we have a good education system. Some states may need to catch up to other states in order to be able to emulate their successful policies, but most states will eventually be able to implement most good policies. |
| A bigger problem is that while each state is testing its own policies by living with them, harmful policies will harm people. Allowing states to teach creationism in schools in place of evolution will mean that a generation of students in those states will leave high school at a disadvantage because of their paltry exposure to science. Allowing states to tinker with the welfare system more freely will mean that some people will suffer from backwards and unwise welfare distribution policies. There is no way to avoid the fact that many people in many states will suffer if we increase states’ autonomy. |
| The only consolation is that, once sufficient time has passed to allow states to implement those policies which are shown to be better, the good policies will be much more stable over the long term. Instead of families on welfare having to work varying amounts and satisfy arbitrary eligibility requirements depending upon which party has power in Washington, we will eventually have a stable and coherent policy that will be defensible with lots of empirical evidence. This will not help those families who fall through the cracks during the transition, but at least we will have made long-lasting progress as a nation. Currently, we are inflicting many people with moderate hardships for as far as we can see into the future. Surely, it would be better for generations hence if we could shape durable policies that would truly be good policies. |
| Though I do believe that giving more power and flexibility to the states will be better in the long term, I do not like that this is the best option that I have been able to come up with. I believe Democratic policies tend to allow people to have greater opportunities. I do not believe someone in South Carolina should have fewer opportunities than I do, simply because they live near more Republicans. But the fact remains that focusing on the federal level has had only mediocre results in good years and plain awful results in bad years. We should not abandon the Federal government, and there are certain areas, like environmental policy and civil rights, where a strong national approach must be taken because one state’s behavior can have great results on other states or because a moral imperative requires Federal intervention. We should, though, not pigeon-hole ourselves into the Federal mindset. We need to focus more on the states, and we need to give the states more control so that generations to come need not suffer the trials of a democracy based almost entirely on ideology as opposed to rationality. |
Contesting Empire in Bush’s Alternate Reality

If the last election was a blow below the belt, this one was a direct smash to the face. But the thing that keeps getting me is a quote, reportedly from a “senior advisor to the President,” appearing in Ron Suskind’s article “Without a Doubt” three weeks ago:

[You] are in what we call the reality-based community... [You] believe that solutions emerge from your judgmental study of discernible reality. That’s not the way the world really works anymore. We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.

Suskind went on to write that Bush is one of “history’s great confidence men” and that his “unflinching confidence has an almost mystical power... It can almost create reality,” but here Suskind just misses the point. It’s not Bush’s confidence or certainty that creates reality, nor is it simply his willingness to act upon that self-assurance. The operative word in the piece is “empire.”

The imperial claim to a hegemonic, monolithic reality isn’t anything new – but the pressing question presented by Suskind seems to be whether this particular moment of empire is somehow different, and whether the current mode of empire requires an entirely new epistemology. Orwell said it best: “If the Leader says of such and such an event, ‘It never happened’ – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five, well, two and two are five.” Like the remarks in Suskind’s article, these ideas terrify us because they flaunt the Enlightenment principles upon which America is supposedly based – critical intelligence, empiricism, a regard for the secular sciences, and so forth... They run contrary to the way the “reality-based community” understands political knowledge and constitutes facts.

But there also seems to be a significant, fundamental difference between the thoroughly modernist Orwellian assault on the Enlightenment and the postmodern one being waged by the Bush administration. The former approach posits some fundamental, underlying truths (omnipresent if reducible to the point of obsolescence); the latter (observing “that’s not the way the world really works anymore”) un

Images of Dover A.F.B.’s flag-draped coffins can vanish, but the dead kids inside those coffins are still dead. And disappeared (at least in the United States) as the Bush administration “act[s] again, creating other new realities” – is a disconcerting development. Where do we go when faced with the image(s) of such a political reality?

Perhaps we might begin by exploring what it means that the Bush administration has so straightforwardly expropriated the analytic tools en vogue in today’s Cultural Studies (“an amalgam of postmodernism, poststructuralist theory, deconstruction, and political moralism”) to serve the ends of empire. Amy Kaplan’s address last year to the American Studies Association, a reflection on “limits of... a method of exposure” when encountering empire, begins to wrestle with this question. Recast in textual rather than visual terms, she seems to ask whether the urgency of “naming the system” diminishes when the system already openly names itself (“we’re an empire now...”). The ramifications of this observation for American Studies – which, at its best, seeks to “reveal the repressed violence embodied in cultural productions or [recover] stories of violent oppression absent from prior master historical narratives” – are profound. Where does the field go in a moment when “lies and acts of violence appear hidden on the surface, and the unpacking of... complex ideological construct[s] often seems irrelevant”?

Perhaps what we encounter is thus a crisis of whether discursive frames allow certain political realities, or whether political (hyper)realities determine and make irrelevant those discursive frames. In the end, I think there has to be a dialectical relationship between the two causalities. Kaplan bemoans the moment where “lies and acts of violence appear hidden on the surface,” but the fact that such brutality is still nevertheless “hidden” (if openly) is important. It means there’s still a place for the “outs of empire,” and a war to be waged in how we frame or conceptualize empire today (though by no means, necessarily, “within the parameters that [these fuckers] thoroughly control and own”). The Right has invested 25 years in shaping and propagating these invisible frames into the popular discourse (see Michael Erard’s “Frame Wars” in the most recent Texas Observer, but the seeming omnipresence of these frames by no means signifies a monopoly over “reality” (nor it’s postmodern death). As we draw a deep collective inhale in anticipation of four more years, it’s important that intellectuals on the Left focus on the broad issue – what is the nature of this self-proclaimed empire and what tools do we need to contest it? I still have this naive faith that some solutions might emerge from “judicious study” of these new imperial texts, these new imperial images, and underlying them, perhaps, the remnants of a discernible reality. Maybe that’s what they’re so scared of in the first place.

Political Commentary
by Thomas Frampton

The author is a third year student at Yale.

The author is a third year student at Yale.
Descending the Ivory Tower
Arts and Education in the Developing World

Cultural Report
by Amar C. Bakshi

This past summer, eleven U.S. college students and I set out for the hill-town of Mussoorie, India to work in the visual and performing arts with 200 children in five underprivileged schools. We collaborated with community artists, local teachers and NGOs to design methods for integrating the arts into classrooms to enrich curriculum, to engage the community in education, and to address pressing social issues.

We confronted a troubling educational situation in Mussoorie. The teacher-student ratio at one of the schools we worked with, the Kosi Government primary school, was only 1 to 41. One exhausted teacher, with only several textbooks, sat her class in a dark room and told them to read silently. She often used a stick to punish miscreants but rarely chalk to elaborate lesson plans.

Unfortunately, throughout Uttaranchal, teachers are underpaid, undertrained and underappreciated. Girls are underrepresented in the classroom and many who do attend are painfully reticent. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds suffer from high rates of absenteeism and low levels of participation. Children over twelve years are often underrepresented as well as they must fulfill family labor obligations.

While corrupt oversight, inadequate financing, and ingrained prejudices threaten equity in Mussoorie education, we witnessed local NGOs and some passionate teachers fighting to compensate. It was very clear as we began our work that what was lacking in these underprivileged schools was not intelligence, but personal attention, community involvement and inspiration. We hoped during our time in Mussoorie to help teachers show children how education could be relevant to their lives and enjoyable, to bring parents into the classroom, and to encourage children to share their artistic talents with the broader community. In the United States, we have witnessed multiple, valuable ends to arts education. We wanted to use local art forms to engineer similar benefits abroad.

Upon arrival in Mussoorie, our project group set out first to learn the local art forms we would incorporate into our program. Community elders educated us how the community had lost its culture to regional tourism and indeed, mass-produced tasseled depictions of identical houses, rivers and mountains flooded storefronts. During our first week of working with local children, we asked them to draw anything they wanted. They all made precisely the same drawing.

We realized then, and through conversation with prominent Indian artists, that our work in Mussoorie should be not only to stimulate the individual and community benefits of arts education – creativity, a sense of agency, a desire to learn, group problem solving capabilities, community engagement in education – but also to foster the cultural pride of the children. We decided to call ourselves “Aina,” which means mirror in Persian. In the Sufi context, the word connotes a constant struggle for self-realization by realizing others within oneself.

The Aina project undergraduates who accompanied me to India, hailing from Zimbabwe to Sri Lanka, were well aware of and committed to understanding the unique social setting from which our students drew their creative motivations. By shedding our deeply embedded emphases on product over process, individual production over group production, and inborn originality over the value of apprenticeship, we were able to engage in a richer dialogue with the children, as well as open up our own minds as artists. Ultimately, by embracing a broad definition of art – considering the ritual protection provided by rice powder rangolis and religious stories embedded in Gharwali dance equally as art – we began to develop a method of using art forms to examine local community issues. We made “process plans” off of each project developed, using an educational methodology of observe, provide, discover, discuss.

Since we had already researched the different artistic forms of the community before we began working with the children, we provided the children those materials necessary to create local forms and invited the children to create anything they wanted. Creations included song lyrics, the incorporation of Bollywood dance into traditional drama, and, for a group of Christian children, the use of abandoned Hindu shrine materials to construct nativity scenes. By always being very clear to emphasize we were seeking to understand not criticize, we asked the students about their different approaches to their art-work as they worked, thus engaging the children’s process of art-making directly. This in turn, developed into a replicable method for engaging social issues through art.

One group of thirty children in the Mussoorie Public Girls School (aged 14-16), for example, used theater and sari costumes to explore gender discrimination in their school environment and put on a show before the wider community. Hindu, Muslim and Christian children reclaimed a vacant post-partition Muslim home and symbolically repainted it, so to open the building to all religious faiths. Our project group additionally collaborated with a local ecological NGO in a rural village school to construct clay and cow-dung sculptures with teen-aged youths about the deforestation of their subsistence community. These youths since have formed a social action group called Prakrati (“Nature”) that uses arts to confront social issues and develop practical means of action. Their model is being emulated by neighboring villages.

Aina’s methodology of arts education has yielded many positive results thus far in the Mussoorie area. Teachers in the community say they have never seen the children so energized; that they had never seen them “think outside the box like that.” By the end of our time at the Kosi School for example, the young children were not simply sitting in a silent room reading, but rather enacting lessons from texts, using rangolis to celebrate their school and Gharwali traditional song to address educational equity. Even beyond our work, local girls were speaking up more in class and attending school with greater regularity.

In the future, Aina hopes to develop more flexible “process plans” that will spur sustainable efforts like the environmental youth action group Prakrati. We will continue our local research and work in Mussoorie this coming summer by bringing another U.S. college student team. We hope to foster more links with NGOs and local art schools and colonies to create lasting networks of public service for local Indian institutes. Moreover, we intend to critically examine the benefits of arts education in developing schools.

This coming summer, we are also initiating a new project in Masiye, Zimbabwe under the guidance of Aina alum Proud Dzamukira. The Zimbabwe group will work with children in an AIDS orphanage and similarly focus on cultivating an indigenously engineered arts curriculum. Throughout the year we have been constantly seeking partnerships with organizations who share our commitment to using the arts for positive social change. To get involved please visit www.AinaArts.org

The author is a third year Harvard student and the founder of Aina Arts.
Reconciling Catholic Faith and Secular Reason

Cultural Commentary
by Niko Banac

Wednesday October 13, 2004, George Cardinal Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, gave a lecture entitled “Newman and Conscience” at the Breasted Hall of the Oriental Institute. The Lumen Christi Organization, a Catholic institute tied to the University of Chicago, sponsored the event.

Cardinal Pell has only recently been appointed to the Sacred College of Cardinals. This was regarded as an acknowledgment of his many services to the Catholic Church, primarily as a scholar and intellectual. His lecture dealt with the problem of conscience. In it Cardinal Pell referred to the Cardinal and theologian John Henry Newman. Aside from his most widely-read work Grammar of Assent, Newman is known for putting forth the notion of the “supremacy of conscience” as a way of reconciling objective morality with the individual’s subjective need to understand his moral instincts.

Cardinal Pell continued to touch on the question of conscience by finally formulating a definition which basically referred to good conscience as a “freely made” choice to accept dogmatic truth. But is this a free choice?

By his own admonition, Cardinal Pell has recently caused quite a stir in Australia for suggesting that conscience itself is not sufficient, and that it can in fact lead to incorrect opinions. For Catholics the “objective truth” can only be the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. During the recent sex scandals in the Catholic Church, laymen who lobbied for institutional changes were brushed aside with the simple response: “The Catholic Church is not a democracy, it is a hierarchical institution.”

Today, however, it is quite fashionable to make reference to tolerance in a positive light, so I was not surprised when Cardinal Pell used the term when engaging in a brief session of gay-bashing. His thesis was that tolerance is a good thing, but that at times, despite the fact that Jesus instructed his followers not to judge, “we must make judgments.” Cardinal Pell stated that modern society does not tolerate racism and sexism, in which case it should treat homosexuality the same way. In reference to this, Cardinal Pell attacked the recent decision of the European parliament to reject Italian nominee Rocco Buttiglione for the position of EU justice commissioner for saying he considered homosexuality a sin as an intolerant act.

Cardinal Pell continued to touch on the question of conscience by finally formulating a definition which basically referred to good conscience as a “freely made” choice to accept dogmatic truth. But is this a free choice? Given the self-referential nature of conscience, how can one make a “free” choice to accept an unqualified truth set in stone, which qualifies the “rightness” of that individual choice (a distinct entity) in reference to its accordance with an outside dogmatic truth? This can only be a tautology, since the qualification of right conscience as a “free” choice to accept something that qualifies it as such automatically robs it of its freedom because nothing is permitted to qualify the supremacy of its referent. [Chaim Perelman defines tautology as “knowing we are learning nothing new, analysis completely fails to interest us, because it is tautological … it only recapitulates the contents of the analyzed proposition in other terms, that is, by recourse to a definition.”]

This is beside the point though, and to even grapple with the disingenuous inconsistencies of institutional didacticism is a needless intellectual exertion. Cardinal Pell stated that the withholding of communion (as some priests said they would do to John Kerry) could be a means to correcting false conscience. However, he also added that a believers attempt to reconcile his conscience with dogma can result in a spiritual journey that, if ending in acceptance, can lead to a deeper understanding of faith. As a Catholic, I can appreciate this, because what appeals to me in Catholicism is the depth and unapproachable nature of its mysteries. But when these aspects of Catholicism are watered down for narrow ends, the Church suffers as a whole. In a sense, the Orthodox Christian criticism of Catholicism as having erred in its rationalism holds water here. Today, church attendance is at an all time low, and in the cradle of Catholicism, the Mediterranean world, only about 10 to 40 percent of the population regularly attend mass.

It may please Cardinal Pell, if he ever reads this article, that I will make sure to mention it in my next confession. I will give it to my confessor, and I will renounce everything that’s written in it. I will accept dogmatic truth, any change or innovation the Pope makes, be it the addition of the luminous mysteries, the visions at Fatima or the canonization of the Hapsburgs, and treat this article as a self-indulgent lapse into error. Everything I have written here is untruth. Disregard my erroneous conscience. Eppur si muove.1

1 “Eppur si muove” is Italian for “Still it moves.” Apparently, Galileo made this cryptic remark (perhaps in reference to the earth) after recanting his heliocentric theory before the Inquisition in 1633.
Four Years in the Desert

The Jed Adler Story

Jed Adler was born and grew up in Palo Alto, California. The house in which he was raised was built on the site of an old estate comprising sixty acres of Oak woodland, on the wagon track twenty-five miles South of San Francisco. As a boy, Jed used to find horseshoes half buried in the shifting sands of his backyard.

One of Jed’s first memories takes place in preschool, when he poured apple juice into the receiver of a rotary telephone. Jed had wanted to break the phone so the staff would allow him to take it apart.

Jed stands nearly six feet, though he does not give the impression of being particularly tall. This is due to his posture, which is poor. Jed favors baseball caps, which cause his hair to fan out in “wings”, and this makes him seem less serious than he is. When arguing, Jed raises his eyebrows and leans forward, gesturing in the method of chopping celery.

Jed is fond of issuing cryptic remarks to announce his arrival. “I’m building an ark,” he once said. “Anybody want to come with?” Another time he said, a bit defensively: “I believe in magic.”

Jed finds certain concepts very funny, though he does not laugh frequently, and never for very long. His resting demeanor is infallibly serious. “When I asked him what category he fit into, Adler said, “You know which category he fit into,” he finally said.

Jed’s greatest pleasure in life is arguing. His aim is not necessarily to convince people that their beliefs are wrong, but to incite anger and confusion. It is only when his audience is in a state of suspended disbelief that Adler is able to argue effectively. At such times he comes off like an enlightened Clarence Darrow, riffing passionately on redemption. At other times, when his audiences’ credulity is waning, his declamations have the aspect of a rant.

As a child, Jed was diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). He said that life at home was characterized by constant fighting between his parents and sisters. Jed, by his own account, tried to remain neutral. He wanted to play computer games and listen to the sound effects of “Miami Vice”. Soon, however, problems at home coupled with Jed’s hyperactivity led him to enact a series of primitive, ritualistic crimes. In the winter of 1998, Jed collected road-killed animals, spray painted them the school colors, and deposited them around campus. The school declared the act a “hate crime”. Several months later Adler stuck again, this time stealing industrial salts from the chemistry lab and using them to burn a giant Star of David onto the lawn of a country club. For these and other reasons Adler parents exiled him to the East Coast, and confusion. It is only when his audience is

Jed’s outlook is basically misanthropic. Like Richard Roma, he subscribes to the law of “contrary popular opinion” meaning that if a view is widely held, it is likely not to be true. When Jed speaks of people in the abstract, meaning people generally, he sometimes calls them “drones”. Priding himself on having broken free of unthinking complicity with some insidious program, Adler has little patience for those whom he perceives to lack discernment. “Eighty-nine percent of people are asleep and don’t know it;” he once told me. “Nine percent are asleep and they know they’re dreaming, and two percent realize they’re awake.” When I asked him what category he fit into, Adler said, “You know which one, dog.”

Jed drives a Saab 900S, a gift from his parents. He keeps the interior immaculate. Cleanliness seems to be a form of control for him. Jed is habitually rearranging his surroundings, making minute adjustments as though sensitive to subtle energy patterns.

One night Jed surreptitiously takes his father’s Jaguar out for a midnight ride around Atherton. The streetlights, obfuscated by a canopy of oak branches, cast spectral shad

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Profile

by Josh Bartell

parents. He keeps the interior immaculate. Cleanliness seems to be a form of control for him. Jed is habitually rearranging his surroundings, making minute adjustments as though sensitive to subtle energy patterns.

One night Jed surreptitiously takes his father’s Jaguar out for a midnight ride around Atherton. The streetlights, obfuscated by a canopy of oak branches, cast spectral shadows on the lawns. Jed takes it up to 65 mph and glances over. At this speed it is apparent that there is no time for a swerving reaction. In seconds Jed deaccelerates. The car looses velocity so fast it feels like we have hit water.

Jed guides the sedan back into his driveway. While he is waiting for the garage door to open he notices that a movie ticket has been jarred from its perch on the instrument panel. “Shit,” he says, leaning over. “He’s gonna see that.”

Jed is notorious among his peers for propounding bizarre and attenuated theses meant to support his supposition of a global conspiracy. In a recent argument over the existence of extraterrestrials, Adler claimed to have “definitive knowledge” of the existence of aliens. He cited the example of Genesis 6 – a cryptic chapter that details the exploits of a mysterious race called the “Nephilim” (from the Hebrew for “nephel”, or untimely births) who were the offspring of human maidens and divine beings. The Nephilim, despite teaching humans much in the arts of math and science, eventually destroyed themselves because they could not live cooperatively. The fact that this account cohered with a number of occult readings on history – such as extraterrestrial “lizards” who visited the Maya and taught them numbers – was one more reason for Jed to put credence in it.

The question of whether Jed legitimately believed in such bizarre formulations is a debatable point. But his reasons for allaying himself with such unlikely scenarios are far from obscure. Adler has a real need to demonstrate the fact that he is a skeptical individual, that he is not guilty of the crime of being gullible.

Jed parked the car and jingled his keys on the way to the front door. It was late July. In a couple of weeks he would be going back to Arizona. The summer had been good for him. He had come to visualize his time Arizona as a sojourn in the wilderness: four years in the desert. The temperature in the Sonora made it feel like purgatory. Life was not going to be as good as he thought. But it also wouldn’t be as bad.
### Stuff to do

**Saturday, January 22**
“**The Adventures of Felix - Film Screening and Discussion**”
Oliver Ducastel and Jacques Martin have created a striking new version of the beloved comic strip character, Felix. The film will be screened at 2:00 p.m., Cobb Hall, room 307.

**Monday, January 24**
“**Al-Jazeera & the Arab Media: Reflecting or Shaping Perceptions in the Arab World**”
Hafez Al-Mirazi, the Washington Bureau Chief of Al-Jazeera Television, will discuss the Arab world at 6:00 p.m., International House, 1414 E. 59th Street, Assembly Hall.

**Tuesday, January 25**
“**Climate Exchange Speaker**”
As part of ECO’s Climate Change Week, a representative of Chicago Climate Exchange, a carbon dioxide permit trading market, will discuss the market and its ecological and economic ramifications. 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Bartlett Dining Commons, Lounge, 1st floor.

**Saturday, January 29**
“**Human Rights: Migration and Refugee Policy**”
The Human Rights Department presents a workshop on refugee policy at 6:00 p.m., Pick Hall, Lounge, 1st floor.

**Wednesday, January 30**
“**Gender Violence and the Price of Virginity**”
Daniel Chen, Postdoctoral Fellow at the University, will explore the complex social and theological elements of gender violence and virginity. Admission is four dollars, including a meal. 12:00 noon to 1:30 p.m., Swift Hall, Common Room.

**Thursday, January 31**
“**“Dub Music of 1970s Jamaica: The Acoustics of Diaspora and Post-Colony”**”
Michael Veal, specialist in African, Caribbean, and African American jazz and pop music, will discuss the intimate connection between dub music and the post-colonial situation of Jamaica. Gain insight into the ramifications of the African Diaspora and the effects of British colonialism, or just broaden your knowledge of dub beyond Lee Scratch Perry. 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Goodspeed Hall, Fulton Recital Hall, 4th floor.

**Tuesday, February 7**
“**“Spirits of Dissent: Southeast Asian Memoires and U.S. Disciplines of Death”**”
Jean Langford will discuss medical anthropology, post-colonial theory, and the politics of representation in South and South East Asia in this Anthropology seminar. 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Haskell Hall, room 315.

**Tuesday, February 14**
“**“Subaltern History as Political Thought”**”
In this Comparative Colonialisms workshop, Distinguished Professor Dipesh Chakrabarty will discuss subaltern studies and history perceived from the view of the masses and common members of society as a vector of societal and political change. 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Haskell Hall, room 101.

**Tuesday, February 22**
“**“Globalizing Mumbai: Civic Boosterism and the Social Construction of Real Estate Markets”**”
Lisa Weinstein will discuss Mumbai, India. 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Wilder House, 5811 S. Kenwood Avenue.

**Friday, January 28**
“**“Al-Jazeera & the Arab Media: Reflecting or Shaping Perceptions in the Arab World”**”
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**Monday, January 31**
“**Energy Efficiency Workshop**”
As part of ECO’s Climate Change Week, a delegate from the Energy Cooperative will hold a workshop concerning energy conservation in apartments. Discover tips to reduce your energy bills and stay warm this winter. 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., Bartlett Dining Commons, Lounge, 1st floor.

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**Passings**

Susan Sontag, famed intellectual and noted novelist, succumbed to cancer in December, leaving the world without an outspoken vocalist of responsible morality, and impassioned social and aesthetic advocacy. Sontag, attendee of University of Chicago, Harvard, and Oxford, challenged established intellectual and social paradigms of social justice and moral relativism. She will be remembered through her works of fiction, including The Benefactor, The Death Kit, and The Way We Live Now, and her essays including “Notes on Camp”.

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