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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.
Africa

Togo- Faure Gnassingbe stepped down from the Presidency last week after serving for three weeks following the death of his father Gnassingbe Eyadema, who had ruled the West African state for thirty-eight years. Faure Gnassingbe acquiesced to democratic elections after many West African nations imposed sanctions on Togo, declaring free election in 60 days, in late April. The leader of Togo’s main opposing party, Jean Pierre Fabre, has criticized the brevity of time until the polls, stating a “transparent and honest election” is unlikely to occur in that time frame. Mr. Fabre remains barred from the election because he does not meet residency requirements, having been exiled in France.

Middle East

Lebanon- Syria has begun withdrawing troops from neighboring Lebanon following massive protests sparked by the suspect assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Lebanon’s Syrian-backed puppet government resigned in the face of the civil disobedience, and international pressure has urged for a speedy removal of Syrian troops who have occupied Lebanon for the last twenty-nine years since the Lebanese Civil War. This so-called Lebanese “Cedar Revolution” (coined the “BMW revolution” by its opponents) coincides with democratic progress in Egypt, where President Hosni Mubarak has announced constitutional changes to allow opponents to challenge his position for the first time in twenty-four years.

Europe

Portugal- The Socialist Party, under the leadership of José Sócrates, claimed an absolute majority in recent parliamentary elections, leading their leftist coalition to sixty percent of the total vote. The Socialists surged in popularity at the recent polls in response to severe recent economic decline presided over by the outgoing Social Democrats. Within the past last three years of Social Democrat rule, Portugal has atrophied 150,000 jobs and accumulated the largest relative deficit in Western Europe. Sócrates proposes to assuage the economic problem by limiting government spending, but increasing expenditure on scientific and technological research in an attempt to mimic the success of Nordic countries who invoked similar measures. Socrates also plans to hold a referendum on the legalization of abortion.

Latin America

Columbia- The government of Alvaro Uribe has agreed to extradite a top leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia to the United States. Omaira Rojas Cabrera (a.k.a. ‘Sonia’), the most senior woman in the FARC, was taken prisoner by government forces in February 2004. Incriminating documents and a laptop loaded with contact information were found on her person at the time of her capture. This blow to the FARC follows hard on the heels of the December 2004 extradition of another senior leader, Ricardo, Palmera (Simon Trinidad) to the United States, on charges of drug trafficking and kidnapping American citizens.

Australasia

Sri Lanka- The ceasefire declared earlier this year between the Sri Lankan government and the rebel Tamil Tigers, following the tsunami that killed thirty thousand, appears in jeopardy following the assassination of a Tiger politician. The ethnic civil war between the Sinhalese majority government and the northern Tamils has endured for twenty years at the cost of sixty thousand lives. Relations have soured between the two groups following the disaster due to questions over aid distribution to the Tamil north.
In Defense of: Ward Churchill

W ard Churchill, professor, Vietnam Veteran, Native American, has certainly raised some eyebrows recently. Here are some things people have to say about Churchill, what could he have done to piss people off so much?:

“Hey fuck for brains.....Ward...if you hate this country so damn much why don’t you move to Iraq or the Gaza Strip and help all those poor people that you say we’re hurting and killing and starving and maiming and terrorizing? Seems to me that you’ve made yourself quite wealthy with authoring books and essays speaking engagements not to mention your teaching position....would I be wrong to say that you’ve etched out a pretty good living doing what you do (spewing hate propaganda in my opinion).”

“F*ck you sand nigger lover and parasite of USA...DIE.”

“I want to thank you for posting the article about Ward Churchill. I think it is an extraordinary thing this man has done. HERE IS YOUR DIRTY LAUNDARY AMERICA DEAL WITH IT!!! He has said what many people are thinking but are afraid to say in such a public way: He needs our support and backing.”

The above letters (the names were withheld) were sent to a website, http://www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/s11/churchill.html, that posted Ward Churchill’s controversial essay on 9-11, “Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens.” Churchill is a professor of Ethnic Studies at The University of Colorado – Boulder. The essay, written on September 11, 2001, was a “knee jerk” response to the attacks on the World Trade Center that left over 3,000 dead. Churchill’s essay received scant attention when it was originally published in 2001, and was later turned into the book “On the Justice of Roosting Chickens.”

The essay, which compares victims of 9-11 to “little Eichmanns,” has resulted in nothing less than: Churchill resigning his position as head of CU’s Ethnic Studies Department, death threats, calls for his resignation, and firing by Colorado Governor Bill Owens, as well as support from Native American groups.

So what’s Churchill saying that’s got so many people irked? The essay’s main point is that America has been doing some bad things, for a long time, and now it’s payback time. Churchill repeatedly invokes the suffering of Iraqi children under UN sanctions, the plight of the Palestinians, and the business of keeping America safe. Churchill expounds on the acts of the 9-11 terrorists, describing them as “combatants.” He goes on to explain that “As things stand, including the 1993 detonation at the WTC, “Arab terrorists” have responded to the massive and sustained American terror bombing of Iraq with a total of four assaults by explosives inside the US. That’s about 1% of the 50,000 bombs the Pentagon announced were rained on Baghdad alone during the Gulf War (add in Oklahoma City and you’ll get something nearer an actual 1%). In the process, they’ve managed to kill about 5,000 Americans, or roughly 1% of the dead Iraqi children (the percentage is far smaller if you factor in the killing of adult Iraqi civilians, not to mention troops butchered as/ after they’d surrendered and/or after the “war-ending” ceasefire had been announced).” This was written before Bush and Company invaded Iraq again.

Churchill’s essay is rambling, and at times hard to comprehend, but the impetus behind it is clear: we are getting our just desserts. He does not excuse himself from other Americans, or claim that his ethnicity grants him immunity. The “little Eichmanns” part is what has gotten Churchill in the most heat. The comparison to the infamous Nazi, who made the trains run on time, was directed at the “technocratic corps.” According to Churchill, such Americans are: “at the very heart of America’s global financial empire – the mighty engine of profit to which the military dimension of U.S. policy has always been enslaved – and they did so both willingly and knowingly. To the extent that any of them were unaware of the costs and consequences to others of what they were involved in – and in many cases excelling at – it was because of their absolute refusal to see. More likely, it was because they were too busy braying, incessantly and self-importantly, into their cell phones, arranging power lunches and stock transactions, each of them, was directed at the “technocratic corps.”

Churchill may be guilty of being a very angry man, made rich by his tenure ($90,000 annual salary) and book sales. He may be a knee-jerk reactionary liberal, or just a jerk, but when you get down to it, past the “little Eichmanns” and comparisons of Madeline Albright to Jabba The Hut, Churchill has a point. He’s not a racist, and he may be a sloppy scholar, but it is hard to look at his essay without having the images of Vietnam, The Trail of Tears, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and slavery force themselves on you.

It is hard to look at Churchill’s essay without having Vietnam, The Trail of Tears, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and slavery force themselves on you. They were too busy braying, incessantly and self-importantly, into their cell phones, arranging power lunches and stock transactions, each of which translated, conveniently out of sight, mind and smelling distance, into the starved and rotting flesh of infants.”

Churchill may be guilty of being a very angry man, made rich by his tenure ($90,000 annual salary) and book sales. He may be a knee-jerk reactionary liberal, or just a jerk, but when you get down to it, past the “little Eichmanns” and comparisons of Madeline Albright to Jabba The Hut, Churchill has a point. He’s not a racist, and he may be a sloppy scholar, but it is hard to look at his essay without having the images of Vietnam, The Trail of Tears, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and slavery force themselves on you. The images make you appreciate what you have, what it took to get here, what mistakes were made along the way, and what mistakes we are still making as a nation.

The discussion taking place in the mass media has focused mainly on Churchill’s First Amendment Right to say anything he pleases. There has not really been a big rallying cry to actually examine Churchill’s argument: that America is now reaping what it has been sowing with the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children worth an SUV? Is a democracy that unlawfully invades other nations in search of mythical weapons worth defending? Churchill’s essay asks these questions in a confrontational and angry way.

Read his article. Decide for yourself.

Domestic Issues
by Gabriel E.S. Lifton-Zoline

It is hard to look at Churchill’s essay without having Vietnam, The Trail of Tears, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and slavery force themselves on you. Rather simply a white guy in with a feather and a peace pipe. As AIM spokesman Russell Means put it, speaking at a standing room only rally for Churchill: “We are the only ethnic group in the world that has to prove our blood like dogs.”

It is hard to read polarizing excerpt from Churchill’s essay without being off put; by Churchill’s choice of language, his sweeping generalizations, his characterization of the 9-11 attackers as “combatants” etc. But it is not hard, if you have the capacity to look honestly at the world, to see how so many people could be angry at America. Is America the devil? I don’t know, but it is true that we as a nation have committed, commit, heinous acts in the name of freedom and democracy? Yes, without a doubt.

Bill O’Reilly, love him or hate him, has a lot of viewers on his Fox News Show, “The Factor,” where he doesn’t spin issues, and “lets you the viewer decide.” Mr. O’Reilly, on his website (BillOReilly.com), had this to say about the Churchill matter:

All over the country far left ravings on campus are acceptable and sometimes even embraced by fanatical faculty. Legitimate dissent has degenerated into hate speech and vile descriptions of America. Many of these so-called teachers, like Ward Churchill, have tenure, a dastardly con that protects teachers for life. They know they can’t be fired so they become little Ayatollahs. And if you call them on their irresponsibility, you are a fascist or a racist.

I am not sure if my article counts as left wing raving, but I am sure trying my best. Mr. O’Reilly speaks for a lot of Americans, so you have to at least pretend to occasionally listen to his ravings. That said, Mr. O’Reilly makes a good point: when you criticize a Native American, call into question his ethnicity, and try and get him fired (Mr. O’Reilly himself has said that Prof. Churchill should not be fired) all the while calling him a traitor and a “sand nigger lover,” reasonable people across the nation will start wondering if you’ve remembered to renew your KKK membership this year.

Churchill may be a jerk. He may hate America (if I were Native American I would loathe this supposedly free country: established by raping, pillaging, land-stealing, white men). I, as one of the aforementioned white men, is supposedly well-educated one at that, do hate some of the actions of my country, and so recognize the importance of calling into question the actions of my government, and the consequences that inevitably result from dastardly deeds. Are the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children worth an SUV? Is a democracy that unlawfully invades other nations in search of mythical weapons worth defending? Churchill’s essay asks these questions in a confrontational and angry way.
In Defense of: Ideological Freedom in Academia

Domestic Issues
by Julie Fry

What if there were a new type of affirmative action, one that focused on ideology, not race, and affected professors instead of students? A movement started by conservative activist David Horowitz makes this scenario an increasingly real possibility. Horowitz is pressing the ivory tower to adopt what he calls an “Academic Bill of Rights.”

According to David Horowitz, the Academic Bill of Rights “demands balance in... reading lists, recognizes that political partisanship by professors in the classroom is an abuse of students’ academic freedom, that the inequity in funding of student organizations and visiting speakers is unacceptable, and that a learning environment hostile to conservatives is unacceptable.” Horowitz claims that there is a gross imbalance in the political composition of the faculty at our nation’s colleges and universities, citing dubious studies that demonstrate that the overall ratio of Democrats to Republicans in higher education is over 10 to 1. Horowitz touts this as solid evidence of the “grotesquely unbalanced, politically-shaped selection process in the hiring of college faculty.”

At first glance, it would seem that Horowitz’s argument has merit – if faculty ideology is so slanted, how can the average, apolitical student make it through four years without becoming thoroughly indoctrinated against their will? Horowitz’s signature motto is: “You Can’t Get A Good Education if You’re Only Getting Half the Story.” Delving more deeply into the data Horowitz uses to make his claims; it seems he has left quite a bit off of his own story.

Horowitz’s data provides the firmest repudiation of his own claims. Horowitz studied 32 elite colleges and universities in the United States using a hit-and-miss method of checking voter registration lists to find professors who were registered with a party. Not counting non-registered faculty, or professors who were unable to be positively identified, Horowitz was able to produce 1,397 registered Democrats, out of 4,255 professors. The largest group produced were 1,891 unaffiliated professors. Unaffiliated professors far outweigh both Democratic and Republican professors at nearly every school Horowitz studied. Horowitz’s rigid categorization of professors into “liberals” and “conservatives” narrows a rich spectrum of personal beliefs into two monolithic categories.

Horowitz makes outlandish claims in his writings, agonizing over “the blacklist of conservatives on American college campuses,” a “systematic repression” of conservative thought due to “political bias against conservatives in the hiring process.” Horowitz also asserts that “campus funds available for political activities are unequally distributed to student groups with left-wing agendas.”

All of this would seem to indicate a serious pandemic in higher education, except Horowitz is misconstruing cause and effect. When examined more closely, we can see that most of his claims fail apart under close scrutiny. True, money is given disproportionately to progressive student groups at elite institutions. However, when the comparative number of progressive versus conservative student groups is taken into account, there is no difference in funding. More money goes to progressive organizations simply because there are more of them.

By only looking at an effect, Horowitz claims the cause of inequitable distribution is the result of a “systematic conservative repression.” Such allegations of bias are ludicrous when light is shed on selective facts Horowitz leave out of the equation. His accusation of faculty hiring bias does not explain how political bias factors into hiring practices.

That conservative professors are in the minority (a sketchy allegation at best) does not indicate a liberal conspiracy to keep conservatives out of academia as Horowitz would like to believe.

The weakness of Horowitz’s demand for “academic balance” in higher education is his attack on forms of political speech guaranteed under the First Amendment. Not only must conservative professors be hired, but conservative speakers must be invited to campus (regardless of demand or interest), and conservative books must be assigned (regardless of academic merit). Meanwhile, existing liberal political speech is rendered unacceptable both in and out of the classroom.

Horowitz seems to expect that conservatives be given a platform to share their ideology, while simultaneously claiming that liberal political speech has no place in academia. He seems oblivious to the double-edged sword which he wields, demanding that conservative viewpoints be given a mouthpiece in the name of balance, then demanding that liberal speech be muted, in the name of fairness to all. The question of free speech is inherent in every aspect of Horowitz’s demands: conservative students feel marginalized and intimidated by ideologies in the faculty, impairing their ability to share their viewpoints freely. However, Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights only serves to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction, giving the students power when light is shed on selective facts Horowitz leave out of the equation. His accusation of faculty hiring bias does not explain how political bias factors into hiring practices.

Although Horowitz vehemently denies that quotas will have any part in hiring practices, it is impossible to see how the Bill of Rights could be accomplished otherwise. In Colorado, when state universities did not lay out their plan to implement political diversity to Horowitz’s satisfaction, he threatened (and attempted) to sponsor legislation which would have codified the Academic Bill of Rights into state law. His message to Colorado universities was clear: Hire more conservative faculty or we will legislate your hiring practices for you. The word “quota” never appears in the Academic Bill of Rights, but it is hard to imagine how legislated “diversity” could come about otherwise.

Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of the Academic Bill of Rights is that it seeks to politicize the academic

continued next page
environment, in the name of de-politicizing education. Horowitz demands that a “plurality of methodologies and perspectives” be given a voice in higher education, yet uses a restrictive set of political categorizations to achieve this so-called “balance.” Academia is governed by a set of scholarly standards, and Horowitz is right to claim that evaluating student work by political standards (i.e., whether the professor agrees with the student’s point of view) is inappropriate. However, his solution to the problem is no less inappropriate: he believes the way to prevent political viewpoints from being inappropriately applied in higher education is essentially to use political standards to determine which professors can share their viewpoints.

Some conservatives may say that progressives are simply unable to understand the many ways in which discrimination plays out against them in higher education. As a transfer student, I am in the unique position to speak to this argument. Before coming to the University of Chicago, I attended a religious university where I was in the severe ideological minority. Not only can I sympathize with the conservative position, I also have experienced it firsthand.

I know what it’s like to be surrounded by a student body that can be viciously intolerant of your views. I know what it’s like to scan posters advertising campus events, feeling left-out and under-represented. I’ve been in classrooms where professors have pushed their own viewpoints on me in a way I felt inappropriate to an academic setting. I’ve known how it is to have faculty criticize and ridicule deeply-held political beliefs, assuming that their audience automatically feels the same.

Still, despite my experiences, I could have not supported a mandated ideological “diversity” at my school. Such superficial policy would breed resentment, indignation, and suspicion of professors given “token” positions.

My experience in the political minority was not enjoyable, but it certainly shaped and strengthened my political beliefs. Constant challenges to my own ideology provided me with numerous opportunities to find my voice and use it. Surrounded by thinking I did not agree with only served to increase my desire to share my ideas with others, driving me to become a greater advocate for my beliefs to counter the half-truths I saw being perpetuated around me.

Instead of demanding that more money be given to progressive groups which my university refused to sponsor, we partnered with community groups, or found outside grants. Rather than clamoring for a progressive speaker to counter each conservative speaker (a plan which surely would have been met with low attendance and massive protests) we took into account the political demographics of our student body and focused our energy on low-budget events which would bring in the people who were truly interested in our causes. It wasn’t easy, but what we accomplished was real. We fought back with ideas and energy, not superficial appearances of “balance” based on a narrow categorization of politics.

Conservatives must view their struggle to be heard as a war of ideas, not a war on ideas.

In short, I learned several things David Horowitz might do well to consider as he clamors for greater “diversity” in our nation’s universities. First, balance is not an inherent part of the real world. Because I went to a fundamentalist religious university, the university community was highly conservative. The state in which my university was located was similarly overwhelmingly conservative, with one of the highest percentages of conservative senators and representatives in the nation. That was the reality of my circumstances, and no clamoring for balance or fairness would have changed the ideological composition of the state legislature, nor should it have influenced whom my school had to hire.

I learned from my time at my former university is that everyone has the right to their own opinion. I believe that there are inappropriate ways to incorporate those opinions into an academic setting but there are still limits in place on discrimination based on gender, sexuality, or ethnicity in our nation’s universities. However, the conservative movement behind the Academic Bill of Rights believes that inappropriate interjection of political belief in the classroom is synonymous with any interjection of political belief in the classroom. This simply is not true. Especially in the social and political sciences, being able to discuss political subject matter is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the realities of our modern world. It is essential that professors are able to enrich and enlighten students with their own political understanding without fear of accusation or reprisal. Students don’t have to agree with their professors to make political interchanges productive and educational.

From my time in an ideological minority, I learned that the only way to change a bad idea is with a better one. Students must become proactive in defending their viewpoints and vigilant in maintaining an arsenal of evidence to back up their claims. Silencing the opposition can never change minds. Conservatives must view their struggle to be heard as a war of ideas, not a war on ideas.

The quest for “ideological balance” has been waged largely with conservative weapons of intimidation — gag orders for political viewpoints and threats against political discussion in the classroom. There must be a better way. Instead of seeking to squelch opposing viewpoints, conservatives ought to find a stronger voice of their own. The inevitable consequences of the Bill of Rights — hiring quotas, bans on political speech, and mandated political events — only serve to mute progressive speech, while making conservative white noise louder. And there is a vast difference between drowning out the other side and winning the war of ideas. Ultimately, in their quest to squelch political discussion, conservatives may find that by extinguishing the free speech of our professors, they have effectively extinguished their own.

Feel left out of the loop?

Catch up on issues past and present

diskord.uchicago.edu
Women's History in Your Own Backyard

A Women's Liberation Walking Tour of Hyde Park

For some, celebrating Women’s History Month means attending pro-choice rallies downtown and feminist brownbags on campus. But how many of you will spend time discussing the history of feminist activism in Chicago or Hyde Park? This March, Distord challenges you to remember the remarkable struggles for women’s rights that occurred on your own campus, on the streets you walk daily, and in the apartments in which you live.

Chicago was the city of firsts for the women’s liberation movement of the sixties and seventies. The first independent women’s liberation group was co-founded in Chicago by Heather Booth, a University of Chicago student at the time. Booth also started the now legendary “Jane”, an underground abortion service that was based in Hyde Park. Chicago was home to the first women’s liberation union, the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, which oversaw the work of many feminist organizations in the city in the seventies. The first women’s liberation center was in Hyde Park, and the first women’s liberation campus group was as the University of Chicago. Where exactly did all of this activism take place? Join us on a walking tour of feminist activism in Hyde Park during the sixties and seventies.

Jane

With the civil rights, labor, and anti-war movements, the early sixties were a period of great upheaval in Chicago. Women’s liberation heavyweight, Heather Booth, remembers, “I hit college, and the world burst open in the most wonderful possible way. I went to the University of Chicago in 1963, in part, because it had no sororities. And sports didn’t dominate the scene. Within weeks, I became very active in the civil rights movement.” In 1965 during her sophomore year at the University of Chicago, one of Booth’s friends from the civil rights movement called her for help. His sister, also a University of Chicago student, was pregnant and needed an abortion. Knowing well that abortion was illegal and generally unsafe and expensive, Booth talked to doctors who were involved in the civil rights movement and was able to find a trustworthy doctor who lived on 63rd Street in the Woodlawn neighborhood to perform the abortion. After the abortion was successful, word quickly got out that Booth knew of a safe and inexpensive doctor. She began referring the women who called wanting abortions to doctors she knew to be trustworthy. Over the years, Jane grew from a well-organized referral program to an abortion service where trained volunteers performed over 11,000 abortions before the police eventually shut down the service.

Hyde Park Activism

Aside from being home to Jane, Hyde Park was a hotbed for feminist activism in the sixties and seventies. This next part of the tour explores how the women’s liberation movement permeated Hyde Park during this period.

1. 5406 S. Dorchester. The Southside Women’s Liberation Center, the first women’s liberation center of its kind in the world, was started here in 1969. The SWLC was actually the front two rooms of this house. Besides being “The Place” for Jane at one time, organizing meetings and discussion groups were held here. As an early flyer notes, “the only requirement for the use of the center is a commitment to understanding the problems of women as females and as ‘human beings’. The SWLC also had a library of magazines and books on women’s liberation and imported books on birth control from Canada.

2. 5532 S. Dorchester. An extension of the SWLC, consciousness-raising groups met here when center was not available. Among the “rap” groups that met here was the Married Women’s Discussion Group.

3. 57th and Stony Island. Walk east on 57th Street to the north-east side of the Metra underpass to see the next stop. Entitled “Pioneer Social Work”, long time Hyde Park resident Astrid Fuller painted this mural between 1967 and 1977. The mural depicts the contributions of women to various social causes.

University of Chicago Activism

While many University of Chicago students were involved in organizations like Jane and the Southside Women’s Liberation Center, women also organized around the Women’s Liberation movement on campus. In September of 1967, the first women’s liberation campus group in the world, the Women’s Radical Action Project (WRAP), was formed at the University of Chicago. This group eventually became a chapter of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union.

1. 59th and Ellis. To give you an idea of how far we have come since the sixties, stop by the Student Care Center at the hospital. Heather Booth recalls an incident that happened in 1965 after her friend was raped at knifepoint. After the rape, Booth says her when her friend “went to student health for a gynecological exam, she was told she [that] student health didn’t cover gynecological services and she was given a lecture on her promiscuity.” Much of the early activism in the women’s liberation movement was done around women’s health and the treatment of women by the medical profession.

2. 5801 S. Ellis Avenue. Upset over the dismissal of Professor Marlene Dixon, over 400 students took over the Administration Building in January, 1969. The Chicago Women’s Liberation Union newsletter describes the sit-in as “the first time in the history of the student movement, a campus-wide struggle focused in a major way on a women’s issue.” WRAP passed out flyers, picketed, and held a forum on the role of women in Academia before the sit-in.

3. 5655 S. University. The Blue Gargoyle opened its doors to the Women’s Liberation movement early on. WRAP and then the Hyde Park chapter of CWLU held meetings on the third floor of the Blue Gargoyle. In February 1970, the Speak Out for Abortion was held at University Church, next to the Blue Gargoyle. Speakers included women who had had abortions, ministers involved in the Clergy Consultation Service, and a lawyer. In June, 1970, the third floor of the Blue Gargoyle became a south side women’s center. Feminist organizations from Hyde Park and the U. of C. continued to meet at the Blue Gargoyle until its closure in the seventies.

Thanks to Mallika Raur Sarkaria and Coral Norris for their help compiling documents.
ubilant coverage of the Iraqi elections would have us believe that the events were the symbolic defeat of terrorism and a new page in Iraqi history. Images of euphoric purple fingers provided an effective interlude during Bush’s State of the Union Address and news media coverage of the day’s events. This smokescreen, however, is not holding up as recent attacks have sent an all too familiar message: Get Out! As hope of national unity dissolves, sectarian battle lines are being drawn to American specifications. While a full-blown civil war is unlikely, cooperation with the carpetbagger government and its U.S. security force is seen by many Iraqis as a feeble option, but an option nonetheless.

The elections were a mockery of democratic process. U.S. soldiers with assault rifles in one-hand and election fliers in the other is hardly an image of popular participation. To begin with, January’s elections were conducted in a war zone and among a people with a dependence on U.S. security forces. There have been many reports of coerced participation in the voting process. Many Iraqis, especially Sunnis, were threatened with a cut in food rations if they didn’t cast a ballot.

In the days running up to the election, U.S. troops raided the homes of those suspected of participating in the insurgency. Military spokesmen have announced that 40-50% of known suspects were killed or captured during these seizures. Meanwhile, U.S. military prisons are being filled to over-capacity. There are currently 6,800 Iraqis being held by the U.S. military; the infamous Abu Ghraib prison, for example, holds 1,100 people above its limit. Once those Iraqis deemed ‘troublesome’ by the U.S. military were removed, the elections could proceed as planned.

As one might expect, most of the candidates in Iraq’s recent election were either exiles with strong ties to the U.S. or political neophytes with strong connections to the constellation of Shia clergy (al-Sadr, al-Sistani, etc.). Within Iraq, there was a widespread misconception that the elections were being held for president and an active legislature, not an assembly to oversee the drafting of a new constitution as was the actual case.

Iraq’s Sunni minority largely abstained from voting last January. Only around 20% of eligible Sunnis voted. The difference between Sunni and Shiite participation in the election is striking considering both groups disapprove of the U.S. presence equally. However, the Sunnis, whose ranks include Baathists, former soldiers, and Islamist groups, possess a great deal of organizational and military power to oppose the U.S. occupational status quo through alternative means; as has been show, American troops and their collaborators don’t last very long in Sunni neighborhoods.

Although violent resistance has reached fever pitch in Iraq since the massacre at Falluja, it has been part of the quagmire since the official invasion ended. Into the summer of 2003, resistance swelled when occupational forces fired on large street demonstrations. While suicide bombs, mortars, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have become resistance weapons of choice, and impromptu attacks a rule of engagement in this lopsided balance of forces, insurgents don’t seem to be running short on munitions. Frequent raids of Iraqi police stations and holdovers from Saddam Hussein’s regime continue to secure significant weapons caches for the opposition.

A recent insurgent attack on February 28th was the deadliest single bomb attack since the start of the Iraq occupation. 122 persons were killed (mostly Iraqi National Guardsmen but also some civilians) and about 170 injured. Ten days earlier, insurgent bombings aimed at disrupting the Shiite holy day of Ashura had killed more than 100 persons.

The ferocious recent attacks have taken a sectarian turn – aimed at both occupation forces and at Shiites, whose recently elected United Iraqi Alliance precariously holds only 138 seats of the new 275-seat constitutional assembly. Two Shiite politicians have already withdrawn from the government, citing tension between various Shiite parties and disagreement with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. According to them, as many as ten other politicians are likely to follow their lead as figures like American-backed interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi maneuver to ensure a better footing after the elections landed his coalition in third place.

One of the most contentious issues for the new Iraq government is the timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops. While Kurdish parties, a collection of former exiles, and CIA stooges strongly favor a US troop presence, the vast majority of Iraqis do not – 80% of Sunni Arabs and 70% of Shiites want them removed. This popular sentiment is of little consequence. The U.S. Army declared before the vote that it would keep a troop level of 120,000 soldiers in Iraq through 2006. All projections for the withdrawal of troops are, of course, based on ‘optimal’ security conditions.

Creating conditions of nominal security in the region will likely depend on the degree to which Shiite/Kurdish politicians incorporate Sunnis and acquire their assistance in apprehending rebel leaders and their supporters. With multiple military bases already in operation and a stranglehold on the nation’s immense oil reserves, the United States will hold on to this bridgehead in an increasingly anti-American region.

Any discussion of the U.S. troop presence in Iraq must take into account the larger geopolitical objectives of the U.S. Iraq is a hub and launching pad for a new American strategy that demands flexible and swift military deployments throughout the Middle East and Central Asia (what is more commonly known as “The Greater Middle East Initiative”). This would provide an unprecedented endowment for fielding expeditionary forces and maintaining dominance over competitors. While the US is currently ensnared in the Iraqi quagmire, the not too distant future could be characterized by a smaller troop presence actually patrolling Iraqi streets. Instead, the US military, primed at various bases, will use strategic bombings and troop blitzes to secure the region.
Encroachment and Destabilization in the Amazon

International Issues by Ali Winston

The Amazon is perpetually at the head of the environmentalist’s list of concerns, particularly when the subject of development arises. Efforts to temper Brazilian developers from expanding their operations into the depths of the ‘lungs of the world’ have had mixed success. Brazil’s indigenous tribes in the Amazon have long fought a losing battle against metropolitan Brazil’s rapacious appetite for resources: development, farming, and forestry have cut deep into their homelands. Although some tribes have managed to secure the right to rule their territories semi-autonomously, recently ‘white’ (the Brazilian concept of race) and identity politics being swept up in the deepest regions of the jungle. This is a poignant example of environmental and identity politics being swept up in the political pressures that often accompany the rapid, loosely supervised expansion of mechanized farming in the Third World.

Roraima province, on Brazil’s wild northeastern border with Venezuela and Guyana, is as remote as they come, and the epicenter of such recent conflicts. Newcomers seeking agricultural lands in Roraima have set up illegal townships and infrastructures to legitimate their claims. Unregulated fires set to clear land for the planting season in the region have drawn Brazilian governmental concern over unregulated development as early as April 1998. Larry Rohter’s 10/15/04 New York Times piece on the region approaches the issue from a solely political bent, opting for the flashier story of indigenous tribes versus modern developers. However, clashing methods of agriculture as well as land rights and indigenous peoples’ autonomy are at the heart of the debate regarding Roraima’s political status.

Indians in the area perceive themselves as victims of underhanded dealings in Brasilia, the Brazilian seat of political power: “The reservation is unfortunately being used as a bargaining chip for local and national interests” (10/15/04, NYT article). Although the current president Luis Ignacio da Silva has asserted his support for the indigenous cause, his administration has turned a blind eye to the transgressions in the Northeast. Roraima was supposed to be set aside as a native enclave, under direct indigenous administration. It would have been afforded semi-autonomous status, much like Nunavut, the Inuit-administered region of north-central Canada. Now that new settlers have firmly entrenched themselves in the region and made significant efforts to ensure that their voice is heard in places of power, it appears that Indian homelands will be fragmented under a new proposal for land partition.

Such events would go a great way in damaging the ecosystem of the region by disrupting the crop diversity with the rice monoculture imposed by the whites. As a result, many species of flora and fauna are placed directly in the firing line of destructive human expansion. Crucial to the debate over the potential havoc such developments would wreak on Roraima’s ecology, yet conspicuously absent from coverage of illegal encroachment on the land of Brazil’s indigenous peoples are any references to sustainable, stable forms of agriculture versus mechanized, nutrient-sapping alternatives. New settlers in the region have planted sprawling rice fields that tap rivers used by the natives for irrigation and runoff has tainted main waterways. Commercial fishing to the Southeast is followed hard on the heels of permanent settlements – fishing trawlers are patrolling the Amazon and its tributaries with increasing frequency. Green Revolution farming methods favored by the settlers involve clumsy, gas-guzzling modern machinery that rip away at the soft, nutrient-rich topsoil of the deep rainforest in the same way it would the packed earth of the Midwestern plains. The farming methods used are not attuned to the particular ecology of the region, and in all likelihood the new farms will falter after a few years once all the healthy soil has been drained of nutrients or washed away downstream. Conseuqently, tribal life suffers due to the fouling of their land and water. It is also difficult to continue traditional farming for profit in the face of such voracious competition. To put it in Darwinian terms, this is a pronounced case of two groups competing for the same ecological niche, with significant political and environmental fallout.

When examining the intricacies of the illegal settlements and territorial demarcations, the question arises as to why the reservation’s sanctity has fallen by the wayside. Quite simply, there is very little desire on the part of either party to cooperate or coexist with each other. There are significant resources available, but the settler’s rate of consumption far outruns that of the natives and is certainly not geared towards keeping a balance between superabundance and scarcity.

Rohter’s article makes little effort to flesh out the ties between native anger at land theft and the agroecological impact the new mode of farming would have on the region. This follows in the footsteps of the BBC’s coverage of the abduction and subsequent release of three priests taken hostage by settlers in January 2004. Attention was lavished on the issue of the ratification of Roraima as an independent Indian reserve and the concurrent opposition to autonomy by settlers, yet there has been no discussion of what impact the ongoing demographic and political changes were having on the land. Since this region of Brazil is so isolated from the rest of the world and bereft of news services, it is crucial that any reportage from the deep Amazon be as informative and detailed as possible.

Traditional modes of agriculture rely on crop polycultures and continual cycling of nutrients in order to replenish the soil and ensure a consistent, sustainable harvest that meets the demands of sustenance as well as a commercial good. Diversity and cycling are natural hedges against unpredictable environmental setbacks, such as drought or flooding: therefore one bad harvest or monsoon won’t prove disastrous. However, the introduction of a rice monoculture is bound to be disastrous: the crop is foreign to the Amazon, and it is bound to bring with it new pests, species, and nutrients that will alter the precarious balance of the region. Another possibility is that in a cruel twist of fate, the rice crops might fall prey to the regional parasites as monoculture crops are significantly more vulnerable to foreign pests than polycultures.

The plight of the Roraima tribes enhances the difficulty inherent in shifting agriculture away from purely economic goals. It is not sufficient to state that development is justified by the sheer volume of food produced: if the biological and vertical/horizontal community structures are damaged as a result of such development, the chances of that land remaining arable greatly lessen. Agriculture must be compatible with the climate and culture of a specific region in order to ensure its long-term viability. Unfortunately, this concern is still viewed as within the domain of the sciences, and, as coverage of the situation in Roraima demonstrates, doesn’t warrant equal attention when compared to the political side of the issue. Perhaps the two disciplines of hard science and social science will gravitate towards a common approach to the issue as arable land continues to fight a losing battle against destructive agricultural practices.

Brazil’s indigenous tribes have long fought a losing battle against metropolitan Brazil’s rapacious appetite for resources.
Nepal is teetering on the brink of anarchy. The Himalayan country’s fifteen-year democratic experiment as a dual parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy—rife with political corruption, a violent Maoist insurgency, and a royal family massacre—ended permanently this past month in a royal coup.

On the first of February, the monarch of Nepal, King Gyanendra, seized absolute control of the nation, sacking the democratic parliament and placing elected politicians under house arrest. Gyanendra extinguished freedom of the press and imposed martial law upon the capital, Kathmandu. Over the past month, Nepalese security forces have rounded up and detained outspoken activists against the King, both democratic and Maoist. The King has justified his recent seizure of power as the only viable way to control an increasingly destructive Maoist insurgency movement that first arose in Nepal’s predominant rural, impoverished zones in 1996 and has since remained uncontained under democratic rule. Within the past nine years, the insurgency has won control of near 60% of the country—at the cost of over ten-thousand lives.

While the Maoist insurgency is currently tearing Nepal apart, King Gyanendra’s brash and shortsighted power grab will serve further to accelerate Nepal towards anarchy. Stuck between merciless Maoists and vicious governmental security forces, the people in rural Nepal now live in a state of constant fear. In response to the recent anti-democratic coup, numerous Western European nations and India have set in motion plans to remove the military and financial aide from the country. If carried out, the actions will cripple Nepal, rushing the nation towards pandemonium and creating a dire need for international military and humanitarian intervention.

Nepal’s democratic experiment first began in 1990 when then King Birendra kneeled to popular democratic pressure and changed the national political system from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy with multiparty democratic elections. The reform relegated King Birendra to the political sidelines while maintaining a figure-head status, so to preserve political stability and Nepal’s national identity as a Hindu kingdom. Early democratic elections under the new political system failed to provide any party with a distinct ruling mandate and resulted in the formation of ideologically incompatible and woefully inefficient, ruling coalitions.

Within its first ten years, Nepal’s democratic political system produced ten different governments and prime ministers as popular allegations of corruption and rural neglect grew rife. The democratic government of Kathmandu in particular failed in its early years to enact popular land reforms in the Nepalese countryside, a move purportedly influenced by wealthy landowners.

Current political turmoil ravishing Nepal in fact grew out of the country’s early democratic political soil of corruption and ineptitude. The current Maoist insurgency, initially comprised of a political group that splintered from the government in 1994, gained popular support in the Nepalese countryside by taking up arms in 1996 and violently breaking up land trusts. The Maoists promised Nepal’s peasants a communist republic with collective farming and peasant land ownership, as an alternative to the neglectful government of Kathmandu. Initially considered only a mild threat, the Maoists grew remarkably stronger over the late 1990’s, concurrent with rising dissatisfaction with the country’s political system.

By 2000, Nepal’s democratic government fully acknowledged the Maoist rural insurgency as a major threat to the nation. The government attempted to initiate political talks with top Maoist leaders to no avail. By then, Nepal’s Maoists had trained several thousand guerilla fighters and militiamen who began ruthlessly crushing dissent in their rural control zones by extrajudicial killings and abductions.

The tense political situation of Nepal dramatically worsened in 2001. Popular Prince Dipendra, in a drug-induced rage over his father King Birendra’s refusal of his desired marriage interest, massacred nine members of the Royal family including the King, before fatally turning the gun on himself. Following this dramatic episode, Gyanendra, King Birendra’s less popular brother, ascended Nepal’s royal throne.

Nepal’s Maoist insurgents interpreted the 2001 tragedy as a boon for their cause and capitalized on national political disarray to increase attacks on army and government outposts in rural zones. In response to such intensifying attacks, Nepal’s democratic government sanctioned the Royal Nepalese Army to wage full war upon the insurgents who, by then, were highly trained and extensively organized.

The Maoists easily repulsed the Nepalese military. Following a series of particularly humiliating defeats in mid-2002, King Gyanendra employed emergency executive powers to temporarily dismiss parliament on grounds of incompetence and take full control of the army. The King was determined to defeat the insurgency at any cost. The army soon began to employ increasingly brutal counter-insurgency tactics: murder, abduction, and torture to counter similar Maoist terror methods.

A popular urban backlash against King Gyanendra’s autocracy arose in Nepal, forcing the reestablishment of a democratically elected government in 2004. However, the lateness of this move indicated that King Gyanendra really held true political power. The Maoists recognized the ascendant power of the crown, and refused peace talks with the democratic government.

It thus came as little surprise that on February First, King Gyanendra brazenly dismissed parliament yet again. The degree of the subsequent media blackout and suppression of human rights displayed by Gyanendra over the past month is unprecedented. These moves illustrate Gyanendra’s personal commitment to winning the war against Maoist forces regardless of legality. Gyanendra offered no guise of diplomacy with the government, casting them aside as a burden to the survival of the nation. Given present realities, the King’s half-hearted concession of democratic elections within three years seems like a pipe dream.
King Gyanendra's reckless re-assumption of absolute power in a politically unstable context, coupled with a declining government human rights record, has signaled to Nepal's allies that democracy will not exist in Nepal in the near future. Backlash has erupted throughout the world against the coup. Nepal's major aid donors, primarily European Union members, vowed to relinquish aid if King Gyanendra didn't reinstate democracy. Furthermore, India and Britain, suppliers of military aid, have threatened to remove assistance if democratic reforms aren't put in place immediately. Either of these two actions will drive Nepal into further chaos, due to the heavily state reliance on foreign supply.

Nepal is the twelfth poorest country in the world – over ninety percent of its people subsist on less a dollar a day. Before the insurgency, over a third of the population survived on money provided in tourism; since 1996, tourism to the Himalayan nation has plummeted by more than 60 percent. In early 2004, the United States State Department placed a warning against all non-essential travel to Nepal. With the crippling of its tourist industry, Nepal has become increasingly reliant on foreign aid, particularly from Western Europe. However, after Gyanendra's power play, Denmark, one of Nepal's leading aid donors established a frightening precedent by setting in motion plans to remove future financial aid.

India, Nepal's major trading partner, has expressed concern over the open border policy currently present between the two countries. The Maoists regard India as a potential threat and have severely reduced commerce between the two countries with roadblocks of major highway systems, general strikes, and by attacking Indian financial interests.

India and Britain's proposed removal of military aid will likely serve to increase brutal violence within Nepal. Currently, the Maoists and the Royal Nepal Army are at an impasse. The Maoists, as shown through their failed embargo last summer on Kathmandu, lack the arms and numbers to siege the capital and the surrounding area from which the monarchy primarily draws its support. The Royal Nepal Army, on the other hand, despite superior numbers, has failed numerous times to wrest hold of the countryside. With India and Britain removing military aid, we can only expect fight and tactics between the two sides to devolve into an unknown level of brutality. Desperation will lead to further repression of human rights on those both desiring democracy or simply an end to the fighting.

On its current course, Nepal appears to be headed directly into anarchy. The people of the nation, caught between equally ruthless combatants, will continue to suffer unless the world chooses to intervene. A multilateral force is needed to mediate between the increasingly zealous sides. India should acknowledge the fact that having a failed state next door will only increase radical elements within their own borders, namely the Maoist Naxalites in Northeastern India. Yet, Indian intervention would be costly geopolitically (being that Pakistan, China, and Russia recently gave support of the royal coup), and its military force can easily handle their domestic Maoists. Western Europe seems to be washing its hands of the matter, and the American military force has more pressing matters than a hill country with no natural resources and only three million people. The world seems awfully content to turn its back while Nepal devolves into chaos.
**Kant and Britain’s National Health Service**

Immanuel Kant may not be the first figure you think of when junk food and cigarettes are mentioned. Nevertheless, his presence loomed over the debate of the recent British health laws.

On November 16th the British government issued a set of proposals on public health. The centerpiece of these proposals was a comprehensive ban on smoking in most public places. It also proposed a ban on junk food advertisements during children’s programming and a color-coded labeling system. This proposed labeling system would give a red label for unhealthy foods that are high in fat, an amber label for nutritious but fatty foods (like cheese), and a green label for healthy foods such as vegetables.

Needless to say, conservatives responded with outrage and horror. An editorial in the UK paper The Daily Telegraph claims that the subliminal message of the white paper is “It is not your fault if you make yourself ill by eating, drinking or smoking too much. That is a problem for the Government and big business.” The Economist accused the government of “puritanism” and succumbing “to a nasty bout of gloomier-than-thou-Methodism”. On this side of the Atlantic, conservatives have been just as vocal. Andrew Sullivan, a prominent blogger and social critic, mocked the British as “nanny-staters” and called the Health Secretary’s statement “Orwellian nonsense”. He ended his post by asking “We can’t even eat any more without government help?”

Granted, Britain’s proposed reforms are riddled with problems. Similar attempts to control advertisements during children’s programming have failed in other countries. Anticipating the restrictions, many advertisers have already found new ways to market to children. Banning smoking in almost all public places is probably too heavy-handed a measure, even for my tastes. Despite the criticism, the warning-light system has received, it is still an improvement on the current British labeling system, which currently only lists the ingredients. Still, why not adopt something like the fairly efficient American labeling system, instead of traffic-light inspired labels destined for ridicule by comedians?

But the conservative outcry against these health measures seems to extend beyond these pragmatic concerns. Britain’s proposed food laws were not just well intentioned but ultimately futile efforts to keep the British people healthy: in conservatives’ eyes these measures were a threat to the fundamental nature of freedom itself.

This whole story begins not in Britain, but in the Prussian city of Königsberg in the late eighteenth century. There the philosopher Immanuel Kant affected a revolution in how we think about morals. Moral philosophers before Kant believed that the great mass of men could not themselves fully understand the demands that morality placed upon them. People would only be moral when faced with the threat of punishment. Against this prevalent view, Kant asserted that morality comes from within, not from without. He claimed that normal, healthy adults can and do understand the moral law, and furthermore they can effectively meet its demands without any outside interference. “Nor could one give worse advice to morality than by wanting to derive it from examples,” Kant wrote in his typically cryptic and chunky prose. “For, every example of it represented to me must itself first be appraised in accordance with principles of morality... it can by no means authoritatively provide the concept of morality”. In plain English, nobody has a right to tell us what is right and wrong; we must discover and judge these things for ourselves. Because Kant believed that we must discover what is right on our own, each of us requires a social space in which we can pursue our own ends and needs, a sphere of freedom that no government can impinge on.

This Kantian concept of an inviolable sphere of individual needs and ends has permeated the political debate, on both the left and the right. In fact, the question is no longer if such a social space exists, but what it consists of. Liberals tend to see moral and speech-related decisions as constituting the essence of freedom (can I read a book or write an article without government interference?). Conservatives and libertarians tend to see “microeconomic” decisions as the epitome of liberty (can put my money towards things that I care about without government interference?).

Unfortunately, this conservative notion of “freedom” rings hollow in the case of the British food laws. Conservatives often forget that there are extremely valid social considerations underpinning regulations. Obesity and personal health are increasingly becoming not just matters of personal choice, but social problems in themselves. For example, Britons are on the whole getting fatter: 24% of British women were obese in 2001, as compared to 8% in 1980. Because of the preponderance of fast-food and smoking amongst Britain’s lowest classes, the average life-expectancy of a working class male is 7.4 less than for a male born into Britain’s upper classes. Even worse, these obesity and smoking problems are draining the public coffers of the health system. Something needs to be done. While such measures as the comprehensive smoking ban may infringe upon individual liberty too much, it is not “patronizing” to call for other reasonable regulations of people’s liberty. Rather, it is a pragmatic recognition of the social forces at play and the danger they pose if left untouched. Obesity, both in America and in Britain, is not just an expression of Kantian individuality, but a social problem, and should be treated as such.
It's pretty clear that this issue is not about what is “fair” — now, a flat tax rate seems like it would be really fair, not to mention efficient — but it's more about fear. People are afraid of “the rich” and feel entrapped by their “evil” corporations that are piloted by those they don’t know and can’t see, and therefore use aggressive taxation as a sort of counter-attack aimed at alleviating these perceived threats. The media coverage of the Enron and WorldCom scandals, the alleged Microsoft monopoly, and other tales of corporate scandal indulge these fears of an uncaring wealthy population and a demonic corporate system. But like the media coverage of plane crashes, these scandals were only newsworthy because free enterprise system failures are in fact uncommon, while every day’s success stories are abundant enough to go unmentioned.

It’s the result of a lack of understanding about how these top-bracket tax payers get to be so rich in the first place that people are afraid of them; most people don’t recognize or appreciate the kind of dedication, hard work, education, risk, and personal sacrifice it takes to be lucky enough to pay over a third of your income in taxes. Out of our fear comes this general perception that rich people are inherently bad people, that they are all pork-bellied, scheming cheaters and oppressive legacy heirs whose main goal in life is to deceive, manipulate, and steal from the “poor.” The defensive reaction is to crack the tax whip hard enough to keep those rich people in line, because that’ll teach them a lesson. Sure, it’ll teach a lesson, but that lesson will be to give up on ideas of innovation and investment, because whatever achievements that result from them will be unrewarded. Placing profit-driven businesses in the role of sinister bad guy is the result of another gross misunderstanding.

A friend of mine who volunteers at an environmental agency recently demonstrated her phobia of the monetarily conscious when she discovered that one of the passionately concerned employees she works with had graduated with a business degree. “Imagine that,” she said. “A businessman with a heart.” What my friend failed to realize is that there is not a whole lot of difference between the basic needs and operations of a small-scale non-profit and a large for-profit corporation. Despite its nomenclature, the ‘corporate culture’ is not exclusive to corporations; even non-profit organizations have to manage costs efficiently, pay their employees, make investments, and still turn over enough profit to stay afloat and continue to grow as a company. My guess is the people in charge of all that at my friend’s environmental agency probably know as much if not more about business than they do about the environment. Is it so impossible to be an intelligent businessperson and compassionately support a great cause at the same time?

The desire to successfully earn money should not be viewed as some kind of criminal act. The productivity that results from such a large volume of Americans who are willing to work hard to better themselves is what makes our economy newsworthy enough to be tracked and reported in newspapers across the globe. The volume of self-made wealth in America today is phenomenal; 80% of America’s millionaires — defined as persons with a net wealth (not net income) of a million dollars or more — are hard-working, courageous, educated, self-made first-generation millionaires, not lucky, old-money inheritors as is commonly assumed. This trend of self-made wealth is crucial to and encouraging of continuing increases in productivity, the single most important factor in economic growth. A pertinent detail is that these self-made millionaires are also self-disciplined spenders; they invest between 15 and 20 percent of their annual household realized income (the sum of the household members’ actual wage earnings and net gains from investment), and save another 15 percent of their earned income (excluding income from investments, etc.). On the other hand, America’s net national savings rate is barely more than zero — in 2003 it was only 0.7 percent, a drastic decrease from the 5 percent net rate of the 1990s and the 11 percent net rate of the 1960s.

The fear of saving is a remnant of Keynesian distaste for thrift and the perceived need to “keep the economy moving” but a drastically low savings rate is detrimental to both the national economy as a whole and to Americans as individuals, because it means the government is relying almost entirely on foreign savers while individuals are relying almost entirely on the government. In the past, it was easy to write off this concern because the American dollar is the world’s reserve currency, but now that the euro has gained a third in strength against the dollar and is emerging as a viable alternative, it’s imprudent to rely so heavily on foreign resources. On the individual level, the rising costs and concerns of Social Security make it just as imprudent to rely entirely on the government rather saving now to provide for the future. In fact, it shouldn’t stop with retirement — the more Americans who are financially independent by saving for their own educations, job training, and healthcare, the smaller the tax burden for everyone will be.

Personal and government saving and investing promote economic growth and job formation by creating a larger resource pool for the government and businesses to pull from when developing new technologies, forming new capital, and providing job training and education to the American people. The economy will not simply stop moving if healthy savings rates are attained. Americans are not all the same age and at the same points in their lives; while some are saving, others are cashing in, and they’re cashing in on more than would have been possible without the financial securities provided by saving and investment. Economic growth goes on.

The same voice that cries out for a higher minimum wage, a lower unemployment rate, and expanded social programs also screams to repeal Bush’s tax cuts, but the plain reality is that we can’t have our cake and eat it too. If the standard of living is to grow, the economy must be encouraged to grow, too, and the best way to do that is through tax cuts that mobilize the effects of supply and demand to limit unnecessary government spending and put more money in the pockets of consumers. One of our economic growth rate’s greatest impediments is the astronomical corporate tax rate: 35 percent! If you include state taxes in that figure, the tax rate rises to 40 percent. That’s higher than the corporate tax rates that socialist welfare states like France, Germany, and Sweden impose on their companies. Only Japan has a higher corporate tax rate, meaning that in terms of international competition, American-based companies face serious disadvantages that prevent them from being able to compete on a global scale.

**Point-Counterpoint: Tax Cuts**

**Taxing Our Fears**

**Republican Commentary**

by Liz Egan

Many Americans are afraid of tax cuts. Those who oppose President Bush’s tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 do so for many reasons, but the loudest among them is that they don’t think it’s fair for “the rich” to get a break while the middle and lower classes struggle to get by. It’s pretty clear that this issue is not about what is “fair” — now, a flat tax rate seems like it would be really fair, not to mention efficient — but it’s more about fear. People are afraid of “the rich” and feel entrapped by their “evil” corporations that are piloted by those they don’t know and can’t see, and therefore use aggressive taxation as a sort of counter-attack aimed at alleviating these perceived threats. The media coverage of the Enron and WorldCom scandals, the alleged Microsoft monopoly, and other tales of corporate scandal indulge these fears of an uncaring wealthy population and a demonic corporate system. But like the media coverage of plane crashes, these scandals were only newsworthy because free enterprise system failures are in fact uncommon, while every day’s success stories are abundant enough to go unmentioned.

It’s the result of a lack of understanding about how these top-bracket tax payers get to be so rich in the first place that people are afraid of them; most people don’t recognize or appreciate the kind of dedication, hard work, education, risk, and personal sacrifice it takes to be lucky enough to pay over a third of your income in taxes. Out of our fear comes this general perception that rich people are inherently bad people, that they are all pork-bellied, scheming cheaters and oppressive legacy heirs whose main goal in life is to deceive, manipulate, and steal from the “poor.” The defensive reaction is to crack the tax whip hard enough to keep those rich people in line, because that’ll teach them a lesson. Sure, it’ll teach a lesson, but that lesson will be to give up on ideas of innovation and investment, because whatever achievements that result from them will be unrewarded. Placing profit-driven businesses in the role of sinister bad guy is the result of another gross misunderstanding.

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Personal and government saving and investing promote economic growth and job formation by creating a larger resource pool for the government and businesses to pull from when developing new technologies, forming new capital, and providing job training and education to the American people. The economy will not simply stop moving if healthy savings rates are attained. Americans are not all the same age and at the same points in their lives; while some are saving, others are cashing in, and they’re cashing in on more than would have been possible without the financial securities provided by saving and investment. Economic growth goes on.

Not only is vast taxation unfair, but it hides a larger, more serious issue: Federal spending is out of control.

The same voice that cries out for a higher minimum wage, a lower unemployment rate, and expanded social programs also screams to repeal Bush’s tax cuts, but the plain reality is that we can’t have our cake and eat it too. If the standard of living is to grow, the economy must be encouraged to grow, too, and the best way to do that is through tax cuts that mobilize the effects of supply and demand to limit unnecessary government spending and put more money in the pockets of consumers. One of our economic growth rate’s greatest impediments is the astronomical corporate tax rate: 35 percent! If you include state taxes in that figure, the tax rate rises to 40 percent. That’s higher than the corporate tax rates that socialist welfare states like France, Germany, and Sweden impose on their companies. Only Japan has a higher corporate tax rate, meaning that in terms of international competition, American-based companies face serious disadvantages that prevent them from being able to compete on a global scale.

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Not only is vast taxation unfair, but it hides a larger, more serious issue: Federal spending is out of control. Supporters of tax increases are afraid of what will happen when tax revenues decrease as a result of tax cuts, but those fears can be easily alleviated not by increasing taxes, but by decreasing federal spending. The government should be forced to prioritize and allocate funds to programs that provide the impoverished with food, shelter, education, and healthcare on a national level. Spending should be cut from programs that are traditionally served by state governments, such as highway repair and community development, and much of the federal/state overlap in education should be eliminated. This is not to say education spending should be cut – rather, the majority of the responsibility should be handed off to state governments, for it is simply impossible for a government that serves almost 300 million people to be as intimately familiar with the needs of local communities as that state’s government. Equally important is for the government to stop funding special interest groups and private organizations, such as farmers’ subsidies and loan guarantees for bankrupt firms. Corporate welfare, such as 2002’s $35 billion farm welfare expenditure, does not and was never intended to fall under the government’s umbrella; state governments and the market system perform these functions with significantly higher degrees of efficiency.

The Cato Institute reports that over 300 billion federal dollars are put toward programs that could be privatized, transferred to the states, or terminated; these programs that could be privatized, 300 billion farm welfare expenditure, does not and was never intended to fall under the government’s umbrella; state governments and the market system perform these functions with significantly higher degrees of efficiency. The Cato Institute reports that over 300 billion federal dollars are put toward programs that could be privatized, transferred to the states, or terminated; these programs that could be privatized, 300 billion farm welfare expenditure, does not and was never intended to fall under the government’s umbrella; state governments and the market system perform these functions with significantly higher degrees of efficiency. The Cato Institute reports that over 300 billion federal dollars are put toward programs that could be privatized, transferred to the states, or terminated; these programs that could be privatized, 300 billion farm welfare expenditure, does not and was never intended to fall under the government’s umbrella; state governments and the market system perform these functions with significantly higher degrees of efficiency.

The CBO’s recently released federal budget projections for this year clearly indicate that federal spending, and not sufficient tax revenues, is the primary cause of the nation’s budget deficits. In further defense of Bush’s tax cuts, the CBO is expecting that federal tax revenues in 2005 will increase by 8.4 percent – that’s $117 billion more than was generated last year. Limited government spending would alleviate much of the tax burden and free up tax revenues that could instead support legitimate healthcare and education programs.

Bush’s tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 need to be made permanent. Since they were passed, the unemployment rate has been steadily declining, the economy has been steadily growing, and by the third quarter of 2003 the GDP had surpassed the highest increase America has seen in the past 20 years. The next quarter’s GDP report was more of the same. In other words, the largest tax cuts since Reagan’s first term also resulted in the largest economic growth since Reagan’s first term. Things have been looking up for businesses, too; investment and expansion turned around a three-quarter-straight decline and began to increase steadily, thanks to the lower cost of capital provided by 2003’s tax relief. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office recently reported that it’s going to be the decrease in marginal tax rates that will ensure our economy’s potential for growth and efficiency. Lower tax rates keep more people in the labor force, encourage investment, and reward initiative and achievement, all of which are crucial to economic growth.

Job creation is a critical aspect of economic growth, and the rich are the catalysts of job creation. The acceptance of this fact and its ramifications resulted in the repeal of the luxury tax, which employed the logic that wealthy people are harmed less by high taxation, and therefore large revenues could be generated by taxing things like yachts. While it is arguable that the rich are not significantly harmed by high taxation, their spending decisions are significantly impacted by it. People who were wealthy enough to buy yachts were also wealthy enough to buy yachts in Europe, causing domestic yacht sales to slump and resulting in the job losses of yacht manufacturers and their employees. This attempt to extract unfair amounts of revenue from the rich only served to harm the working class.

The argument that tax rate hikes for the poor affect their lifestyles more drastically than tax rate hikes for the rich has fallacies that run parallel to the luxury tax. While it is arguable that tax cuts for the poor would enable them to better support themselves and tax cuts for the rich would enable them to better entertain themselves, it is equally arguable that a wealthy man’s vacation is a working man’s paycheck. If we tax the upper class enough to prevent them from taking cruises, dining in expensive restaurants, buying art, or patronizing any kind of non-essential activity, it would cause the economy to slow down or stagnate, because suddenly thousands of cruise ship employees, waitresses, artists, and other service providers or luxury manufacturers are out of business, causing them a harm that is far more severe than the supposed unfairness of Bush’s tax cuts.

We are inspired by the top achievers in sports, academics, research, and the performing arts. We reward them monetarily for their hard work, talent, sacrifice and dedication, but we also reward them with our respect. Why would we not also be inspired by those who are financially successful? They have worked just as hard, and should not be punished by unfair taxation for their achievements. It is recognized that successes in athletics, the arts, and academia must be earned, but many Americans seem to feel this entitlement to fiscal assistance that they shouldn’t have to earn. Tax cuts for the rich may seem excessively large, but that’s because the rich are carrying the majority of the tax burden in the first place. Tax cuts for the rich may mean a savings of a few thousand dollars while tax cuts for the poor mean only a savings of few hundred dollars, but that is simply because it is not feasible to refund $10,000 to a group that pays only pays $5,000 in taxes to begin with.

So-called “rich” people are not the bad guys here; they’re the ones in the best position to help those in need. They’re the ones footing the welfare bill. They’re the ones providing the investment capital for small businesses. They’re the ones subsidizing charities and sponsoring little league baseball teams. They’re families with two income-earners, lottery winners, and people who just happened to have a good year in the stock market and may never be in the upper tax brackets again. They’re the celebrities who pulled together millions of dollars for the tsunami relief. But they’ve all worked hard to get to where they are today. The Bush tax cuts aren’t about favoring the rich or oppressing the poor. Instead, they’re about embracing our fears of the unknown by trying to improve our own human capital and rise up, rather than taxing our fears by pulling down those above us as some kind of punishment for daring to achieve the American dream.
Point-Counterpoint: Tax Cuts
Disaster Around the Corner?

The United States is currently in the middle of a less-than-stellar post 9-11 economic recovery and will face large deficits for the foreseeable future. Job growth is sluggish and several large industries, like airlines, may produce job losses. The rapidly and somewhat inexplicably booming housing market could burst at any moment, with detrimental economic effects. Meanwhile, government agencies across the board are cutting services. Education and healthcare are being cut, as well as veteran’s benefits and domestic security spending. Also, we have devoted billions of dollars to an indefinite presence in Iraq. These are only some of the reasons why it would be imprudent to cut taxes. While tax cuts of any kind are unwise, tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans are downright indefensible.

Tax cuts are not as complicated as they may seem. Reaganomics claims that government revenues can go up with tax cuts. Realists know that government revenues go down. When revenues go down, spending goes down, deficits go up.

The fallacy in the Reaganomics argument is that it is truly “voodoo economics.” Reagan claimed his tax cuts would miraculously raise revenues. They did not. Bush claimed his 2001 tax cuts would raise revenues. They did not. In fact, tax revenues are now lower as a percentage of GDP than they have been in 50 years.

When the Federal Government has lower revenues, it gives less money to states to fund Federal mandates. States are required to find a way to provide Medicare, welfare, education, etc. When states get less money from the Federal Government, they must cut those services, raise fees for government services, or raise taxes. Furthermore, localities often need to raise property taxes to fund their own Federal mandates. In this way, the actual cut in total tax burden is smaller than the size of the Federal tax cut.

Lowering taxes means that the government must reduce spending and/or increase deficits. During his first term, Bush made big cuts in the Federal budget, including but certainly not limited to cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, public education, public housing, CHIP (which provides poor children with healthcare), Head Start (which provides poor children with early education as well as regular meals), and Pell grants (which provide poor families a means to send their children to college.

The cuts during Bush’s first term do not reveal the full effects of the tax cuts. According to Bush administration memos, the 2006 budget will likely include a 3% cut in domestic security spending by the Department of Homeland Security, a 2.4% cut for the Department of Education, a 3.4% cut in the Department for Veterans Affairs, a 2.6% cut in the budget for the Environmental Protection Agency, a 2.1% cut for the National Institutes for Health, and a 1.9% decrease in the budget for the Department of the Interior. Furthermore, there is wide speculation among Washington insiders that Bush’s 2006 budget proposal will include substantial cuts to both Medicaid and Medicare. The tax cuts of the past four years have forced and will continue to force Federal, state, and local government to cut back on government services, including education and healthcare.

The tax cuts have also increased the Federal deficit and the national debt. Economists know that deficits “crowd out” private borrowers. Though short-term deficits may not have detrimental effects, long-term ones can greatly reduce the supply of credit in the global credit market, thereby raising the cost of credit, i.e. raising interest rates. Furthermore, increasing the deficit increases the national debt, which increases the amount of interest the U.S. must pay each year to service that debt. Thus, reducing revenues with smaller reductions in spending will require greater deficits, which in turn requires increases in spending on interest. According to the CBO, the Bush tax cuts will increase the amount that the Federal Government spends on debt service between 2005 and 2014 by over $1.1 trillion, in addition to the direct cost of the cuts of $2.8 trillion.

This deficit-debt downward spiral destroys economies. Argentina’s collapse was in part due to the debt that became impossible to service, forcing the government to default on its loans and thereby destroying its credit. Though unlikely that the U.S. will succumb to a similar scenario, a large national debt could cause very serious problems if people become less and less eager to loan money to the Federal Government. To quote a study published by former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and economists Allen Sinai and Peter Orszag, the high deficits could lead to “financial and fiscal disarray” because of a “fundamental shift in market expectations and a related loss of confidence at home and abroad.”

If tax cuts reduce revenues, force reductions in spending, and increase deficits, how can anyone propose that there should be more tax cuts? Proponents of tax cuts have several arguments, all of which are less than wholly true when analyzed.

The main argument is that tax cuts will boost the economy. Tax cuts do in some ways stimulate the economy, but do not create the degree of stimulus that proponents claim. The theory is that people will use their tax cut in the consumer marketplace, thereby increasing economic activity and creating jobs. However, supporters fail to acknowledge that if there were no tax cuts, those revenues would be spent on other programs that stimulate economic growth. Perhaps that money would have paid for an extra inch of armor on a Humvee in Iraq, thereby saving the lives of several soldiers or the government spent $100, that money would all be put into the economy immediately. Spending is more effective at stimulating the economy in the short run than tax cuts.

This argument is further borne out by the statistics. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the actual number of jobs created nine months after the 2003 tax cuts was only 13% of the amount the Bush Administration projected. The Administration’s own publication, the Economic Report of the President for 2004, states, “The performance of employment in this recovery has lagged that in the typical recovery and even that in the ‘jobless recovery’ of 1990-1991.” The CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation both found that the Bush tax cuts would have negligible effect on economic growth, and those effects could be either positive or negative.

Even if tax cuts’ negative effects counteract the stimulative effects of “putting money back into the economy,” as Republicans like to term it, the Bush tax cuts are nonetheless poorly constructed. First of all, Bush’s cuts are heavily skewed to the wealthiest Americans. Wealthy Americans spend less and save more; this means that the short-term stimulus caused by giving money to wealthy Americans is less than the effect of giving the same amount of money to middle class or poor Americans. Wealthy Americans are much more likely to invest in the stock market or put their money in a retirement account, which has a positive effect on the economy in the long term, but...
Democrat on taxes, cont.

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it can actually hurt the economy in the short term, given that money is not being spent.

The Bush tax cuts are not short term tax cuts. Less than 6% of the President's 2003 tax cut, which was billed as a stimulus package, took effect in 2003. Less than 20% of the total tax cut was implemented by October of 2004. If the tax cut was supposed to stimulate a sputtering economy, why was it spread out over ten years? Furthermore, if the tax cut was supposed to be a stimulus, why is the Administration proposing to make the cuts permanent?

Money from taxes is invested in the NIH and the NSF to fund scientific research that creates new technologies and new products that benefit business. Much of this research is a public good that private enterprise will not sufficiently supply. No company would have gone into space; the short run returns were too low. However, the space race spurred huge advances in technologies that eventually led to practical computers and the dawn of the information age. Government money also goes into investing in human capital. More money for Pell grants means more college students and well-educated workers. People with better primary education are more productive when they enter the workforce. Head Start allow kids to position themselves to do well in school, as well as giving them a reliable source of food. The list goes on and on. Government spending is a long-term investment in our economy. Since tax cuts reduce spending, they do not create new investment as much as they shift investment from the public sector to the private sector.

The rich pay the most taxes because they're the ones who can pay. Reducing a poor person's income by 5% could mean the difference between buying a Lexus or a Toyota, buying a summer home or not, going to the Caribbean or not. The harm to the rich is not nearly as grave as the harm caused to the poor. Spending reductions that tax cuts necessitate predominantly affect the poor, as they are the ones who benefit from such programs as CHIP, welfare, Medicaid, and Head Start. By giving tax cuts to the rich, you are not only helping the rich without helping the poor, but you are in fact hurting the poor as you help the rich. Taxing wealthy Americans yields more revenues from the same number of people than does taxing the poor or middle class.

Republicans should not be proposing new tax cuts without proposing some combination of spending cuts and deficit increases, which are both destructive, to the point of canceling out any benefit of the tax cuts. Furthermore, any tax cut that is weighted towards the wealthiest Americans gains strikingly little benefit for the amount of harm it causes to Americans and their economy.
My mother was white, my father was Mexican. My father wasn’t around and my mother was a pretty abusive woman. She abandoned me in Los Angeles when I was eight. At which point I lived in the street, foster homes, psych wards, juvenile halls – I did that until about ten years ago, and then I came to New York. Then we found that my mom and dad weren’t actually my mom and dad…I was actually adopted. It was a mess. So there’s not really much of a family to speak of. But it seems like a lot of trannies are like that, one way or the other. The trans community is that.

I never went to school. I attempted once or twice, through the homes, but it never took. I admire any trans person that has the courage and the strength to go to school, because I couldn’t. I can’t imagine how it’d be if I tried to get an education. I get enough flak just walking down the street. Can you imagine me with a whole room full of people, trying to get an education? Even if I get an education – who cares? What’s it going to get me? It doesn’t matter if you’re a college graduate. Who is going to hire you?

I’ve had problems getting apartments. They’re okay when they talk to you on the phone, see your name on paper. Show up in person, you’re fine if they’re stupid and they don’t realize what you are. I’ve had them tell me, no, we don’t like having people like you because of the drugs and the prostitution – even though you may not be a prostitute, they assume you are. It’s bolder now. They used to say ‘people like you’ and now they’ll say ‘ooook – no drag queens’. I’m like, we’re not all drag queens, dear. But whatever. I’ve been denied access to several government facilities because of that. That’s always the problem for us – not finding housing. The problem is, they don’t want to accept us.

The medical facilities too. I’ve had trouble with St. Vincent’s Hospital. I was denied emergency care there one time, actually more than once. They sent me away. At the time I was a working girl and I was on drugs. I took too much, and I almost OD’ed. And the cops who saw me took me to St. Vincent’s, and the doctors told me no, they would not deal with me, that I shouldn’t have taken the drugs and since I was a prostitute they should said, you are still a man. It was stupid. My choice is pee in a jug, or get beat up. I chose to pee in a jug. That happens a lot to us. In the shelter system, government programs, apartments – it all comes down to we don’t fit anywhere. So most people think you’re a man. They don’t stop to realize that when you put us in a men’s shower, we are not going to fit in. If you’re gay, that’s okay – you still have the same bodily anatomy. But if a someone’s showering and sees me where the bottom half is a man, the top half is a woman how can you expect someone who’s not expecting that to get used to it? That’s as disrespectful to men as it is to me. But yet we’re thrown into that situation where we have to choose. Don’t bathe, don’t use the bathroom? Risk your life.

This is a population that cannot go to the men’s or the women’s side. We have to make a third. They’re not including us in anything. We have no rights. I can go to the men’s room and get beat up, or I can go to the women’s room and let’s face it, some women don’t want us in there, either. So where are we going to go? We can get arrested for urinating on the street. The center is one of the only places that has gender-free bathrooms. That’s what’s needed. Housing is the same way. If you’re a woman, sure, we’ll rent to you. But if you’re a man, sure, we’ll rent to you. Trans? Uh-uh. No, you’ll cause problems. That all comes down to, trannies are neither one, we’re not male, we’re not female. Until human rights law makes people pay attention, the government would rather not deal with it. They don’t have to rent to us – they can keep sweeping us away. If these rights are put in place, I can demand certain things. I can demand that you make a place for me. I can demand that shelters provide a section for me. Right now, there’s nothing law-wise that requires them to do it. If they do it, it’s just because they’re being nice. But there’s not that many people who are nice in New York, let’s face it.

At one point my t-cells went down to 40-something – that’s extremely low. It’s because I was living in the street, in trains, subways, alleys, trashcans, you name it. Living on the street, not eating right, sometimes not eating at all…lots of days there’d be rain. I could catch pneumonia and die. The winters were horrible. One time I almost lost a toe of frostbite. I had no socks. The abuse homeless people suffer is horrible – and being a homeless tranny, it’s even worse. Health wise, the street was killing me.

My choices were limited. I could go to shelters. Shelters is a bad name for them. They’re more like kennels. Maybe not even kennels. I’d be compelled to go to the men’s side. The shelter issue would come out there. When I was sleeping, people would want to cut my throat, beat me up. I had several attempts at people beating me up, some sexual assaults… I myself was raped in one of the shelters in New York.

The first time it happened, I was in the shower at one of the missions around here. I was showering. A guy got into the shower, started to masturbate first, and then he slowly but surely worked his way over to the point where I was against the wall. He had a razor – I don’t know how he got a razor. It was either put out, or get cut. So I put out. As a hooker, which I was at the time, I figured that giving up a piece of ass is a lot better than taking a chance on being cut. That’s happened many times now.

I had no place to live but on the street. Unfortunately, the only thing I could turn to was prostitution, and we all know where that leads you. It lead to even more abuse. But why would I go into a shelter and get raped and murdered? I’ll just go on a “date” and hope to get a hotel room.

The only people that have helped are Housing Works. They’re the ones responsible for me having the place I have now. You know, I try to get these things on my own – but it doesn’t work. When I go to meet the landlords and they realize what I am – no, they’re not having it. To them, you’re a tranny. That’s it. Until I had an advocate, I had nothing. They would pay me no mind. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t be standing here today. I’d still be homeless. Or dead.

Take your pick.  

For more information on Housing Works, New York’s largest AIDS service organization, visit their website at http://housingworks.org/
Several years before he stole many thousands of dollars from my parents, my uncle David Rose presented our family with a gift. It was a black Jaguar S-Type. The fact that the car was leased did little to diminish the stature of his gesture in my young eye. My parents were less sanguine about the prospect of owning a luxury car. Since my mother would drive only a Volvo, my father considered the car much too flashy, and I didn’t yet have a license, the vehicle sat unused in the driveway for a number of months.

By the time I could drive I had decided that I didn’t like the Jaguar, either. True, it had a lot of kick, but the handling was squelly, and I could never master the disc changer. Also, Jaguar was no longer manufactured in England.

When David was born my mother was already in high school, the Rose family having relocated from Los Angeles to Atherton. Most of the stories I have heard about David’s youth depict him as unruly and unprincipled. It is said that he fired M-80 firecrackers out of a slingshot at pigeons. He learned to drive a motorcycle in his early teens and severely injured himself in a crash around 1980. While he was in the hospital he developed viral pneumonia from a nearby patient and lost all hearing in his left ear. To this day, when he speaks to you he cocks his head like a stork angling for minnows. The posture could be unnerving, but I suppose some women found it endearing. David was always a success with women.

David, like both his siblings, attended the University of California, Berkeley. My mother says he was the brightest child in the family. He studied philosophy and mathematics. He considered briefly a career in teaching, though work had always struck him as unpalatable. One summer, when he had failed to get a job by July, my grandfather Arthur offered him a position at an Orange Julius of which he was the franchisee. David said he would take the job on the condition that he could “order people around.”

By the late 1980’s, David was living in Berkeley, largely supported by his parents, printing off business cards that listed him as the executive of corporations that did not actually exist. These cards were a big joke within the family. I still have one that bears the words: “David Rose, Signal Consulting: Principal”, along with a logo he must have spent weeks designing.

David came into possession of an apartment building near the Berkeley campus. He hit upon the idea of renting space to recent graduates who were involved in technology and had the money for rent. If he thought them promising, David would allow students to live for free, provided he got a piece of the company. Most of the renters’ projects founder. A couple of them didn’t. By the mid 1990’s, David, like a lot of people in the Bay Area, found himself suddenly rich.

Fortune cohered with David’s sensibilities. Though he claimed to believe in karma, David got rid of most of his money by spending it. He spent fast. He claimed that spending money generated karma that eventually brought money back to you. He was flying to Europe every few weeks to buy clothes and electronics. He lavished gifts on my sister and I. For my bar Mitzvah, when I all received from him was a shirt from Thomas Pink, London, I was profoundly disappointed. My father had been trying to disabuse me of this sort of materialism for years. I suppose that by this point David’s fortune was already in decline.

David was on the vanguard of the technology revolution that swept the Silicon Valley in the late 90’s. He used a cell phone with a holster, and had a Palm-pilot clipped to his belt. He was involved with a startup called “Proxy-net”. The aim of “Proxy-net” was to develop wireless Internet. He was sure it could be done; he just needed the capital. He convinced my parents and a number of other relatives to loan him money. Francis Fukuyama has argued in “Trust” that one of the main reasons minorities such as Jews and Japanese succeeded in the United States was because they were willing to pool financial resources.

David Rose made a lot of money, stole even more, and lost it all.

When my grandfather died the family started to fall apart in earnest. I can remember combing through the house the day before the estate sale, my sister and I eagerly opening drawers and pawing through closets that used to be strictly off limits. I found $48 in $2 bills that the bank refused to exchange for fungible denominations. My sister found a Technics phonograph than now sits in my room. We uncovered a tremendous cache of liquor in the pantry: thirty years of gifts accrued by a couple who did not drink more than the annual glass of Manishewitz. I poured bottle after bottle down the sink. I remember the good, feminine smell of Southern Comfort.

When the fortune from Proxy-net had not materialized by the following fall, I stopped asking. I did not think it odd that my parents no longer spoke of David over the dinner table. They had never talked about him much anyway, except to point out that my faults were becoming like his.

I do not recall exactly how I learned that Proxy-net was a scam. If my parents had been less literal-minded, they might have been able to detect a joke in the name. Then again, maybe not. They were out a lot of money, and they were pipped. But they never talked about what was going on with David in front of my sister and I. We gleaned what information we could from telephone conversations we chanced to overhear, and shared information. She found it all very funny. Freud says that laughter is a reaction predicated upon discomfort.

When I learned that David was suing my father, an attorney, over legal advice he’d given ten years before I felt a fleeting moment of anger. My father is someone who always plays fair. For the most part, though, my reaction consisted of a struggle to comprehend. I was much given to philosophizing in those days. There seemed something tragic and profound in the way members of a family could come to be turned against each other. There was also no small amount of irony in the fact that the majority of my father’s practice is estate litigation.

My parents struggled to rationalize David’s betrayal of them. My mother, not an M.D., speculated that David might by bipolar. My father called him a “schmuck”, which, for someone who actually speaks Yiddish, is a more pejorative term than for someone who does not. I was not sure whether I would see David again. According to my parents, he owed money to certain “creditors”. He had become a refugee, gone underground.

But it was only a matter of time until he resurfaced. One day in August, as I knocked croquet balls across the lawn, the phone rang. It was uncle David. We spoke haltingly for perhaps ten minutes. He seemed contrite and unsure of how to approach the conversation, as though I might attack him. We mostly talked about women. There were none in my life or in his. He gave me some forgettable, vaguely Buddhist advice about being in control of your emotions. Then he wanted to know if my sister was around. She was, but I knew she wouldn’t speak to him. She had been more influenced by my parents than I.

One night toward the end of summer I drove out to see David at his apartment in San Francisco. It was a surprisingly opulent place, given all the stories I’d been hearing about his indebtedness. Epicurus says not to overindulge in luxury or you will become acclimated to it. We stood on the back porch shivering in the wind while he pointed out various landmarks. His house was scrupulously clean, the refrigerator filled with health foods. There was no longer much for us to talk about, I realized. When I was younger I had built quite a hero out of him in my own imagination. I remembered the time he drove me up from Carmel, making the hundred-mile trip just over an hour, stopping for Chinese food along the way.

I steered the conversation in a philosophical direction and we spoke about the Kabala and numerology for a half hour. At some point during the talk I stopped listening to what he was saying and found myself just looking at him. He was a small figure in a black turtleneck, sitting there on a leather sofa in an empty house full of fax machines with lights that blinked on and off, on and off.
Musings by Charles Umeano

Falling in Love (Then becomes The Fall)

The Cemetery of Two Voices

One is dead.
Tripping into abandoned sepulchers,
Searching for my lost messiah
In insidious avenues that beguile the senses
With misleading ministrations.
Black looks too lovely for the dead to adorn, I think.
Those gaunt, pale faces look even more ghastly
When decked like Princes;
Such psychology disturbs me
(Too easily perceived).

Unwanted, unwarranted tears fall not at all like raindrops:
They do not nourish,
They do not wash away my failures, my sins unto Nothing,
They do not do, never did, anymore.

Vital moments flee terrestrial audience;
Truth is dead.

Breathe of Clay,
God of Marble,
Phallus of Steel,
Here for all to rejoice and bemoan!

Kitsch Rebirth

Drop me, baby.
Send diaphanous poison searching
through my veins.
True panacea, I wish to taste your kiss,

Exhaling and Inhaling,
Feel your shot bite, your heavy touch, your milk-soft skin,
Somnolent you, anything will do.

Shake me, darling.
With your blood red lips, groove me:
I still say you can’t look someone in the eye and lie.
“But who’s lookin’?”
And I am left defenseless...

Resignation

Gateway to illusory, transient Paradise,
Point out my approaching Armageddon,
Should you be so kind, and
I will still jump.

Words fall like arrows falling against the sea.
No, just spread those diseased legs
(Alpha and omega of chaos)
And let me have my fill.

I would catch those struggling, squirming lips of yours
And gag your infernal bark
Forever. I swear you would advance just
the same, unscathed.

Truth told, I quiver to think that time will
bid me adieu of you.
Be merciful, silence me forever…

Airplane

What a wonder it is to take flight.
To soar past tellurian grasps deep into the unknown.
Akin to a Labrador, we abandon ourselves
to another sense,
Taxing earthly leaches,
And arrive, landed, at our final destination
Unable to tell best friends of what we have seen:
Like the familiar sea, yet a sea with stars!
We are lost in a dream,
Regardless of the wakening glare of our distant neighbor:
Hot, yellow, bright, and now, so near!

Unadorned with flight,
We trust that our rapture, formed like Whitman’s,
Does not the way of our forefather’s descent:
That we should not, and by heaven, will
not, find our captain asleep
Behind the wheel, cold to our fears, and
dead as history to us.

We are at a standstill: the reality of our unreality
Hovers so evidently, so assuredly, on
hope:
We place all our eggs in one basket:

futures unacquainted and bitterly undone.

Yet we saw the wheel
Turning throughout; hastening us to our final destination.
And we measured ourselves against it:
At first it stood still, frozen in sensuous anticipation, and
Then it turned in exuberant, unceasing insanity.
In fortunes yet exhumed, we take wondrous, uncertain flight.
NOW Petition on Sexual Harassment Policy

This statement from the University of Chicago chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) is currently endorsed by seventeen student organizations. We have met with Susan Art, Bill Michel, and Martina Munsters to discuss this letter and are currently in meetings with other administrators about the policies in place for sexual misconduct. It is crucial that students be aware of the problems with the current policy on sexual harassment and the necessity for change because the University’s response affects every member of the community. —Lizzie Krontiris and Michelle Rengarajan

To Members of the University of Chicago Community:

We write as a group of students and affiliates of the University of Chicago.

We write because we are concerned with the manner in which the University of Chicago deals with cases of sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. The sexual harassment policy has the potential to affect anyone affiliated with the university, and we feel that under the current policy, all of said people are unsafe.

As a result, we write enumerating a series of problems we see with this policy, the reasons we feel such aspects are problematic, and suggestions for remedy. Specifically, the problems we see are as follows:

• The current University policy lacks explicit, independent definitions of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and assault. Without these, it is unclear how to classify a sexual violation, and as a result it is unclear what a survivor’s options are through the university. A lack of clarity prevents justice and recovery. The solution, however, is simple: the policy should provide explicit definitions of sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexual assault, as are provided by the Illinois State Constitution. These should be included in both the policy and in resources for survivors.

• Sexual abuse and assault should not be considered “direct forms of sexual harassment,” as currently stated in the University policy, but as independent crimes, as they are at other universities and in the legal realm. Sexual assault and abuse are trivialized when they are considered sexual harassment. The differences among the three crimes should be made clear, and options for survivors of each should be provided.

• The policy should explicitly state that sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are not gender-specific crimes.

• Acquaintance rape is one of the most common forms of sexual assault on college campuses and should be specifically described.

• The current University sexual harassment policy places a strong emphasis on resolving complaints informally. Sexual abuse, assault and harassment are crimes of a serious nature and warrant formal options for resolution, without an emphasis on informality. These formal options should be clearly described in the policies to be created so that they are easily accessible to the public.

• The current University sexual harassment policy lacks explicit pathways a survivor may take, and lacks explicitly outlined rights of survivors and the accused. This disables survivors from receiving both help and justice, and disables the accused from knowing their rights. We feel that revisions to the policy should enumerate all possible options for action in detail, including:
  o How to get medical attention
  o Contact information for the Deans on Call
  o Contact information for RSVP, the Rape Victim Advocates, and other campus resources
  o Contact information for more long-term resources, such as counseling
  o A clause informing survivors and the accused that taking action within the University does not preclude taking action with the police.
  o Contact information for legal resources, including information and direction concerning how to file a report with the police.
  o Provisions for separating survivors and the accused in dorms, classes, and employment.
  o Provisions for a formal hearing, elaborated upon below.

• Currently the formal method for resolving complaints within the University system is a formal hearing before the Disciplinary Committee. While this is a good option for formal resolution, the structure of the hearing should be made more explicit and accessible, so that affiliates with the University know what to expect. Specifically, we propose the following changes to the policy as concerns the Disciplinary Committee when addressing cases of sexual violation:
  o The policy should describe in detail the structure of the Disciplinary Committee and the structure of the hearing.
  o In such cases, the Disciplinary Committee should only include people who have training in dealing with cases of sexual violation.
  o Confidentiality of hearings should be explicitly stated in the policy.
  o The survivor and the accused should have the right to a hearing without any student present, if they fear a loss of confidentiality, or for any other reason.
  o The survivor and the accused should have the right to dismiss any person from being a juror of the hearing.
  o There should be options to appeal the decision of whether the Disciplinary Committee will be called for a specific case.

• Likewise, the potential consequences of the Disciplinary Committee hearing should be made more explicit and accessible. Specifically, we propose the following changes:
  o The following rights of the survivor and the accused on trial should be made explicit: how to present evidence for the case, how and whether witnesses or statements from witnesses may be incorporated into the case, and who, if anyone may be present at the hearing other than the survivor, the accused, and members of the Disciplinary Committee. This last provision should include possible representation of the survivor or accused by a faculty member.
  o The policy should explicitly state that the survivor cannot be punished if the accused is not convicted at the hearing.
  o Possible repercussions, including expulsion, suspension, probation, and limits on registration of the accused should be made explicit for each individual offense.

• The University policy should incorporate a clause requiring sensitivity training on sexual harassment, abuse, and assault for positions of authority, including, but not limited to, housing staff (Resident Heads, Assistant Resident Heads, Resident Masters, etc.), department heads, faculty and teaching assistants. Furthermore, Resident Heads, Resident Masters, and Assistant Resident Heads should receive first-response training.

• The policy should be made more accessible. Specifically, the following changes should be made:
  o Links to the policy and resources should be included in the “Top 40” student links on the http://students.uchicago.edu/ website.
  o We hope that this statement has clearly enumerated the problems we see with the policy and the resolutions we propose. We hope to initiate communication between university policy makers and those whom their policies affect, and to work together toward a safer campus environment.

Want to learn more or have your group endorse this statement?
Contact Michelle at rengaraj@uchicago.edu or visit http://socialjustice.uchicago.edu and click on the “Campaign Features” link.