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The Iowa Caucus Community

by Hollie Russon-Gilman

Spending Winter vacation in Iowa was a once in a lifetime experience. I was surrounded by a bunch of intense young people who, unlike my friends and family, understood why working 16 hours a day, trekking through snow to knock on doors and sleeping on couches, is the only way to spend a vacation. However, it was their ambivalent relationship to the caucus. On the one hand Iowans love having many of the most important political and Hollywood stars in their back yards. As a guest in the Hawkeye State I spent New Year’s with Senator Obama, got to watch Kevin Bacon singing with John Edwards, and hosted events for Madeline Albright at the “Gigglin’ Goat” where I had to literally beg people to come. When Albright spoke at our school, she packed I-house. But this is Iowa. They must vocalize their opinions and persuade fellow voters face-to-face, sitting in one room. As Hannah Arendt notes, “Aristotle called the bios politikos, namely action (praxis) and speech (lexis) out of which rises the realm of human affairs from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded” (Arendt, Human Condition, 25).

The caucus is action par excellence. Each recreates a mini polis — people surrounded by their equals. People must even convince others to support another candidate. In the first round the people vote for whichever candidate has earned their support. You need 15% of the supporters in the room to support a candidate in order for a candidate to be “viable”. Following elimination of candidates who prove unviable, realignment takes place. Realignment involves people literally going around to their friends, family, and neighbors and convincing them to support a certain candidate. At my precinct Scarlett Johanson campaigned on behalf of Obama – apparently she’s more persuasive than I.

Iowans hate “foreigners” (Americans really are more united around state, rather than national identity) dictating who they should vote for. As I met an increasing number of “undecided” caucus goers I realized that people cling tenaciously to their voting power until the end. Some Iowans will call themselves “undecided” in order to be wooed and maintain agency until the second before the caucus is over.

The caucus itself is a fascinating experience where people must come together in local communities, speak before their peers and emote. People cannot hide behind their ballot boxes. My favorite activities involved truly interacting with members of the community: washing dishes at a Welfare clinic after I taught them how to caucus, singing Christmas carols at nursing homes, spending the holidays with the brilliant professors of Iowa State University. I loved going door to door, stopping for fudge and hot chocolate as our volunteers offered more socks for my cold feet and double fried hash browns for my hungry stomach. I had fun organizing themed volunteer nights such as “husbands for Hillary” or drinking with AFSCME, one of the unions that support Hillary.

The caucus is a very effective tool for socialization. I will never forget the relationships I formed with the incredibly warm, kind people of Iowa. It fills the much needed gap for social interaction that plagues America. As Robert Putnam notes in Bowling Alone, more Americans than ever are bowling – but the number of people in bowling leagues has dropped. People are bowling alone.

It is impossible to caucus alone, and as a student in political science, I understand why the core is so important – because it unites us. Iowans, and all Americans, need a caucus to unite us. That said, the caucus is not a legitimate way to elect the next President of the United States of America. The process is entirely de-regulated; you can register on the night of the caucus without proof of residency, and the rules are subject to the leaders of the caucus and can be fraught with inconsistencies – especially as some people show blatant favoritism to a certain candidate.

Americans need more of the unique social setting caucuses provide, but we also need political structures we can trust. The caucus illuminates many of the flaws of our nation – but how they have truly manifested in the social realm of American life. Without a strong private or social life how are Americans expected to have a valid political existence?
**Who's Choosing Our Candidate?**

Delegates, Superdelegates, and the Next Democratic Presidential Candidate

by Sam Boyd

Brokered conventions (where no candidate arrives with a majority of the delegates) are predicted every four years, and every four years they don’t actually happen. However, we do know that this election will see a closer result than any since 1980 or even 1968. We might not even know who will win until the convention gets underway. A fight over the Michigan and Florida delegations could decide the election. Or, unelected superdelegates could throw the nomination to a candidate who comes in second in pledged delegates. Even if the result is known at the start of the convention, it might not be determined until June or July.

Despite the importance of the convention, the actual rules that cover delegate selection and behavior are obscure even to seasoned political watchers. While some of the rules are too complicated to get into even here (there are, for instance, actually three different ways pledged delegates are selected), what follows is a brief overview of the Democratic convention process: where the delegates come from, how they will be assigned, and what the process will look like from now until August.

On Aug. 25, 4,049 delegates from 48 states (more on the missing two later), the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and “Democrats abroad,” will assemble at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Denver, Colorado, to pick the next Democratic presidential nominee. Of these, 3,253 (80 percent) will be pledged to a particular candidate and selected through primaries and caucuses while 796 (20 percent) will be unpledged party leaders known as “superdelegates.” Delegates will vote, in more than one ballot if necessary, until one candidate receives at least half (2,025) of the total and becomes the nominee.

**Pledged Delegates**

Eighty percent of the total delegates, known as pledged delegates, are elected to represent a particular presidential candidate through caucuses and primaries in each state. According to Democratic Party rules, all states, whether they hold primaries or caucuses, must award pledged delegates proportionally to candidates who receive more than 15 percent of the vote. The easiest way to understand this is to consider a state primary where Kucinich gets 10 percent of the vote, Edwards gets 20 percent, Obama gets 30 percent, and Clinton gets 40 percent. Under this scenario, Clinton, Obama, and Edwards get 40 percent, 30 percent, and 20 percent of the delegates awarded by the state while the remaining 10 percent are divided evenly among the three candidates. In addition, most states allocate a portion of their delegates proportionally by congressional district—complicating the picture further.

This selection system has the odd consequence of disproportionately rewarding candidates who receive barely more than 15 percent of the vote, especially if a large fraction of the vote goes to candidates who do not meet the viability threshold of 15 percent since they get the same share of those votes as the top vote-getter.

To make things even more complicated, while states must assign delegates proportionally, they are free to decide whether or not voters must be registered Democrats to vote in the primary. Furthermore, it varies whether this decision is made by the party or the state, so one party may allow independents to vote in its primary while another does not. In California, for example, independents voted in the Feb. 5 Democratic primary but not the Republican one. *Congressional Quarterly* has a complete list of state rules online at <http://innovation.cq.com/primaries?sort=dem_presdate&tab=2>.

While the DNC rules state that “delegates elected to the national convention pledged to a presidential candidate shall in all good conscience reflect the sentiments of those who elected them,” there is no actual requirement that they vote for the candidate they are pledged to.

Note that the current numbers of pledged delegates do not include Michigan which, because it moved its primary before Feb. 5 without DNC permission, will most likely not have any delegates seated at the convention. Florida, has also been stripped of its delegates. However, both Florida and Michigan will send slates of delegates to Denver and a battle could erupt at the convention about whether or not they should be seated.

Former presidential candidate and New Mexico governor Bill Richardson is one of the precious unpledged superdelegates.

**Superdelegates**

While voters assign four-fifths of the delegates, the actual results could easily be decided by the remaining fifth — superdelegates. The first thing to know about superdelegates is that there’s nothing super about them. They get one vote at the Democratic National Convention just like pledged delegates.

So who are these mysterious capped candidate pickers? DNC members, all Democratic members of Congress, Democratic governors, and certain former party leaders. Essentially they represent both Washington insiders and the leadership of the state parties.

The Democrats created superdelegates after the 1980 election, in a Washington-based backlash against the three previous national conventions, which had consisted almost entirely of delegates selected in primaries and caucuses, and which had chosen George McGovern (once) and Jimmy Carter (twice) to be the party’s nominee. By adding members of Congress and the DNC into the mix, the Democratic powers-that-be hoped to provide more establishment input into the process—in the hope

*continued on page 10*
The immediate uproar over Hillary Clinton’s comparison between Martin Luther King Jr.’s public speech and Barack Obama’s rhetoric of hope provides the occasion to engage with King’s symbolic status in our nation’s politics today. The holiday, warmly and beautifully celebrated in the coldest month every year, allows an essential moment for national reflection, but certainly not organized protest.

The power of King as a national symbol of hope (and sometimes guilt) is undeniably important to achieving his dream. But the connotations of that symbol—of Civil Rights first, non-violent civil disobedience second, and the power of rhetoric third—are not in the spirit of his own philosophy. King’s late radicalism, which is not part of his cultural connotation, reflected his view that the Civil Rights Act was not enough, and that non-violence had much more radical potential, the strength of it lying partly in rhetoric.

Clinton remarked, while complimenting his rhetorical genius, that “Dr. King’s dream began to be realized when president Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 … it took a president to get it done.” The media attacked her statement’s implications on a number of levels, but most often heard was outrage at the idea that King was less instrumental to the passage of that act than Johnson. The thing is, as one of Clinton’s black supporters Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) observed, their implication that King could actually sign that bill into law is stupid. These comments nonetheless reflect an idea entrenched in Americans that laws and presidents are the major vehicle for social change. Clinton appeals to this notion of change all the time, which is why her comment did not seem strange to me. She wants to remind us that experience and political savvy are more important than powerful rhetoric. But King’s strategy and philosophy show his commitment to broader, more radical change.

No doubt the Civil Rights Act engendered much change, and President Johnson should be commended for signing it into law. But the passage of the bill also drew from powerful symbols—the martyred President Kennedy, who tentatively but publicly endorsed Civil Rights, and King’s “I Have a Dream” speech in front of hundreds of thousands in Washington.

At the time of his death, King was planning another march on Washington. The Poor People’s Campaign was his plan to gather a multi-racial army of poor people from around the country and non-violently occupy Washington until the pseudo-socialist Economic Bill of Rights was passed. He called this the second stage of the civil rights struggle.

The first phase had addressed segregation. Non-violence was used as a rhetorical strategy to force Americans to see blacks as people facing extreme injustice. Reversing the common image of blacks as violent brutes, people were attacked by dogs for non-violent demonstration—the movement attempted a rhetorical shift in the interactions of the country. King wanted people to view themselves as citizens, rather than members of a clan or family, and as humans who wanted to be just. This meant enacting change much larger than any that could be legislated.

But when he marched in Chicago against de facto racism in the housing market, King was met with greater violence than in the South, and from mobs rather than the police. America was not ready for the radical change that his rhetoric called for. The Civil Rights Act had been enacted, and no legal segregation existed in Chicago. Change beyond the law was his vision.

Unfortunately King’s status as a popular symbol deemphasizes this project in favor of a less radical one, equating his most important accomplishments with the passage of the Civil Rights Act as Clinton and the media did. More importantly, it reflects our nation’s ideas about how to effect change, which are bound up in the law even when some of the most important social projects can never be legislated. I think King’s legacy of rhetoric is slowly helping to accomplish some of the change, but his symbolic status as a traditional liberal does not. In celebrating his holiday, we should remember the power of his rhetoric in effecting extensive change, but keep in mind his broader radical project. Empty rhetoric that does not take this next step is not useful, but neither is insisting on law as King’s legacy instead of this rhetoric.
by Conor Gaffney

In November of 2005, a government-appointed commission recommended that the United States spend $50-125 million a year in order to reach the goal of sending one million American students to study abroad by 2016. The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship, a committee of congressmen, university presidents, educators, and CEOs of private study abroad programs, argued that national security and global economic competitiveness were reasons for aspiring to a 400% increase in the number of Americans studying abroad.

Today's study abroad programs, "the hottest new education market", according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, are unlike the smaller and less common research-oriented international education programs of the 1960s. Undergraduates today choose from a dizzying array of options: working, volunteering, or studying in every continent, even Antarctica. International experience has become a common element of the American undergraduate education, and a credential much desired by employers. Two schools, Goucher College and Soka University of America, have already instituted mandatory study-abroad requirements for undergraduates, while other schools, like Harvard and Duke, are currently debating whether or not to follow suit.

Studying abroad, however, is just a single facet of a much larger educational trend that repositions the idea of a liberal education in American political and social life. Recruiting foreign students, creating international research groups, designing a multilingual and multicultural campus at home, and sending students to study in foreign countries around the globe are all efforts made by America's colleges to master the profound, yet ill-understood effects of globalization. Part of the larger program of internationalization, adjustments in curricula, new initiatives, and the diminishing gap between campus and the market, reveal the reorientation of values in American education that has occurred in the past century.

Internationalization emerges as the successor to the trend of "diversification", a social and educational vision that has profoundly changed the terms of a liberal education. Diversification, popularized in 1978 by Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, at the time destroyed the façade of a meritocratic college admissions system and further enshrined the idea of an ethnically diverse campus as reflective of American egalitarianism. By ruling that race could be used as a criterion of positive discrimination in college admissions, making quota systems unconstitutional and affirmative action constitutional, Powell's opinion established the democratic vision of diversity as a centerpiece of American liberal education.

Louis Menand, a professor at Harvard University, notes that the consequences of diversification have reached far beyond the color of college campuses: "the changes are visible today in a new emphasis on multiculturalism (meaning exposure to specifically ethnic perspectives and traditions), and on values (an emphasis on the ethical implications of knowledge); in a renewed interest in service (manifested in the emergence of internship and off-campus social service programs) and in the idea of community; in what is called 'education for citizenship'". Diversification, in effect, reoriented the values of a liberal education, enthroning cross-cultural understanding as the basis of American citizenship and equating knowledge with a communal political viability.

Just as diversification changed the tenor of undergraduate education and, importantly, the focus of undergraduate admissions, so does internationalization appear to have implications for the idea of a liberal education and the position of college in American political and economic life. In 1985 less than 50,000 American students studied abroad, under half a percent of enrolled college students. Two decades later, the number had grown to 223,534, an increase of 150% (but still only 1.3% of all enrolled college students in the United States). The most dramatic growth occurred between 1995 and 2005. Over half of American students chose to study abroad in traditional destinations, like Europe and the United Kingdom. However, between 2004 and 2005, Argentina saw a 42.3% increase in the number of American study abroad students, while China was more popular by 38.2%. Aside from Greece which had a 32% increase, European destinations saw essentially the same number of Americans students studying there in 2005 as in 2004.

Along with this increase in demand comes an increase in supply. Study abroad programs have been traditionally a cottage industry of domestic and foreign universities, unaffiliated for-profit organizations, and part-time work for educators. The
expanding market has become more crowded and more competitive, but remains disorganized and nebulous in its aims and practices.

Colleges are beginning to demand standards of quality. In 2001 The Forum on Education Abroad was founded to create standards for international education programs. “We tend to think of study abroad as a silver bullet—that it’s going to make students more academically engaged, better citizens, and help our country in globalization,” Brian Whalen, the forum’s president told the Chronicle of Higher Education, “And in some ways, it’s very powerful. But we lack precision to our programs, let alone a way to measure what we’re accomplishing”.

Study abroad providers, operating in the poorly defined space opened by perceptions of globalization, have evolved an ethics-less practice. Study-abroad professionals say that more institutions are taking advantage of special pricing deals offered by third-party providers. The clearest attempt to check this undirected growth is a current investigation of the Attorney General of New York. The office of Andrew M. Cuomo is investigating the methods 15 colleges, including Harvard, Brown and Columbia, use to approve study abroad contracts with independent providers. The investigation stemmed from an article published in the New York Times last summer detailing how study abroad program providers offer colleges rebates, free travel, back-office services, marketing stipends, and other benefits. Reminiscent of the feeling the financial stress of obtaining overseas credentials. Students and their families are often left to cover airfare, lodging, and additional fees associated with studying abroad with little financial aid or grant money. The result is a further reinforcement of what some officials at Harvard call the “upstairs-downstairs syndrome”, where only the wealthy can afford highly valuable, but costly, extracurricular activities. C. Wright Mills said, “In the upper classes, it does not by itself mean much to have a degree from an Ivy League college”. In the era of internationalization, it is not simply the brightest students who will make up the competitive class of tomorrow’s workforce, but the ones whose experience best fits, and whose parents can afford, the paradigm of service and study abroad.

So what does this mean for the idea of the liberal education in the era of internationalization? On the one hand internationalization appears as the successor to diversification, as simply another wave in the modern movement of American liberal education, in which the old guard is exchanged for a new deserving and diverse range of America’s brightest young minds. Responding to the debate over whether or not colleges should institute admissions quotas for Jewish students in the 1920s, Judge Learned Hand concluded that “a college may gather together men of a common tradition, or it may put its faith in learning”. Hand’s opinion reflected not only the egalitarian aspirations of the last century of education, but the older, Jeffersonian idea that in a democratic and diverse society, education is a public trust. A liberal education will create a democratic aristocracy, “whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue... rendered by a liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens”. “Faith

According to the International Institute of Education, 223,534 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit in 2005/06. U.S. student participation in study abroad has grown 150% over the past decade.
by Sam Boyd

_Comeback: A Conservatism that Can Win Again_ by David Frum
Doubleday 2007, $24.95, 224 pages

David Frum is certainly a man who knows which way the wind is blowing. In 1994 he wrote _Dead Right_, an argument for purer anti-government conservatism and a criticism of the Reagan and Bush administrations which nicely played into the Republican Revolution of ’94. In 2003 he published _The Right Man_, a laudatory account of Bush in the white house before and after 9-11 that rode a tide of pro-Bush pro-war jingoism. In early 2004 he published, with Richard Perle, _An End to Evil_, which stands as the most prominent summary of Bush-era neoconservative ideas.

Today, with Republicans in disarray and Democrats united and exuberant he’s written a book called _Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again_. None of this is to say Frum is dishonest. As Keynes said, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?” Frum clearly has an unusually strong focus on the fragility of the present state of the political world. As he says in the closing chapter:

“The fact of change is the great fact of human life. The necessity of adapting to change was the impulse that inspired me to begin this book. And the dangers that threaten any institution or party or political idea that fails to adapt—those were the nightmares that drove me to finish.”

So what does a thoughtful conservative think of the modern Republican party? Nothing good.

In fact, it could be that the most persuasive and bitter critic of the modern Republican party is none other than the man who coined the phrase “axis of evil”. Don’t get me wrong, he’s no liberal, but he has come to believe his party is deeply misguided and that for most of them is deeply absurd. If this book has one message it’s that. Nor is this criticism merely empty words. It’s pretty shocking to see a former Bush speechwriter argue that “while many of the country’s most pressing domestic problems are we right, but voters are starting to agree with us.”

Art from the jacket of Mr. Frum’s book.
Newsweek has a section called “Conventional Wisdom”. In it, newsworthy people get an up, down, or sideways arrow to rate how their prospects look. In it, Obama has been getting consistent ups and Roger Clemens consistent downs. And “Hillary”? Well, she has not even been getting her proper acknowledgement. Bill Clinton got a down in the February 4th edition, but at least he got to be Bill Clinton and not just “Bill”.

Calling Senator Clinton “Hillary” does not appear to be a trend isolated to Newsweek. I noticed it first in my everyday interactions with people I know. Many intelligent, sensitive people—the kind who care about substantive political issues, and many who support Clinton’s candidacy—persist in referring to her by her first name. Once I noticed people I know calling Clinton by her first name I also noticed some news outlets referring to her this way.

Calling Clinton “Hillary” is problematic because I am convinced it happens largely because she is a woman. To the extent that anyone agrees that people tend to refer to her differently because of her gender, they will have to agree that doing so is wrong.

There are other arguments for why people are so willing to call Clinton “Hillary”, but none are satisfying. Each of the other reasons that could supposedly explain why people do so also apply to other political figure, yet people do not regularly refer to any other political figures by their first name.

Some argue for the use of her first name on the basis of distinguishing her with Bill Clinton. Still people always do, as Newsweek does, refer to him as Bill Clinton. Why not call her Hillary Clinton, then?

Among politicians Clinton does have a distinctive first name, and she does market herself as “Hillary”—presumably to make her easier to personally relate to. (Her website’s banner is “Hillary for President”, a menu on the left implores you to “Join Team Hillary” and among the items to select on the top is “Hillary’s Story”. “Hillary 08” bumper stickers abound, and in fact hillarystore.com nary contains a piece of merchandise with the word “Clinton” on it.) It strikes me as impossible, though, that the reason Clinton’s first name is so distinctive among politicians, namely, that it is a woman’s name, and people’s willingness to follow her cue and actually call her by it are unrelated. Other politicians market themselves by their first names, but people rarely refer to them that way.

Republican candidate Mitt Romney and former Republican candidate Rudy Giuliani both have distinctive first names by which they market themselves (a glance at their websites reveals as much), but people do not regularly call these male candidates by their first names. These different responses could have to do with other distinctions between Clinton and these other candidates. However, that seems unlikely considering, firstly, that the most obvious distinction is their gender, and second, that being called by her first name is not the only way in which the public treats Clinton differently than other candidates.

Even though the process of selecting a presidential candidate has become as much about who a person is as what they stand for, Clinton deals with obsessive scrutiny of her personal life more than other candidates. We know a great deal about each candidates’ background and personal choices, but we have heard more often about more miniscule details of Clinton’s life: her first date with President Clinton, their marriage, her hair, her clothing, her crying (or not crying), and her so-called carpet bagging. Calling her by her first name is just another way of undermining her position as a legitimate politician, like obsessively focusing on the above details rather than on her policies or even her character.

It is not just, or even mostly, the men or misogynists of the world who talk about the first-ever viable female candidate for president in such
an infantilizing manner. Julia Baird, in her Newsweek review of Thirty Ways of Looking at Hillary: Reflections by Women Writers, puts it perfectly. She says of the book, which she feels focuses much more on the trivialities of her life rather than her politics or political background, “Imagine if men wrote a book about Clinton containing this kind of minutiae – the same women would turn and savage them for trivializing her.”

I do not mean to fight Gloria Steinem’s fight. I do not intend this to be an endorsement for Hillary Clinton. I personally do not like her politics, and I think pressuring people to vote their gender is reprehensible—gynocentrism is in my view no better than its opposite.

I also do not mean to imply that it is harder to be a female candidate than any other sort of candidate, and I certainly do not want to get into a debate about whether there are more barriers for women or for other historically-oppressed groups like African-Americans. There are other unfair, unwarranted signs of disrespect that other candidates contend with because of their identities (see: CNN moderator Wolf Blitzer asking Obama during a Democratic debate if Bill Clinton was the first black president.)

And frankly I hope that I am wrong, that people really do call her “Hillary” for some reason other than a latent discomfort with powerful women. But if I am right, the fact of other candidates also being treated unfairly has no mitigating effect on the disrespectful tone of much discussion about Hilary Clinton. If I am right, it ought to stop. Having a woman run for president—the same year as an African-American, no less—represents real progress, but it does not indicate perfect equality. Since we have come so far, why not show respect for the progress we have made by respecting Clinton’s historic presidential bid, and respecting Clinton?”

### Delegates, from page 3

said input would diminish the chances of outsider and unvetted candidates like their recent nominees. The wager was that the establishment would help pick a more electable candidate—though the party's next two nominees, Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis, while eminently acceptable to the establishment, proved much less acceptable to voters.

The number of pledged superdelegates varies depending on what source you consult, but the tallies given here based on the running total compiled by the Democratic Convention Watch Blog uses only press releases or other public statements to assemble its list. CNN, CBS, and the AP list larger numbers of delegates as having endorsed, but rely on unclear methodology and do not list the names of each superdelegate who supports each candidate. (The DCW blog has full lists of superdelegates who have and haven't publicly endorsed.)

While the possibility that superdelegates would thwart the will of the electorate is brought up every four years, there is reason to think they may play a decisive role in this one. As Diskord goes to press, Barack Obama has a lead in pledged delegates, but it seems unlikely he will gain enough to win without superdelegates. It is therefore possible, if unlikely, that they could give a victory to Clinton even if she has fewer pledged delegates.

It wouldn't be the first time superdelegates functionally decided a democratic primary. In 1984 Walter Mondale had to line up 40 superdelegates in order to claim a majority after the California and New Jersey primaries since he didn't quite have half the delegates yet. In 1980 superdelegates weren't a factor, but Ted Kennedy tried and failed to overturn the rule that bound pledged delegates to vote for the candidate they were pledged to on the first ballot so that some Carter delegates could vote for him instead (no such rule exists this year). But, though these races did have some suspense, there has never been a truly unpredictable convention since the modern primary process emerged in the 1970s. A brokered convention wouldn't necessarily be good for the party, but it would show just how hard it is to decide between two remarkable candidates.
“It’s definitely not Israel, it’s not Turkey, it’s probably not Jordan,” said the man examining my customs form, “it’s gotta be Syria.” The paper had a yellow slash of highlighter through it, put there by the man at the Passport and Immigration desk on my arrival at JFK. I had flown from Damascus that morning through Istanbul and into New York. The official wielding the highlighter had taken one look at the countries I’d visited, slashed my form, and said, “Take this to the man at the end of the corridor.” I’d followed his instructions, and after some minutes of tapping my foot anxiously in a non-descript office, I was called to a different booth.

“What was this, some kind of religious pilgrimage?” the questioner asked me. “No,” I said. “I was on a leave of absence from university, just traveling. I’m studying the Middle East.” He typed some things into the computer in front of him and sighed. “Well, they sent you over here for a reason. Where are your parents from?” “Both American,” I told him. “I mean, where are they from?” “How far do you want me to go back? I think my mom’s parents are British or Scottish and my dad’s family is mostly Jews from the Ukraine and Eastern Europe.” He looked puzzled.

“Let me explain something to you,” he said, his voice taking on a lecturing tone. “When I come back into the US after a trip, I get a hard time. People even ask me if my parents were slaves. And I’m an officer in the US Navy. Now why do you think they do that?” he asked me, gesturing to his black skin. “Look at you, and your name, and this list of countries. It’s not right they sent you down here. But now your name’s been flagged; I just have to put some information into the computer to de-flag it. It doesn’t matter what I ask you, it’s arbitrary anyway. It can be anything, give me anything. What did you eat for dinner yesterday? When did you last brush your teeth?”

“Rice, and on the plane,” I told him. Something dawned on my sleepless, addled mind: he meant I’d been profiled as an Arab. Apparently the four months I’d spent in the Arab world trying to turn myself Palestinian had worked better than I’d imagined.

From August to December of 2007, I studied Arabic in Palestine and Israel, and spent a few weeks in Jordan and Syria during that time. Life in the Middle East was a game of identity, and so my own identity became flexible. It wasn’t who I knew, or even what I knew that mattered, and it wasn’t who I was—it was what I was. In America, what you are matters in a less complicated way. The identities we assign ourselves and each other, though arbitrary, remain constant and straightforward. In the Middle East you have to read the situation and decide if it’s better to be American, a student, Israeli, Canadian, devout, or..."
actor, of Arab heritage, or married. Guess wrong—and a cabbie might overcharge you, a country refuse you entrance, and a friend turn their back on you.


In Jerusalem, Hassidic men were stepping on my toes in their fervent rush to the Wailing Wall, and Palestinian women pushed me out of their way to the vegetable stands. But it wasn't the force of the Hassids' toes or the women's hands that hurt; it was the Palestinian hawkers' cries of "Shalom!" in my direction. Being solicited in English all over the Middle East was annoying, but being assumed Israeli by Palestinians was distressing. I hated that they thought I was their oppressor, and the fact that their livelihood depended on pandering to it. I could see the calculations in their eyes as I walked by; they were guessing what I was and addressing me accordingly. Sometimes I got English and sometimes Arabic, but most often Hebrew. I wanted to tell them that I was not Zionist, but all I could do was respond with an emphatic Arabic hello, "Marhaba!" and hope they understood what I meant.

“We knew you were Jewish as soon as you said you didn't have an Arab parent,” my friend from Birzeit said, laughing. “Who else could look like you?” I thought back to all the times upon meeting Palestinians I'd had to insist I had no Arab heritage, and I wondered if they had come to the same quick conclusion. They hadn't put me on the spot, but instead had let me tell them in my own time, I realized appreciatively. Most Palestinians know that Judaism is matrilineal, but my situation of WASP-mother-converted-to-Judaism and ethnically-Jewish-family-on-my-father's-side-who-couldn't-care-less was so genuinely confusing that it left me some space to maneuver. “I'm half-Jewish,” I said sometimes, a truth at least empirically, or “I have Jewish family.” The Arabic “al-yehud” means literally the Jewish people, but colloquially the Israeli army. I'd launch immediately into a guilty rationalization of the distinction between Jew and Israeli, between Israeli and soldier, or simply between Jew and Zionist.

I visited Jordan in September after spending a few weeks in Palestine. I expected Jordan to look like Palestine geographically and socially, and Jordanian national identity to incorporate empathy with Palestine. I was only crossing a river, after all, and I knew that huge numbers of Palestinian refugees live in Jordan. Most Palestinians living in the West Bank even hold Jordanian passports. I thought Jordan would resemble a Palestine free from Israeli occupation, without restrictions on movement and a decimated economy. I was excited to tell locals that I studied in Palestine. But I was surprised. Though there were Palestinian flags at every other corner tourist shop, I couldn't gauge people's reactions when I told them where I had been. They didn't seem to care. Cab drivers gushed in Arabic about the great relations between Jordan and Israel, and indeed, Israeli backpackers abounded. Some Jordanian faces registered only confusion when I said Palestine, or alternately, the West Bank; it was as though they hadn't heard of either. An older Palestinian woman on the bus to Jerash, though she gave me the gift of an air freshener from her purse, and bade me eat most of her bag of chips, seemed to lack enthusiasm.

Many Jordanians I met were friendly. Dizzied by the sun among the Roman ruins at Jerash, I sought air conditioning. “Mathaf hunak?” Is that a museum? I pointed, asking a guard. “The tourist center,” he replied, and a string of Arabic that I didn't catch. I admitted as much and he accompanied me indoors and explained the small plastic model of Jerash, all the while proclaiming his surprise that I wasn't Jordanian. I told him bits of my life.
Crossing back into Israel, I faced Israeli border patrol and prayed they wouldn’t see “Ramallah” written in tiny Arabic letters in my passport. The girl looking down at me from behind the booth was named Michelle Cohen. Like me, she had dark, curly hair and a stud in her nose. Like me, she looked disgruntled. “What are you doing in Israel?” she asked. “Just traveling around,” I said. “College in the US doesn’t start until January, and I’d rather be in Israel until then than at home.” “What parts of Israel are you visiting?”

“Oh, you know, all of it” I hedged vaguely. “Where?” she insisted. “I’ve spent a lot of time in Haifa, a lot of time in Tel Aviv. I love the beach there. Been to Jerusalem a couple times,” I told her. I was hoping she would read between the lines and assume I was a secular youth group alumnus losing myself in booze, hash, and boys in uniform. But I seemed to have gotten my lines wrong. “All of it?” she asked suspiciously. “Have you been to the West Bank? Are you going to the West Bank?” “No” I said, wishing I could be honest.

I told her, and she promptly stamped my passport with a new three-month visa.

When I went to Syria for a vacation, I fidgeted nervously while the Syrian officials took their time with my passport. The old passport with two Israeli stamps was on its way home in the Turkish mail, and the fresh passport was clean but for an entrance stamp into Turkey. My anxiety was mostly irrational: I’d purged my belongings of anything with Hebrew lettering and of Palestinian wares and addresses. I was just an American kid meeting family members in Damascus for tourism. I left the US two weeks ago, I left the US two weeks ago repeated in my head.

I’d been foolishly conversing in colloquial with the passengers on the bus from Antakya. I told them I learned it in the US, but that was an unlikely story. It took all my willpower to refrain from whispering the truth to the boy who sat next to me, a Lebanese Palestinian refugee studying at Turkish university. He was hot-headed and took on the whole front section in an argument over the appropriateness of sitting next to a girl on the usually segregated bus. I appreciated his conscious effort to include me in the discussion, but he gave me an awful choice. As an Arabized American girl in a middle-aged bus riders’ world of tradition, I would lose no matter what I said. I had to choose to betray my new friends, and my feminist principles, and to an extent myself—or to scandalize the hospitable people who wanted to marry me to their nephews. Alienating them both by proclaiming my belief in more than two genders was not even in question.

The boy and I talked Politics, and he asked me what I thought of Israel, and whose side was I on? I wished I could be honest. I’m on your side more than you know, I wanted to say. I’m fighting for your cause! But I didn’t—couldn’t—say. He became my translator to the officials to whom I spoke only English because although I understood their every word, I feared my Palestinian accent would betray me.

“Dixieland,” my American friend who’d been studying in Damascus told me, “is what we like to call it here.” The code word referred to the forbidden place I’d been traveling. He knew I’d falsely checked the box that read I have never been to Israel or the West Bank; the proliferation of Syrian intelligence necessitated a code word. But did Dixieland mean specifically Israel or Palestine? It wasn’t clear, and the Syrian government didn’t seem to distinguish between the two. It barred visitors to both from entry. Though Syria, unlike Jordan, admits to bad relations with Israel, it does not seem to have any greater empathy for Palestine. Why does Syria force its tourists into this charade? I didn’t understand. They must be aware we elude their question with multiple identities, our multiple passports. Why can’t we?
When my cousin introduced me to his best friend Azad, I immediately swooned. Our conversations were effortless, and the more we talked, the more I realized how much we had in common. We agreed on our favorite episode of “The Simpsons”, both despised okra, both reread Waiting for Godot until the pages were worn and stained with coffee. It was one of those lovely, ordinary encounters any twenty-something could have experienced. That is, until I remembered that we were in Iran, I was leaving in three weeks, and dating (at least the kind I was used to) was illegal.

Being a twenty-something in Iran is a lot like when you were in middle school. This is not to infantilize an entire culture, or to imply that all Iranians are bratty or immature. What I’m referring to is the repressive elements. Young people in Iran live with their parents until their married, so you are always having to tell an ‘adult’ where you are going, why, how, and who’s going to be there. Hence an extreme resentment to all authority figures prompts you to rebel in any minute way possible. Everyone listens to Nirvana. Dress is of the utmost importance, and what is approved by your friends is often unapproved by the authorities. Morality police, or basiji, are always in your business. The only place to make out is in the backseat of your older friend’s car.

It was my third trip to Iran. I had returned to visit relatives of my Iranian-American mother, brush up on my Persian and somehow explore my “roots,” entangled and hidden in my all-encompassing Americanness. Exiting the plane in the summer of 2007, I thought I was in for a repeat of my previous trips, that I knew what to expect. I would stay a few weeks in the city of Esfahan, eating too many kebabs. I would go to the bazaar with my grandmother while she haggled for 10 cent postcards, meet dozens of extended family members giving three kisses each, maybe go to a few historic Mosques. One day, when my family suggested I go visit cousins in Tehran for a couple weeks, I was excited to see the capital, but expected more of the same.

When I saw Azad in a smoky university theater-lobby in Tehran, I didn’t know if I was attracted to him because of his shy, green eyes or because he was the first person I had met in weeks who wasn’t a relative. He was my cousin’s best friend, a computer science student with a deep...
voice but a smile that belied youthful innocence. He was also nearly fluent in English from watching illegal satellite television and listening to pirated Smashing Pumpkins. We were both there to see my cousin perform in a play: a 90's grunge musical version of Jack and the Beanstalk… in Persian. In the stands of the black box theater at the University of Tehran, Azad sat next to me, leaning over to whisper translations of the Farsi dialogue in my ear as I brushed back the thick, dark cloth of my chador.

As my cousin took me along with his friends on their daily outings, I saw the life of Tehran youth rarely shown in American media. The dance parties with four-foot speakers blasting Beyonce, smoke machines and smuggled Russian vodka. The bonfires in the mountains, twenty-something college students wearing Che Guevara shirts under their coats, boys and girls cuddling underneath a blanket for warmth and reading the poet Hafez. “Pull back your hijab,” a girl told me, as she yanked my headscarf from my forehead, locks of hair falling on my eyes. “You look too Muslim.”

One day, my cousin had to go to his theater class and Azad took me around the city. We went to video and book stores, walked in parks and sneaked hidden sips of water into our mouths during the month of Ramadan. Azad took me to an art museum and we discussed whether pornography can be art, briefly interrupted by the security guard telling me to fix my sloppy headscarf. In his cramped Tehran apartment, he kissed me while the Radiohead playing from his stereo mixed with the Friday prayers blasting from the speakers of the nearby mosque.

Like most things in Iran, our romance was kept secret; we didn’t want to worry my family who were paranoid about my safety. Azad and I sneaked kisses when no one was looking and covertly held hands underneath the coffee-house table cluttered with soaked tea bags and cigarette butts. Our relationship obeyed the same rules that governed the culture of the nation: do whatever you want behind closed doors, but when you’re out in public, be what they want you to be.

It didn’t always work. One night, on our way home from the coffee house, two police cars pulled us over. I was in the backseat, with my cousin on one side of me and Azad on the other. When the cops approached the car and asked for everyone’s national identification cards, my nerves brought on confusion, which promptly brought on fear. Having left my passport and visa at home, I gave the officer my University of Chicago ID, and my cousin explained that I was American. Suddenly the officers demanded that all of the boys get out of the car, and I was left alone, remembering all the stories I had heard from family members and friends about getting arrested for bad hijab, staying out too late, or wearing sunglasses.

The boys got back into the car and we drove off. I asked why we got pulled over. It was because I was in the car, a woman, in the backseat, in between two men that were neither my brother nor husband. I was American, though, so they made no arrests.

That night was my last in Iran. I was set to return to Chicago early in the morning, so I said goodbye to the country in the dark, while traffic lights danced through the smog, shining through our dusty car windshield. Outside of my family’s third-floor apartment in midtown Tehran, Azad and I gave each other the typical kiss-on-each-cheek goodbye. I wondered if I would ever feel his rough face next to the silk of my headscarf again.

Not all of Iran is like middle school. But being with Azad, my cousin and his friends, it was difficult to escape the repressive elements, the arbitrary authority and alienation that I associate with an era on the verge of explosion. We in the ‘West’ may not see this explosion, revolution, or rebellion for quite some time or ever. But in the small but pervasive counter-culture of Tehran, where young people are smart, hip, and bored, it’s already happening. On the street in daylight, they act how the government wants them to act. But when no one is looking, whether in dark coffee houses or locked living rooms, young Iranians are risking imprisonment or worse to experience what we take for granted: alcohol and sex, but also expression and independence. And above all, the ability to create a new culture and society, self-determined, and yet hidden in the shadows.

Palestine, from page 13

they just ask whose side I’m on?

At the Damascus airport I met a Fulbright scholar doing research in Syria. “Dixieland,” I told her, was where I’d just come from. “But not Dixie proper. The other side of Dixieland,” I justified, emphasizing the differentiation that didn’t officially exist between the two sides of the Green Line. I couldn’t bear to have her think I’d been in been in Israel but not Palestine.

Being profiled as an ‘Arabiyyeh coming home to New York was strangely thrilling. It proved the suspicion I’d been having for months that the differences weren’t so great between all the things I pretended to be—I could be any of them, and all of them. The great insensitivity of the United States when it came to the subtle lines of identity I’d walked was comforting.

“But I’m Jewish. My name is Hebrew,” I wondered out loud when my questioner finished the lecture on racial profiling. “The average Joe doesn’t know that though, does he,” he responded. He hit a few more keys. “You’re all set,” he said. “But for one more thing.” “Yeah?” Anxiety had stolen my patience; though I liked this man my connecting flight was scheduled to depart within minutes.

“Don’t let them keep you from having adventures, and doing the interesting things you want to do,” he said. “I won’t,” I told him. Grinning as I walked away, I began to wonder about the adventures my bus companion into Syria could have, and what interesting things he could do with the special Lebanese passport he’d shown me marked “refugee”. He would never see his family’s old village west of Israel’s separation wall. He probably never visit his homeland east of the wall. He might never see New York. And I realized that as much as I may make light of identity, the weight of its burden on some is inescapable.
Thanks to all who submitted, and congratulations to our winner!

“Do you come to the pool every hump day?”

—Van Kluytenaar
In 1968, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, established only a couple of years before, presented Congress with one of the more radical documents in the history of American urban planning, *Tomorrow’s Transportation*. The document advocated a program of experimentation in mass transportation technologies to counteract the strongly pro-automobile and anti-city policy that shaped the country’s landscape after World War II.

One of the proposed experiments was personal rapid transit (PRT): automated pods that would ride on a special guideway, each carrying a single passenger (or party of passengers) directly from one station to another. PRT was a way to bring the speed and comfort of private transportation to public transportation—quick, electrically powered, private vehicles shared by all.

The small size of the cars also meant a small guideway was necessary, making the system less expensive than other fixed-guideway transit systems.

As incredible as this concept seems, a fully functional workaday PRT system, called ULTra is currently being installed at London’s Heathrow Airport and will be operating by 2009. Another system, the joint Swedish-South Korean Vectus, has a large test track in Uppsala, and an American company, Skyweb Express, has a short segment of test track in Minneapolis. It is exciting to think that the age of personal rapid transit is coming, but establishing a PRT system in an American city will still be difficult, not because of technology but because of political considerations.

Despite the federal push for PRT, culminating in the Transpo ’72 exhibition, cities were understandably reticent about PRT in the late 1970’s. An experiment with infrastructure can always turn into a boondoggle, and the Urban Mass Transportation Agency (UMTA, now the Federal Transit Administration) was unwilling to fund test systems. Private firms are more adventurous than governments in applying PRT—the Heathrow system is being built by the British Airports Authority (BAA) that is privately owned. More ambitiously, the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company hopes to use PRT in its Masdar Development, a project for “a carbon neutral and zero waste community,” as it is described on architects Foster + Partners’ website. In being powerful firms largely unaccountable to the wider public, the BAA and Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company can take risks that a municipality may not be willing or able to.

Although Masdar will be an example of PRT in an urban context, it will be planned along with the city, not inserted into the urban fabric. As PRT Developer J. Edward Anderson explains, “PRT has had an unfortunate relationship with military contractors. Initially the system chosen for what was to be the first PRT system, a UMTA-funded loop in Morgantown, West Virginia, was called the Alden staRRcar. Feeling that Alden was too small for a federal contract, in 1970 UMTA gave the contract to Boeing. With typical military-industrial complex logic, they scaled the vehicles and guideways up, changing what was to be a lite personal rapid transit system into a bulky group rapid transit one (despite this, the system has operated peerlessly since its opening in 1972 and is often called “America’s Best-Kept Transit Secret”). Similarly in the late 1990’s when Raytheon’s PRT system was considered for Rosemont—used to military largesse, Raytheon scaled up the vehicles and guideway from the original concept, making the system economically unviable.
Although the ideology behind “The Golden Compass” may be objectionable, the armored bears were unanimously approved by the viewing public.
the contrary, Pullman has absolutely no problem defending his work or his opinions on the world at large. One might even say that Pullman is overly and overtly outspoken about his stance on organized religion. Someone who says “I am of the Devil’s party and know it” is certainly not shy about his opinions.

The Catholic League, too, is obviously not shy about making it’s voice heard and as The Golden Compass’s marketing kicked into high gear, so did the Catholic League’s boycott. A big Hollywood studio makes a book ultimately about killing the “Authority” into blockbuster fantasy movie? And to be released at Christmas? The horror! People who listen to the Catholic League immediately turned against the book clearly without reading it and those with children felt the need to shield the young, fragile minds from such blatant blasphemy. It is ridiculous to keep a fantasy story out of a child’s hands, a child who will be able to decide what he or she believes in time, but fear of godlessness propagated by the Catholic League campaign worked. The Golden Compass underperformed horrifically in the U.S. box office with terrible reviews to boot. This is despite the fact that the movie is the most watered-down version of book a Christian audience could ask for.

Many people who support Pullman decided against seeing the movie because they believed it to be a bastardization of Pullman’s work. New Line buckled under the pressure and sacrificed Pullman’s viewpoint, rigorously editing and then ultimately cutting the portion of the film dealing with the final three chapters at the last minute. The chapters gave the studio its biggest obstacle since that’s where most of the religious mentions take place.

This all is very scary to me. How could New Line, a studio brave enough to take on the book in the first place (given that Pullman is by no means quiet about the beliefs exposed in his books), get down on its knees and bow before the very power that Pullman despises: the power of organized religion and its desire to control the way people think? In an article about the film in the December 2007 Atlantic Monthly article the author wrote, “With $180 million at stake, the studio opted to kidnap the book’s body and leave the book still intact, the opening would have been even more controversial and people would be interested. Instead, they created a tepid, uninspiring movie out of what is one of the greatest stories I’ve ever read. Taking out all the anti-religious elements, like comments about the “Authority” or any mention of Dust as “sin”, made the story seem muddled. By pussy-footing around Pullman’s built-in fan base to pander to people who would boycott the movie anyway. Alienating the fans and attempting to appease people who would never step foot in the theater was a horribly unwise move by New Line. If they had released the movie with its loyalty to the book still intact, the opening would have been even more controversial and people would be interested. Instead, they created a tepid, uninspiring movie out of what is one of the greatest stories I’ve ever read. Taking out all the anti-religious elements, like comments about the “Authority” or any mention of Dust as “sin”, made the story seem muddled. By pussy-footing around Pullman’s built-in fan base to pander to people who would boycott the movie anyway. Alienating the fans and attempting to appease people who would never step foot in the theater was a horribly unwise move by New Line. If they had released the movie with its loyalty to

had respected the story and all the anti-organized religion stuff that went along with it, the studio could have created something different. Studios are mainly after money though, at the end of the day, no matter how much one would like to think its art for art’s sake. The thing is, New Line got their money in the end, just not from the United States. Yes, the movie did abysmally here, but over in the rest of the world, it’s performed rather well; it’s worldwide grossed about 325 million dollars.

Yet in the eyes of the Hollywood establishment, it’s the way the film was received here that counts. Compare for a moment the release of The Golden Compass to the release of The Passion of The Christ, a movie the made boatloads of money right here in the United States. With The Passion of the Christ, Christians and others went to the box office in droves, despite credible reports of the movie’s blatant anti-Semitism, shelling out the big bucks to watch Mel Gibson’s fixation with blood, torture, gore, and pain play out on the screen. The movie was not about spirituality—it was a celebration of torture and pain dressed up in Jesus's white robes. I realize that in understanding Christ’s sacrifice for mankind, one must understand the agonizing pain he went through. However, there is a difference in respecting Christ for undergoing such torture and exploiting the gore of it on the screen. In contrast, with The Golden Compass, it seems that much of the religious Christian public spurned the film because they feared that children would be swayed by atheistic evils in a movie where a brave, good-hearted little girl battles against forces who want to either control her or kill her. Above all the religious furor, The Golden Compass is a film based largely on human (and daemon) interaction, about love and trust, about knowing what’s right from wrong morally, and not because an “Authority” told you so. This is because Pullman’s prose came from a deeply spiritual center (regardless of what the Catholic League may think)
and Gibson's epic of blood came from a hubris that led him to showcase utter, graphic brutality on the screen and call it a symbol of his faith.

The other thing that completely baffled me about the release of The Golden Compass was the barrage of negative reviews. I waited until a couple weeks after the release to finally see the movie. I had been avoiding the experience, since every review I read despised it for different reasons and liked only the special effects. Also, friends of mine, whose opinion I trusted, saw the movie and abhorred it, saying things like, “If you think that the movie’s good, then we are no longer friends.” Luckily for me and my friends, I didn’t think the movie was “good”, but I certainly didn’t think it was as dreadful as everyone said it was. I think under the restraints imposed by the studio, the movie turned out relatively well.

Lyra’s world was fully realized; I found myself being enchanted by the way the daemon-human relationship looked on screen, and the actors were all well-chosen. Then, I realized why many of the bad reviews and many of my friends’ opinions made sense. This movie allotted little time to explaining Lyra’s world and, unlike The Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter, there are plenty of people who haven’t read the His Dark Materials series. I didn’t miss the omitted information like Pullman’s descriptions of the bond between daemon and human, and the horror of it being cut apart, because I knew it already. Still, that lack of knowledge couldn’t excuse all the scathing reviews. I can only wonder what could have been if the film had retained all its controversial elements.

A few weeks ago, I went to a church service with a friend of mine who is particularly religious. A woman was guest-speaking and the pastor sat back and watched placidly. At first she was discussing how those who have suffered abuse in its many forms can find solace in God. Then, she said, “We are all broken. Everyone in the universe is broken.” In her opinion, the only way to stop us remaining broken and miserable is by throwing ourselves whole-heartedly into faith and repenting for our collective sin, a sin that is inherently within us because of Eve. If Pullman was next to me, he would have stood up and made his disagreement known... loudly. Pullman thinks that humans, far from being broken because of the original sin Eve committed, are best when they question, when they are curious, when they don’t follow the rules, when they give into the demands of their heart, when they don’t clutch onto their innocence well past the time they should, when they are perfectly and ever-complexly human. Pullman may or may not be an atheist, but he is most certainly a humanist and anti-organized religion.

The church I went to is a representation of a worldview that Pullman has fought against his whole life. Yet in interviews he has only seemed cynical, sardonic, and a touch wishful whenever the subject of New Line’s version of his story is broached. I know Pullman wants his books to be made into movies, and that meddling with the process would make that impossible, but just like he completely destabilized the idea of an “Authority” in his story, I can’t help but see New Line as an “Authority” also. Just as the Authority in Pullman’s book was selfish and afraid, so was New Line. The studio wanted money and was terrified that offending Christian sensibilities would be taking that money away. Unfortunately, while sitting in the church a few weeks ago, I didn’t feel like I could stand up to Authority. I didn’t want to offend my friend and I didn’t want to upset the churchgoers. Instead, I escaped back into my memories of His Dark Materials, a story that celebrates humanity, a story that should be shared with as many as possible--no matter how hard the Catholic League tries to stop it and no matter how New Line might mess it up. It’s up to us, those humans with Dust settling nicely around us, to stand up for Pullman’s story. So, here I am: I’m taking a stand.

Sources and Resources

For more information, “Innovative Transport Technologies” <http://faculty.washington.edu/jbs/itrans/> is a good portal. Among the most useful resources there are an excerpt from Tomorrow’s Transportation, J. Edward Anderson’s “Some Lessons from the History of Personal Rapid Transit (PRT),” Dick Gronning’s article “Fitting PRT Into an Existing Multimodal Environment,” pages on the history of PRT and other sorts of innovative transit, summaries of the Rosemont and Palo Alto, and links to PRT news and developers’ pages.

A summary of the Masdar project can be found at <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/Projects/1515/Default.aspx>.

ULTra’s promotional video can be found on YouTube.

Transit, from page 17

’72 was that “the developers were so busy improving their hardware they paid inadequate attention to integrating their systems into communities.” To rectify this, PRT advocates now put emphasis on how PRT can work in concurrence with other modes of mass transportation, using a net of PRT loops to augment systems like bus and light rail lines.

Looping through an American downtown is a unique challenge, though. ULTra’s promotional video, for instance, emphasizes “blending in well with modern architecture”- -but their use of the word modern seems a little puzzling. In the United States, modern business districts are not separate from historic cores—no Canary Wharves or La Defenses here. The old and the new rub shoulders. Although even Disney World’s twin monorail tracks would dwarf a PRT guideway, the fact that there are no antecedents for such tiny streets in the air would bring complaints about visual intrusiveness from the moment any urban system is proposed.

In American suburbs, however, there is little context to worry about. Chicago’s Regional Transportation Authority seriously considered a suburban PRT system for the suburb of Rosemont in the 1990s, but it never reached development (see sidebar). A similarly detailed study was also published for Stanford Research Park in Palo Alto California. In both of these studies, the objective was to augment the reach of a heavy rail line (the CTA’s Blue Line in the former and the CalTrain in the latter) in what are currently automobile-dependent areas. This would make reverse commutes more viable, taking down the barrier of the park-and-ride lot and allowing city-dwellers more access to jobs in the suburbs. Given that opposition to expanded mass transit is one of the main tactics suburbs use to maintain income (and therefore racial) homogeneity, PRT’s adaptability to suburban environments may make it harder to build a system there.

Therefore, if the new generations of PRT systems do prove successful in their first, private trials, we can expect there to be proposals to adapt this new form of transportation to American cities—the application PRT was first envisioned for. Even if it serves as a supplement to existing transit modes rather than a replacement, the installation of a PRT system requires the will to risk changing the way we move in our environment. We risked it in the nineteenth century with the metro and the streetcar and in the twentieth with the automobile—how long will we have to wait into the twenty-first century before we can make a shift of our own?