

# The Gothic Guardian

at Duke University



# The Inauguration

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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:  
Duke Dining Needs  
Competition



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## insidethisissue

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AARON MCGUIRE

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# The Miscellany

## Social Update

This spring, Duke students will have the opportunity to participate in a party so bizarre, it needs a disguise. Duke's Honor Council brings us "Duke Unmasked", a party based on secrets and stereotypes. Preparation for the event begins with the harvesting of anonymous student secrets from various campus locations. These secrets will later be displayed at a party at which students are to be given masks created to represent their individual interests and social milieu. Here they are supposed to seek out other guests wearing a mask that corresponds to theirs.

Stereotyping students based on a few facts about them seems an unusual way to promote openness and social interaction. Perhaps the Honor Council is working from the (not wholly outlandish) premise that Duke students are inherently perverse creatures.

It would probably be more in keeping with the spirit of the event to withhold our judgment of it until we can figure out how well it works. And we will try, in spite of the natural perversity of our disposition. Only one thing is certain: it will be highly entertaining to see what anonymous secrets are deemed worthy cocktail-party décor.

## Faculty Update

Contrary to popular belief, Duke is (apparently) home to some politically conservative faculty members. Professors John Coleman, Michael Munger, Adriano Rampini, Juan Rubio-Ramirez and Edward joined with other academics to express their disapproval of President Obama's stimulus by signing an advertisement sponsored by the libertarian CATO Institute that appeared in the New York Times and Washington Post, among other major papers -- if the Old Grey Lady can still be considered a "major paper" rather than the nation's most widely read left-wing tabloid. (Full disclosure: Professor Munger is this publication's faculty sponsor.)

In *The Chronicle's* January 30 article on the advertisement, Munger, and the writers of the ad itself, targeted Obama's curious insistence that there is "no disagreement" about the necessity of the stimulus. Al Gore and the global warming alarmists must be flattered; the Great Orator has adopted their favorite rhetorical technique: when all else fails, falsely assert that everyone agrees with you. Is the stimulus the new global warming? At any rate, we at the Miscellany are heartened to see that, on a campus where diversity more often refers to differences of ethnic identity than of opinion, five Duke professors were willing publicly to contradict the president. It can't hurt for Obama to learn that he shouldn't drop the word "consensus" as promiscuously as he

hands out our hard-earned tax money.

And that's something we can all agree on. Right?

## Arts Watch

Musical fans, rejoice! An American expat named Teddy Hayes has written a musical comedy sure to become an instant favorite with other culturally attuned American expats who have taken up residence in the UK. No, really, the show offers something for viewers of all stripes. Playbill Online quotes the show's press materials: "Pop, gospel, jazz and soft rock come together in a politically inspired romp." That's right—a "politically inspired romp". Unfortunately, the musical is not based on the Clinton administration – they don't mean that kind of romp.

Still, Hayes's chosen premise has plenty of comic potential. The musical, "Obama on My Mind", "takes a humorous look at the weird and wonderful world behind the scenes of a small Obama campaign office and the larger than life characters who make the wheels turn, the cogs whir and bring in the votes." (This quote is also drawn from the press materials quoted on Playbill's site; rest assured that we would never pen so awkward a sentence.) We're laughing already. The title song, performed by Ruby Turner, includes the following lines: "Change comes with a man/ Who is both Black and White/ And his destiny's to help the world unite." Cross your fingers that "Obama on My Mind" makes it to the Durham Performing Arts Center in the near future. And perhaps we can look forward to a sequel, "Me and Bobby Jindal", in 2013?

## Gift Guide

A new type of gift card became available in Indiana this Christmas season.

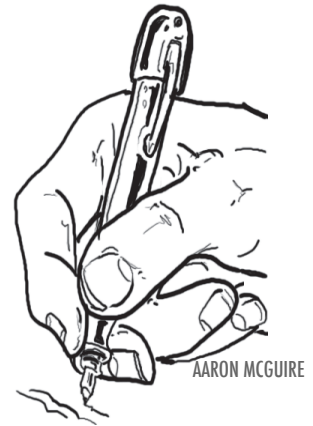
The Planned Parenthood gift certificate is not your average shopping-center gift card. It can be used to pay for contraceptives and, yes, for abortions. We guess that the advent of the abortion gift card marks, at least among some subset of our society, the end of any sense of abortion as either an immoral or a shameful deed. An abortion – the act of ending a human life – becomes a casual purchase, and even a gift to be bestowed, just like that pair of jeans you bought last week with the Gap gift card your grandmother gave you for your birthday. It stands in stark contrast to the idea espoused by many that life itself is a gift (whether from Fate, a deity, or the machinations of biology). We can only hope it doesn't catch on. ☹

*The Miscellany does not reflect the views of the editorial board or of the staff of this magazine. We are merely an individual who has self-indulgently adopted the royal we.*

# *A letter*

From

# The Editor



Conservatism on campus is about resilience. And in the wake of President Obama's inauguration with enormous Democratic congressional majorities, conservatives will need a lot of it. For the past eight years, campus conservatives have been able to take solace in national electoral strength. We are now reminded of what it means to truly "be in the wilderness."

Therefore, this second issue of *The Gothic Guardian* picks up where our fall edition left off, exploring, among other issues, how conservatives and the Republican Party arrived at our current predicament. The generational fissure evinced by this election -- with young voters breaking heavily for then-Sen. Obama -- should be of particular concern to national leaders. Penetrating the younger generation's sense of disaffection will require both an effort to remarket conservative principles to young voters and a renewed recognition, in the oft-quoted words of former House Speaker Tip O'Neill, that "all politics is local." Seeking to play our part in this effort, we have endeavored to provide commentary tailored to campus life and as well as to more political questions.

On some level, the appeal of the Obama candidacy to young voters was obvious. President Obama embodies the aspirations of today's younger generation, clearly through his youth and lifestyle, but also because his breaking through the "final" racial barrier represents a clearing of conscience for so many who have grown up reading about the deeply tarnished racial history of their country. That Sen. McCain came off as embodying qualities of an older era likely further tipped the scales against Republicans in a year so highly primed for a "change" narrative.

Yet, the Obama presidency now presents a fresh start for conservatives in making a pitch to young voters. Prior to November 4th, many in today's younger generations approached American politics with the heavy baggage of race-consciousness. Count this author among the skeptics of a newfound era of Obama-inaugurated "post-racialism," but conservatives may not be wrong to hope that campus discussions on race and politics can now be

approached with new frankness.

Evaluating Obama the president and legislator as an individual, not merely as the first African-American president, will be critical to this enterprise. To the extent that his election truly represents the breaking of a racial boundary, Obama must be treated like any other President and subject to the same harshly critical lens. Some in the media have expressed the intention to soften any future criticism of the president, in the belief that his presidency will be viewed as a reflection on all black Americans. That would be a shame. Truly breaking the racial barrier will depend not just on Obama but on us, as citizens, divesting the moral authority of President Obama's race from our perceptions of him. After all, the implication of racial progress would be that the president's race, as a reflection on him as an individual, means nothing at all.

Those conversations are the kind campus conservatives must encourage over the next four years. A healthy balance between political scrutiny of the national environment, tailoring commentary to a youth audience, and discussing local issues of relevance to college students can help break old stereotypes of the GOP and conservatives in general.

Local issues in particular offer an opportunity to showcase the diversity of viewpoints within the conservative and libertarian camps. Multiple articles in this issue focus on campus life—touching on issues like the campus Israel-Gaza discourse, online privacy, Duke University's Financial Aid Initiative, campus dining, and even the recent "I ♥ Female Orgasm" event. As you will observe as you peruse the issue, conservatism is a rather big tent, within which there are bound to be disagreements.

We hope you enjoy the issue, and look forward to having you join us in enduring what will likely be a long four years for conservatives. The forecast is depressing, but if there's any good news in the situation, it's that campus conservatives are well-trained for the resilience the next four years will demand. **G**

# Do you ♥ orgasm?

Andrea Green & Alexandra Jacobson

A poster in the Bryan Center, depicted a T-shirt bearing the cryptic message, "I love the big O". The next poster made it clear that the message was an advertisement for a strangely intriguing lecture. It read, "I LOVE FEMALE ORGASM."

The lecture took place on January 13th at 7:30 P.M. in White Lecture Hall. After Dorian and Marshall, the distinguished lecturers of the night, were introduced, the audience was split up into a male and a female group. The boys went with Marshall to a different room, and the girls stayed in the auditorium to hear girls' stories about their first orgasms, myths about orgasms and masturbation, and some of the different ways they had achieved orgasm. Then the boys came back in for a co-ed lesson about the female anatomy and sexuality.

Andrea describes the lecture as "partially entertaining and partially scarring." The many puns and funny stories told made for an entertaining evening. The topic of "orgasms" is not typically addressed in this type of public forum, so it was a new experience for most of the audience. Though there were many laughs and giggles, there were also many astonished faces. Some people did not seem comfortable with this degree of openness concerning sexuality. Everyone in the audience seemed engaged in the tales of first orgasms and the reassurances that masturbation is normal. It became awkward when the topic of "female ejaculation" was addressed. Dorian and Marshall did a good job of minimizing the awkwardness and making people feel comfortable asking questions and addressing issues that typically are not talked about. In the end the audience seemed glad of the chance to learn about this uncommon topic.

Getting the straight facts on the issues addressed was very helpful. Boys and girls alike learned a lot about sexual health and expression, but some of the questions got a little uncomfortable. Those audience members more reserved on the topic of sexual conduct were slightly thrown off by the openness of those more experienced in the field. The ability of certain people to tell personal stories displayed an impressive degree of self-confidence, but the audience was not always prepared to hear them. One of the other main topics of the night was pornography and its role in the sex life of college students. The girls were assured that not all women look like the women depicted in these films, nor are all men expected to look like male porn stars. The speakers explained that not all women's bodies are the same and that not resembling the women or men in these films is not a sign of deficiency or a bar to having a satisfying sex life. This section of the lecture was difficult to relate to for those who had never seen a pornographic film. The assumption that nearly everyone watches pornography was a little extreme, but it is always nice to hear that your body is beautiful even if it is different than

what you see on screen. The mere fact that these speakers were invited to campus on the topic of female orgasm speaks volumes about the role of sexuality in campus culture. The popularity of the presentation was another testament to the atmosphere of

extreme openness and acceptance of sexuality at Duke. White Lecture Hall was full to capacity. Students crowded the aisles and some even sat on the sides of the stage. The lecture was so popular, in fact, that those who were even a few minutes late had no chance of finding a suitable place to sit. The lecture was a salutary source of factual information that is often regarded as taboo and kept hidden, and this likely diminished audience insecurities and ignorance.

On the other hand, the lecturers could have done a better job of promoting modesty and portraying sexually conservative behavior in a favorable light, especially in a place like Duke that is already quite accepting of sexual expression and behavior on the other end of the spectrum. Dorian and Marshall said much about sex and very little about the choice to abstain or wait until marriage. Though their lecture was very entertaining and informative, and provided a thorough discussion of the many options concerning sex and sexual behavior, they could more completely have addressed the legitimacy of other lifestyle choices.

Overall, the lecture was beneficial to Duke students. It offered a safe environment where people could ask questions and receive accurate answers. There were no "censored" answers and no answers based on myths. There were just raw facts. Many students (including guys!) came over to East Campus for the event, so female sexuality is clearly a topic that's of interest to the student body. More lectures like this might be beneficial in the future, but attendees should be aware of the slight awkwardness that accompanies it! Future storytellers may wish to think before they speak. Believe it or not, not everyone wants to hear the racy details of strangers' sexual exploits. **G**



ALIXANDRA JACOBSON

# Financial Aid:

## Can it pop the Duke bubble?

“Duke has a fundamental commitment to selecting students on grounds of talent and character, not their family’s ability to pay. The uncertainty in the economy makes it more important than ever that we be able to stand by this commitment. Thanks to the success of the initiative, we have ensured that a Duke education will remain affordable and accessible to all students and families.”

- President Richard H. Brodhead  
Duke News, November 2008

### Chalette Lambert

In 2005, Duke University, urged by President Brodhead, launched an aid initiative to increase financial aid spending from the endowment rather than the operating budget. The goal was to raise enough money to split funding evenly between the two sources. In fact, the initiative called for decreased reliance on the operating budget in order to prevent future weakness in the financial aid program.

By the time economic recession decreased its endowment by 19% this year, Duke had already met the \$300 million financial aid fundraising goal. Due to Duke’s successful initiative, families making under \$60,000 a year will not have any parental contribution requirement, and for families making under \$40,000 a year, the loan requirements have also been eliminated. Additionally, Duke reduced loan requirements for families making more than \$40,000 a year, according to Duke University Development.

The success of this initiative, in addition to providing financial support, serves to enrich the Duke experience by diversifying the student population’s socioeconomic makeup. As it stands, Duke is not very socioeconomically diverse. Although many students come from different backgrounds, the general population of Duke students self-segregates into two general classes – the

wealthy, and everybody else. The financial aid boost could allow for a greater student population from less wealthy backgrounds, increasing socioeconomic diversity, reducing pressures to fit into an affluent culture, and providing more space for alternative social activities.

Of Duke’s Ugg-wearing and SUV-driving atmosphere, senior Chad Tudenggongbu – an international student from Tibet – said, “You go off campus and then you see another side of America and you kind of wonder, ‘What happened there?’” Most Duke students appear at ease spending on the latest fashions, electronics, and entertainment. Since the majority of Duke students lives generously, if not extravagantly, students with less wealthy backgrounds can feel pressure to fit into this unequal socioeconomic atmosphere.

According to the Duke Chronicle, economic inequality is more than an atmosphere: Duke’s average family income is more than three times the national average. 60% of students do not require even minimal financial aid, meaning their families can pay \$113,000 out of pocket. Students with financial aid are clearly in a minority. However, the successful financial aid initiative in combination with the economic decline carries enough

weight to change Duke's culture and reduce the effects of large economic stratification. Maybe the solutions to socioeconomic pressure, effortless perfection and the partying culture lie not in web campaigns or surveys, but in the natural consequences of a less-wealthy student population – i.e., in greater socioeconomic diversity.

Take, for instance, partying at Duke. Not only do many people have a specific “going out” wardrobe, this collection expands with time, from enrollment on. Dinners and pre-party activities also turn into elaborate spending affairs. Safe-riding it back to Duke after the party is over isn't cheap either. A more balanced socioeconomic group of students would serve to diminish the whole party scene – simply by removing the funding. A majority of non-partying students would be able to support alternative social activities and the diversity would reduce pressure to spend on unnecessary items.

These reductions benefit most Duke students. If nothing else, the average student does not want to continue reading articles on Duke's social problems – can we solve this once and for all? Yes, by expanding Duke's socioeconomic diversity. The only way to reduce pressures of a wealthy atmosphere is simply to reduce the wealthy atmosphere. The financial aid initiative will give voice to more students from non-wealthy backgrounds, reducing the pressures of a largely affluent population. In combination with adverse effects from the recession, the initiative will diversify

Duke's economic makeup and its related social atmosphere.

The financial aid increases affect not only current students, but also future Duke applicants whose financial needs are of particular concern during a recession. The aid boost from the successful 2005 initiative allows Duke to be more confident about attracting the best – and most diverse – students regardless of financial status. “When I received the admissions letter, I literally fell on the ground screaming with joy,” said Duke junior Kateri Zhu. “[But], that joy would have lasted only a moment, if my admissions letter had not been backed with a financial aid package that made attending here possible.” Even though many families are increasingly concerned about finances, Duke's aid increase has eased their strain and eased students' pressures to fit into a privileged campus culture.

The diversification is already promising. According to a report in the Duke Chronicle last May, Duke's financial aid director during the initiative, Jim Belvin said, “[The initiative] was successful, we certainly attracted low-income people, but if you look to the future we will have an even greater impact.” The increase in the non-wealthy student population that will arise from the increase in financial aid funding enhances the social atmosphere for every student involved. To everyone's benefit, Duke will be able to maintain its commitment to increased aid packages for low-income students in spite of national recession. **G**

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# Israel, Hamas, and Gaza: Debunking the propaganda

Jake Moroshek

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights “strongly condemned Israel’s disproportionate use of force.” Closer to home, Duke Against War, the Muslim Students Association and the Arab Students Organization put up posters around Duke declaring that “a genocide is taking place in Gaza.” Thousands of miles away, Hamas leader Fathi Hammad said, “We will not rest until we destroy the Zionist entity.”

These groups (and individuals), in spite of their very different guiding principles, methods, and goals, all chose to condemn Israel. A review of the evidence, however, shows that Israel had a perfectly legitimate basis to engage in war against Hamas, and that it executed the war in an ethical fashion.

Many campus declarations on the subject have gone without refutation. Facebook statuses and campus tabling efforts advertise the civilian death count in Gaza. None mention the hundreds of rockets that rain down on Southern Israel every week. Some of the popular explanations and arguments being proffered regarding Israel’s action deserve a response.

## The motives for war

**Propaganda:** Israel has no right to fight.

**Reality:** Since 2001, terrorists have fired over 4000 rockets from

Gaza into Israel. Imagine if a large group of terrorists at UNC were shooting rockets at Duke. And suppose they were killing innocent students and faculty. Wouldn’t it make sense for us to do something? Even Duke Against War might swap its protest signs for bazookas. But ask them about Israel, and suddenly they think differently. The reality is that Israeli civilians live in a constant state of fear, and that Hamas is the aggressor in this conflict. The question is not why Israel fought back, but why did it take so long to do so?

**Propaganda:** Israel is a cruel occupying force and Hamas is merely fighting back.

**Reality:** Israel ended its presence within Gaza in 2005. After they left, the rocket fire went up by more than 500 percent, according to Israeli Ambassador Dore Gold writing in the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

## The implementation of the War

**Propaganda:** Israel used a disproportionate amount of force.

**Reality:** Remember that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, killing more than 2400 people? President Roosevelt did not tell the armed forces to use a “proportionate amount of force” or to kill a

## themiddleeast

maximum of 2400 Japanese people. After 9/11 the West collectively toppled the Taliban. Nobody compared the casualties in Afghanistan to the numbers that died in the World Trade Center. Nor should they have. It is highly unreasonable to compare the casualties from the rocket fire in Israel to the casualties in the Gaza strip. Ambassador Gold put it best when he said, "To expect Israel to hold back in its use of decisive force against legitimate military targets in Gaza is to condemn it to a long war of attrition with Hamas."

Furthermore, from a purely legal perspective, international law states that a nation is not required to calibrate its use of force according to the size and range of the enemy's weaponry.

Moreover, if Hamas had the weaponry that it wants (and that it works endlessly to acquire from Iran), Israel's casualties would number in the tens of thousands. But because the number stands at 13 Israelis to 500-1300 Gazans, the world forgets what each side is fighting for. Take the Hamas terrorist. He goes to the most populated civilian area and shoots a rocket into Israel in hopes of killing as many innocents as possible. If the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) find him, he'll try to die with several civilian casualties. The Israeli soldier, on the other hand, is given strict intelligence on the enemy, and does his best to minimize civilian death.

**Propaganda:** Israel targets civilians.

**Reality:** Throughout the war, Israel not only dropped leaflets but also text-messaged civilians, warning them of oncoming attacks days in advance. Conversely, Hamas used human shields by basing operations in hospitals and schools. In the case of the UN school, militants were camped inside and were firing on the IDF.

It's still too early to tell how many Gazan civilians died. Palestinian sources peg it at 894 out of 1300 total. However, Italian journalist Lorenzo Cremonesi, a correspondent for Italy's *Corriere della sera*, recently wrote that 500 to 600 people died in total – the majority of whom were men between 17 and 23 recruited to Hamas's ranks. It will be a few more weeks until more accurate figures are available. However, even if these numbers stand, then the casualty rate in Gaza would be unusually low for an urban war. NATO's war in Afghanistan, for instance, took a much higher toll on civilian life.

### Conclusion

At Duke we had the Gaza Vigil. But was there a vigil for the millions of people in Israel who live under rocket fire? Do we hear about the children in Israeli schools who have to run for bunkers several times a day? Israel is a nation of fourteen million people surrounded by hundreds of millions of often hostile Arabs. It certainly does not instigate wars, because to Israel, every life is precious. Israel supporters and Palestinian sympathizers

alike mourn fallen Gaza civilians. Hamas, elected by the Palestinian people, has no purpose other than to wage war. These two worlds constantly collide, and eventually the sovereign, peace-loving nation needs to fight back. **G**



**“These two worlds constantly collide, and eventually the sovereign, peace-loving nation needs to fight back.”**

# Resurrecting the Republican Party

**Natalie Figuero**

Ronald Reagan swept the 1984 presidential election, winning 49 out of 50 states. In fact, the only two presidents in American history to ever carry 49 states in a presidential election were both Republicans. Two decades later, however, the Republican Party finds itself trying to rebound from a series of major electoral defeats. Since 2004, Republicans have lost important congressional

ing localization. In addition, McConnell pointed out that voters from every demographic—from the most educated to the least educated and from the richest to the poorest—felt alienated and disenchanted with the Republican Party. Clearly, a new strategy is necessary for Republicans. The Grand Old Party must stop tailoring its message to target specific minority groups and alien-

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**The bottom line is this: if the Republican Party hopes to be a powerful force in the future, the entire party must go beyond rhetorical posturing and embrace a true spirit of reform.**

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seats to Democratic challengers across the nation, and in 2008 voters tipped the scale heavily in favor of Democrats in both Houses. In addition, the 2008 presidential election put an end to eight years of Republican leadership by placing a young and idealistic Democratic candidate, whose rhetoric was largely based on the idea of “changing Washington” (mainly referring to the sitting Republicans), in the White House. While critics are quick to point to the Republican Party’s allegedly “outdated” positions as a primary cause for its recurring electoral defeats, the problem is actually much more complex.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) recently questioned the Grand Old Party’s current direction and declared the Party’s need to redefine itself, saying, “Every so often, there comes a time when a political party has to reexamine itself. For Republicans, now is such a time.” He warned that Republicans risk losing their competitive edge on the national level against the Democratic Party, mainly because of Republicans’ increas-

ating important support bases along the way. It must reconstruct its message in order to broaden its appeal to voters in a diversifying country, because conservative values can appeal to everyone.

Still, McConnell neglected to mention a crucial voting base the Republican Party will need to focus on in the near future: the youth vote. That is, the 18-25 year-olds who are consistently labeled as politically inactive and apathetic. They are the generations the Republicans lost sometime between George W. Bush’s entrance and exit, questionable attorney general firings and secret detention centers, Abu Ghraib and the Libby scandal, monumental deficit spending and soaring gas prices.

But the Republican Party’s failings did not only come about through the appearance of scandal and irresponsible leadership. They were also owing to ideological inconsistency. Proponents of curbing wasteful government spending were disillusioned by the largest spending administration in American history. Advocates of a small federal government were disenchanted with

## resurrecting republicans

the extraordinary executive powers with little transparency that characterized Bush's rule. Lobbyists were extremely influential in Washington and pork projects became a way of life in the legislature—Republicans and Democrats engaged in spending sprees, and few leaders condemned the practice. (This was a major issue in the 2008 presidential race.) Washington politics was in serious need of reform, but it seemed that no one was suited for the task. For younger generations, Bush's administration defined conservatism and Republicanism. It was, after all, the only example they could draw from.

Meanwhile, McConnell argues the Republican Party has paid less and less attention to the issues the youth care about, as well as “kitchen table” concerns. Perhaps the Party has overemphasized the demands of the extreme right, alienating independents, the youth, and moderates of the party. This is clearly the case regarding social issues. The extreme wings of any political party are generally unwilling to compromise and deliberate, and often paralyze effective policy-making. Or perhaps Republicans have been unable to translate regional concerns into broader, national stances. Whatever the case, the outcome is that Republican positions are increasingly perceived as “unfriendly” with the everyday concerns of Americans, on issues ranging from the environment to immigration. For example, Republicans are often perceived as being unconcerned with the plight of America's poor, primarily because of their stances on welfare. Yet this is because the GOP's policies target the systemic problems in order to create equal opportunity for Americans, rather than providing immediate relief that is not sustainable and that does not target the actual problems of inequality and poverty in the United States (as the Democrats do).

The question, then, is not whether the Republican Party should reorient itself to broaden its appeal, but how it should do so. A good starting point is mobilizing the youth vote—roughly 45 million are eligible to vote. The youth vote was key in the 2008 presidential election, constituting approximately 20% of the total vote. They were largely in favor of the Democratic ticket, and their preferred candidate was Barack Obama. In fact, Obama's highest margin of victory in Iowa, which is an extremely important win for any candidate, came from precisely this age group. Last November, exit polls showed that over 68% of 18-29 year-olds voted for Obama, while only 30% voted for McCain. The bottom line is this: if the Republican Party hopes to be a powerful force in the future, the entire party must embrace a true spirit of reform, not a rhetorical one. Although McCain's campaign platform eventually focused on “reform,” the message was not adequately developed and expressed by the Republican Party. Why vote in a single Republican candidate who favors “change,” when

the rest of the party does not condemn the status quo?

But before any real structural reform can take place, the Republican Party must reevaluate its national strategy. It must recreate its fading image of electoral strength, responsible leadership, and ideological unity. It must redefine itself in terms of the needs and concerns of everyday Americans, just as each party must do every few generations. The GOP can no longer afford its image of being too rich, too white, too southern, and too male. Conservative principles, McConnell argues, are not an “abstract” set of ideas. They are universal and relevant, and do not need to be tailored to suit particular groups of people. They work—a fact that has been proven again and again. A reexamination is crucial if Republicans seek to reemerge as a competitive force against the Democrats on a national level. Moreover, the Democrats cannot run on the platform of “changing Washington” every four years, particularly since they now dominate both houses of Congress and the White House. Although the series of electoral losses throughout the last eight years have been somewhat weakening, they have also forced Republicans to rethink their general direction. Yes, the next couple of years will be challenging for the GOP, dominated by a Democratic Senate and House, and a Democratic executive branch. But the Republican Party has the potential to reemerge as a dominant, relevant force in American politics, once it redevelops the structural capacity and coherence to do so. **G**



# Goodbye, Mr. President:

## A Review of the Bush Legacy

**Aaron McGuire**

Many words have been associated with the Bush presidency. “Incompetent” ranks highly. So does “unprepared.” “Ineffectual” is fitting. But most in the media and a majority of the public incorrectly associate Bush with a specific word denoting a movement that he doesn’t represent. Many would consider Bush a “conservative.”

What policy initiatives make Bush a “conservative” president? What sort of an ideology did he present that would make anyone call him that? He presided over an expansion of the federal government that would make Lyndon Johnson envious. He took as prominent causes the expansion of the federal education system, an offensive war with a small dictatorial state, the gradual opening of our borders, the greatest expansion of Medicare in the history of the country, a gradual erosion of civil liberties with the supposed aim of preventing an increasingly elusive concept of anti-U.S. terrorism, and the nationalization of our nation’s banking system.

None of these actions were predicated on bedrock conservative principles. They were predicated on a misnamed “compassionate conservatism,” the watered down ideological middle ground between welfare liberalism and activist militarism. To call Bush a conservative based on his record would be analogous to calling FDR an anarcho-capitalist because of the New Deal, or to calling Mugabe a humanitarian based on his tenure in Zimbabwe. But the image of Bush as a conservative isn’t entirely groundless. Bush has all but dismantled popular conservatism as a serious intellectual movement and replaced it with a “conservative by association” construct. Entities perceived in the public eye – for better or for worse – as bastions of conservatism (consider *National Review*, the *American Spectator*, and other such traditionally hard-right publications) stood behind him and defended the vast majority of his actions, even when they sharply contrasted with overall conservative philosophy. They allowed Bush to become the main representative of ideological conservatism in the public consciousness, and in doing so led the American public and (perhaps most importantly) young Americans to

misunderstand their ideology.

The goal of conservatism is prudent, efficient government that does little but does it as well as it can. A conservative government neither crowds out private firms nor affords special privilege to a select few in perpetuation of a system of trough feeding monopolies. Cutting taxes and inviting a score of special interests to sup at the public trough is not conservatism; it’s poor economic policy. Massive offensive wars are not conservative – a strong national defense is not analogous with a trigger-happy offense. Unprecedented expansion of the federal budget is definitely not conservative. But despite all this, conservatives put on a happy face and placed our former president at the bulwark of their movement. They now reap the consequences. They have become ineffectual, toothless, and sallow, like the parents who tell their teenager not to imbibe or puff while sipping a Vesper martini and taking a drag from a Cuban cigar. There is no heft to their words. Any point they try to present is belied by their actions as a collective movement; they didn’t protest when one of their own did what they caution against. Why would anyone, especially young voters, take any conservative seriously? What reason has anyone given them?

Conservatives of our generation are exposed to this in any political argument. Among our brood, Obama absolutely crushed McCain, pulling 66% of voters age 18 to 29 to McCain’s 32%. It is quite often the case that, in a discussion, many of our peers will espouse conservative principle or give their approval to conservative concepts. But the GOP has been shown to march lockstep behind poorly planned fiscal liberalism (so long as they like the president who peddles it) and foreign adventurism; they have done nothing to show young conservatives that they’re a party with true conservative values. They have, in fact done the opposite. And for the youngest voters, those who weren’t alive in Reagan’s heyday, this is the only image they have of the GOP and of conservatism as a movement. There are no golden days; the only conservatism they know is that which Bush has espoused. That is, the conservatism that isn’t.

## leavingoffice

Our generation is often decried as one obsessed with superficiality and fluff. To a certain extent, this is true – MTV wouldn't pull a profit if there wasn't at least some truth to it. But as a blanket statement, it is false, and to chalk up all of Obama's votes to an idolatry based on his celebrity would be a dreadful mistake. Consider the numbers. George Bush lost the 18-29 youth vote by only 2% in the 2000 election, running on a platform that was traditionally conservative and based on small, efficient government with a hint of social conservatism. Obama's success among the youth has been based not just on his celebrity but also his presentation – he speaks of and presents plans for efficient government that happens to be large. To many in our generation, a large but efficient government is far and above better than a large and inefficient government.

As Bush's nearly-even vote share with Gore in 2000 would indicate, there were quite a few young voters who lived their 20s during the Bush years who split their tickets, voting for Bush in 2000 and Obama in 2008. This isn't a coincidence. Many saw the election as a choice between two candidates proposing bigger government, one proposing efficient largesse and one proposing an inefficient continuation of Bush's years. These are the voters that the GOP needs – those for whom the celebrity of Obama was unimportant. His commitment to efficiency and transparency (whether it was fluff or not) were hallmark conservative values that the Republican party has all but ignored in recent years. Our generation shares these values. To regain a political majority, the GOP must credibly fight for them again.

The worst part about it all for movement conservatives (or for young conservatives eager to defend their views) is that this all isn't to say that Bush hasn't had his successes. He has been an average president, if not a rather decent one. And some conservatives are right to defend him as such. In the long run, however, pointing this out does even more harm. His successes are all things that conservatives shouldn't be getting excited about in the first place, and things that undermine the principles that conservatives claim to uphold. By far, Bush's greatest success has been his revolutionizing and greatly increasing African aid.



Although a great humanitarian accomplishment, it was hardly a “conservative” one. It was a well-intentioned activist accomplishment that would be at home in the upcoming Obama administration. He prevented any recurrence of a terrorist attack for seven years, but at the cost of an assortment of liberties and a massive expansion of government with an entirely new cabinet department. He had many other successes, nearly all of them liberal and activist in nature.

Bush a “true” conservative? That's preposterous. Bush shares more of his general ideology with activist presidents like Woodrow Wilson and Jimmy Carter than he does George Will or Bill Buckley. But the big names of modern conservatism anointed him their hero, and now they must cope with the repercussions. Regaining public credibility and rekindling the young conservative movement that Barry Goldwater bequeathed to Reagan is going to be a long slog for those who traded their values for a guy they liked. I hope that conservatives finally waking up to the dire consequences of selling out will assert a clean break with a president whose tenure – while not, as conventional wisdom would declare, terrible – was entirely antithetical to the movement they built.

It would be shocking if they did. But stranger things have happened. ¶

# Ba-“rock star”

Lingfeng Li

America is officially obsessed with Barack Obama. The attention is not unwarranted — Obama is our new president (and the first black American president, for that matter), *TIME* magazine’s 2008 person of the year, and even a Grammy winner. Millions lined up for his inauguration, as one day housing advertisements were priced in the thousands online on Craig’s List. The media talked endlessly about Americans who simply wanted to be a part of something historic, even if it meant they would only see other spectators and not the man himself.

The media spotlight on his family is equally glaring. *New York Magazine*’s “The Cut” blog, which provides frequent updates on the fashion industry, is absolutely infatuated with Michelle Obama. In early January (citing a source no less prestigious than the *New York Times*), they argued that Michelle could save the fashion industry, currently flagging under recession-related problems. Her fashion selections, they say, have given brands like J Crew and Jason Wu big boosts. She’s even going to be on the cover of *Vogue*.

Scarcely a day passed at the beginning of the year without some mention of Obama’s daughters and their move to the Sidwell Friends School, as images of the prestigious private school infiltrated numerous publications and television programs. The young girls have an entire host of celebrities offering to entertain them or set up playdates.

With so much attention paid to everything from Obama’s smoking habits to his exercise routine, it can be difficult to make an Obama presidency simply about the issues. Obama has never been merely a politician — since his appearance at the Democratic National Convention in 2004, his political career has relied heavily on popular themes and charismatic oration. As America’s youth embraced Obama, they were embracing the Obama mystique as much as they were embracing Democratic principles.

The amount of charisma Obama brings to politics is not a negative in a time when the US requires extensive public relations work with the rest of the world, but his presidency will ultimately be shaped by the issues. And yet, it may be the issues that are neglected. During the course of the presidential campaigns, I actually felt that most Obama supporters at Duke could see past his charm and inspect his policies. But as I read the numerous articles about Obama’s inauguration, many of them focused on politically irrelevant topics like the free concert on the Mall, I became increasingly skeptical about whether the masses could see past Obama’s personality and get to the heart of his politics.

I don’t mean to criticize Obama enthusiasts for their excitement. Their candidate has come a long way to reach this pivotal



moment and supporters have every right to be exuberant. But, there are more worthwhile goals than chasing celebrities on the National Mall or flocking to a city for the sole purpose of telling a good story in the future. Politics should not be about personality, and it is important that young voters in particular do not forget about the issues that matter most.

Paraphrasing the wise words of Alfred Pennyworth, it is what we do that defines us. Obama’s entire candidacy has been predicated on the need for change. But change, especially in the current economic environment, is not simply going to follow excitement and celebrity appearances. Young voters must be wary that Obama should not merely be judged by the content of his character, but by the legislation he actually supports.

Americans (and editors) should ask themselves how a story on Malia and Sasha’s first day of school is newsworthy and, if it does have some cultural relevance, if it’s more newsworthy than the \$825 billion Obama wants to spend. On the Saturday prior to the election, I read a story on MSNBC online detailing Obama’s train ride to Washington and various abstract musings falling under the general category of excitement and hope. It’s hard to see the value in printing stories like this time and time again. America is hopeful — I get it. Meanwhile, I continue to hope that other young voters will also be able to get past Obama mania and examine his policies objectively, with admiration but a fair amount of skepticism.

Excitement about politics is great for our country. But to follow a politician blindly just because he is charming is silly. Find one example in history where that kind of loyalty has ended well.

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# A Market-less Place?

## *The need for competition in Duke Dining*

Isaac Wang

My friends and I often compete in describing our worst dining experiences at Duke. My stories don't always win, but they do have shock value. My worst encounter occurred when I asked for ice cream at Subway and the server spent over 15 minutes trying to find an ice cream bowl, leaving me and other customers waiting. She returned at the end with a cup from the Great Hall, and I couldn't understand why she didn't just use a Subway beverage cup to begin with.

Similar stories are volleyed around campus everyday about Subway's employees, Alpine's employees, the Marketplace's employees, and so on. Students generally assume that these are isolated experiences that occur on an unlucky day. However, they don't realize that the problem lies in the system. The widespread ineptitude is actually institutionalized by Duke's progressive leftist agenda and its commitment to "worker rights" at the expense of all else. Much is made of the effect of Duke's ideological leftism in the classroom, but the very structure of basic university services mirrors this viewpoint as well.

The problem lies in the fact that Duke operates its own microcosm of misguided socialism. Duke Dining (along with many other divisions) is not driven by market principles of supply and demand, competition, and accountability. This results in the poor service, high food prices, and sub-par food quality. Of course, left wing ideology seeks to protect the rights and interests of the worker and never those of the consumer. Increased product quality, service, cheaper prices, and competitiveness are seldom on the agenda of leftists. Their ideology has continuously sought to bring higher wages to workers (regardless of productivity), pro-

vide protection from outside competition, and navigate around market supply and demand in misguided attempts to increase the welfare of the socio-economically disadvantaged.

The empirical evidence on the failure of such policies consists of a history of disastrous results across the world. Economies in Europe during the 1970's were on the brink of bankruptcy due to large unproductive work forces that demanded high social welfare payments. This resulted in massive welfare retrenchment policies, extremely high unemployment rates (roughly 10% in continental European countries today), a lack of competitive products, and a much lower standard of living than that of the United States and Japan. Left-wing labor policies make it extremely difficult to fire people in many European nations, rendering employers reluctant to hire new employees. This not only creates a less productive economy but also contributes to persistently high unemployment. The protectionist policies that dominated economies of Latin America in the 1930's-1960's, known as Import Substitution Industrialization, resulted in inefficient and obsolete national industries and, worse, a focus on industrial development that impoverished local commodity producers. Consequently, the region has been marred by unending labor conflicts and has been largely forgotten in the world economy due to a lack of competitiveness with China and India, which are building prosperity through hard work and market reforms.

Closer to home, leftist labor policies are a large reason why Washington, DC has a disastrous public school system and an insurmountable stalemate with the teacher's union. The situation

is so bad that Mayor Adrian Fenty has hired a Democrat, Michelle Rhee, to clean house by implementing so-called “business principles” of accountability, cost control, and economic incentives for teachers to bring acceptable public education to DC students. As always, quality, service, prices, and competitiveness suffer when the left works ardently to defend worker’s rights and blames their poverty on society.

So how does any of this matter, and how does it affect Duke’s dining system? The best way to approach this is to look at students’ complaints and pinpoint the aspects of Duke’s policies that result in these unsatisfactory experiences.

The first complaint is usually “why are the food options here at Duke so bad?” Duke students don’t have very many practical options outside of the Great Hall and BC Plaza, because Duke Dining has effectively created an oligopoly. An oligopoly is a situation in which a market or industry is dominated by a small number of sellers; firms operate under imperfect competition, and may employ restrictive trade practices (collusion, market sharing etc.) to raise prices and restrict production in much the same way as a monopoly. While collusion may not intentionally be on Duke’s agenda, the university does implement a multitude of policies that enable an oligopoly.

First, Duke students do not have access to the competitive market since their money for food is restricted by Food Points in a “use them or lose them” system that forces students to spend money on campus eateries. This creates a non-tariff barrier that blocks out outside competition from Durham, thus not only limiting our options but also obstructing Durham’s restaurant owners from penetrating a wealthy market and bringing money to the Durham community. Durham residents should be outraged. While Duke does operate a merchants-on-points system to mitigate the problem by allowing students greater options from outside competitors, this program only extended to a limited number of vendors, and students have to pay a pricey premium on top of delivery fees to get outside food.

Furthermore, location is a huge barrier that restricts students to the limited choices available on West Campus. Students are confronted with what I call the “Bush-Kerry situation”: picking the lesser of two evils. When students are hungry, a chain of thought like the following usually runs through their minds: “I hate Duke food. If I order out, it will be expensive and will take forever. This option obviously depends on my class schedule. Grace’s, the Refectory, and Blue Express are all good on occasion, but are much too far away to be reliable for an average day. If I eat on West, I get to choose from Alpine (Sandwiches), Twinnies (Sandwiches), Subway (Sandwiches), Bella Union (Sandwiches), Saladelia (Sandwiches), Sanford Deli (Sandwiches), McDonalds (unhealthy sandwiches and fries), and Chick-fil-A (unhealthy sandwiches and fries).” Most places can simply be labeled as “overpriced grab-and-go sandwich/coffee shops.” Duke’s food scene can be described as numerous mutations of Einstein Bros Bagels. It’s a painful reality for most students with taste buds, and it becomes clear that Armadillo (diarrhea) and Loop (high-calorie salads, burgers, and milkshakes) are students’ primary destinations. The Great Hall (a disastrous attempt at multi-cultural food) sells bad sushi, an Indian food vendor (Sitar) that never changes its menu, and Pan-Asian and Italian vendors that continue to exit through a revolving door. As you know, Duke



AARON MCGUIRE

## acloserlook

gives a contract to a company (remember Aramark) to provide food to Great Hall and Marketplace, rather than just let outside restaurants compete. Couple this with the oligopoly that limits food choices, and the Dining program becomes an absolute disaster. This is what happens when liberal ideology is unchecked. Instead of this frustrating arrangement, why not just remove barriers to entry and have restaurants from the outside compete on an even playing field? Take a trip to the food court at the Grand Asia Market near Cary, compare and contrast the food quality and service to that of the Great Hall, and you will know what you could be having. In economics, this intangible difference of forgone production is called “Dead Weight Loss.”

This brings us to our next question: “Why do Duke’s vendors continue to stay open despite bad service and food?” This reality puzzles the majority of students who’ve grown up in capitalist societies where products and services continue to get better in the face of market competition. Every surviving restaurant chain in a capitalist society operates on the principle that providing quality food and service to the customers is the only way to earn returning customers in a competitive society where customers have a variety of options. When restaurants fail to provide an enjoyable experience, people don’t come back. Period. Under these conditions, Subway and Alpine would have failed long ago if they continued to provide their same quality of service. The employees’ poor attitude and incompetence would drive Duke students to find other food options. Subway and Alpine would run out of business and be replaced by better dining options if they didn’t hire new and improved personnel. But it is precisely because Duke doesn’t operate under market principles that it has allowed Subway and Alpine to flourish. In fact, there’s not a single vendor in the Great Hall in its current state that serves food good enough to be served in a restaurant.

Because Duke’s dining system is an oligopoly, students who quickly tire of the limited options inevitably have to return to Alpine for breakfast and Subway for lunch when they cannot endure rotating Chick-fil-A, McDonalds, and Armadillo (all very unhealthy options). Worst of all, Subway and Alpine will never run out of business under the current system, because the restricted market maintains a high demand for their food. Devoid of competition, neither eatery will ever have to face the prospect of going out of business, and hence neither will ever improve the quality of its employees or business processes. See if that kind of thinking will survive one mile off campus. Problems such as poor tasting food, small portions, and bad service would all be reduced if more market forces were allowed into the system. Duke’s dining has no room to improve because it has no room to fail.

The last complaint is “Why is Duke’s food unreasonably expensive when it is so bad?” The policies behind this reality are even more shocking. Duke University runs its eateries via a central command system. While most of the campus eateries that receive protectionist privileges do operate by market

principles outside of Duke, they do not do operate that way within Duke because of university policies. Unlike most businesses, they do not handle any of the expenses that relate to rent and utilities (water, electricity, gas) because Duke hires people to handle them. This essentially takes an important variable out of management’s hands and gives it to an extra (costly) middleman to process utility expenses at a universal rate. As a result, Duke charges vendors a fee higher than that of management handling its own utilities in an outside environment.

Furthermore, Duke’s dining system handles all of the restaurant’s finances involving the Duke Card. Worse still, Duke forces campus eateries to use its register machines and its specially designed (and very expensive) paper for receipts and signatures. Again, all campus eateries have to pay a heavy premium to Duke University to handle all of these non-negotiable procedures. Lastly, Duke’s dining employees are all part of Duke’s employee system, and eateries are forced to follow Duke’s labor requirements. Duke’s dining employees are almost impossible to fire because of their participation in labor unions (another favorite institution of the left). I’ve seen this first hand when I asked my manager at Trinity Café why one of the Durham employees was still allowed to work there despite a bad attitude and serious incompetence. His response, as a manager, was “Duke makes it so that I can’t fire her, I can only motivate her.” Our policies should allow a free-flow of labor movement and implement merit based compensation (another crowning achievement of the market) to filter bad employees and handsomely reward the good employees, who are the true victims of this decaying system. Instead, the unions with the support of liberal establishments continue to fight for higher wages for workers despite the poor service of a large segment of the employee base.

The circumstances are almost comical, and yet those in control continue to ardently push a “progressive” agenda. The results are very similar to the outcomes of government bureaucracies. The systems and processes are inefficient due to the insertion of a middleman that is not driven by market forces, the employees do not receive a compensation that matches their performance for better or worse, and the increased costs are passed on to the consumer without the increase of service and quality. It is clear that restaurants off campus that handle their own internal processes are cheaper and better tasting, and have better service. Duke’s involvement in the dining system has stymied the market and disappointed the students who hold the dining system to a high standard.

As universities become ever more competitive in their attempts to attract the best students and students pay ever more for living costs, it should go without saying that Duke Dining, an integral part of university, should improve as rapidly. It is time Duke does what is in the interest of the students (as well as its own recruiting goals). Market reform is an urgent matter that cannot wait any longer. **G**

# Give me my space: *Duke needs to safeguard privacy*

Andrew Tutt

For most of us, the details of getting online are murky. It is enough to set it up once a year and never worry about it again. Yet to anyone who has ever looked a little deeper, the Internet poses a grave threat to our conventional understanding of privacy. If we are to safeguard what little we can of our right to anonymity online, we will need Duke to become a partner in that venture. Duke, in short, needs to do its part to safeguard our privacy.

Experts agree that true Internet privacy does not exist. Anyone who cares enough can track down every webpage you have ever visited. They can see what files you have downloaded, who you chatted with and even the contents of your emails. More irksome perhaps, for the most part this is not even illegal. Rather, we are supposed to realize that since our data passes through so many insecure channels on the way to and from our computers that there is simply no possibility of “reasonably” protecting its privacy. Thus, if you’re sending email at work, your boss can legally monitor it, and if your company becomes involved in a lawsuit, your adversary has the legal right to review it. If you send email from home, anonymous hackers can intercept it, and if you are suspected of a crime, law enforcement officials with a warrant can seize your electronic correspondence. The danger in all this comes from that fact while most of us are aware that employer-mediated internet access should be treated as public, few of us realize that the same actually applies when we get online anywhere.

Perhaps most troubling for students, your Internet service provider (ISP) may legally be able to scrutinize your email, and it is here where the issue hits home. You see, for the most part we can at least take comfort in the fact that invading our Internet privacy is very difficult to do. The information someone can gather about us is vague, numerical, or buried with the data of

potentially millions of others. But one group can see it all with ease: the Internet Service Provider through which we connect to the Internet. For Duke Students, that service is provided by the university.

At the start of each semester, we link the numerical identification that our computer sends out to the internet, its IP address unique as a fingerprint, with our NetIDs. Thus, Duke, which can see every webpage we visit and every email we send as our ISP, can also tell exactly who did what, because it possesses the crucial link between that number and our identities.

If you think Duke would never invade the privacy of its students, consider this: When the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) advanced claims that students were sharing files illegally, the university told the RIAA which students did the downloading by looking up the IP address they were asked about and reporting which student’s NetID was associated with it. Never mind that your roommate actually did it on your account, or that your NetID was stolen, your IP was spoofed by another, or that the IP the RIAA asked about may not have even done the deed—the university simply turned over this critical bridge between you and your semi-anonymous online identity to the RIAA.

Yet, far more important than the debate about whether keeping and turning over those records was the proper policy, is analyzing the university’s response to downloading as a whole. In an effort to “protect” students, the university considered more invasive policies, rather than fewer—proposing that Duke consider purchasing software to monitor our online activity and warn students that if Duke can see that an illegal download is occurring, so can anybody else. That sort of policy is like taking

Unlike most other policies, which would normally brook a strong backlash, everything that Duke does to monitor, restrict or otherwise alter the Internet provided to its students can happen without any knowledge.

a sledgehammer to a penny nail. Indeed, some of the software considered could have literally given Duke a record of every website every student ever visited.

And that is perhaps the most dangerous thing about the possibility that Duke might invade our privacy electronically. Unlike most other policies, which would normally brook a strong backlash, everything that Duke does to monitor, restrict or otherwise alter the Internet provided to its students can happen without any knowledge. There is no accountability. While I admit my search has not been exhaustive, I have not been able to come up with a single document that says the university will specifically not read the emails of its users, even if it has a legal right to do so. Nor that Duke will not restrict websites it deems inappropriate, or that it will not slow down the Internet for some users and speed it for others. In fact, in a medium with such important stakes with regard to our very identity, the people to whom we are most vulnerable are guided by the broadest of doctrines: the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Yet this document, really the be-all-and-end-all of electronic privacy in an educational context, deals exclusively with access and restriction of academic records—and makes no mention at all of any of the matters so far addressed—and so we are back where we started.

The truth is, this is not a political issue. Access to the Internet is a matter of freedom of information and even freedom of speech. Duke's ability to decide that students who visited websites relating to any number of morally questionable ideas (such as a website that sells term papers) were in breach of some university policy smacks of the most invasive of intrusions.

Some students have already felt the effects of Duke's invasive policy. The website Juicy Campus, which by any objective measure is a despicable website, has occasioned postings of insults, perversions, and even anonymous threats. When threats have been made on the website, universities have in the past tracked down the posters using their power as ISPs to figure out who made the posting. While it's true that threats against individuals and institutions are wrong, is it not also wrong to violate someone's anonymity in this way? Would an institution that would do that also allow itself to read the emails sent out to the supposedly private listservs of its students? Duke needs a new procedure for developing the policies by which what we do is monitored in a way which does not invade our privacy. The alternative is to censor ourselves into oblivion. **G**



AARON MCGUIRE

# Books: *Beet*

Rachel Stern

Roger Rosenblatt's *Beet* is an entertaining satirical portrait of higher education that explores the infinite comic potential of modern university culture and politics.

Rosenblatt's Beet College is an elite institution in the north-eastern U.S., founded by a pig farmer on his farmland. The novel is full of porcine puns, some of which (like the school mascot, a pig named Latin) are clever or cute. Other pig references, however, are more pointed: for instance, the names of the two main academic buildings on campus, Old Pen and New Pen. Rosenblatt explains that they were formerly piggpens (and that the faculty commons is a converted slaughterhouse!), but leaves it to the reader to decide which groups on campus represent the pigs and pig farmers. And it is no easy task to determine whether the domineering, profit-obsessed trustees; the "dither of deans"; the groveling president; the insidious, endlessly self-centered ex-hippie faculty members; or the slacker students who play on their professors' pathetic need for their approval rather than attempting to obtain a solid education, behave the most like pigs.

*Beet* is on the verge of being shut down. Not only is the college not turning a profit (a matter of great importance to the chairman of the board of trustees), its endowment has disappeared. Earnest, idealistic English professor Peace Porterfield, whom Rosenblatt describes as a modern incarnation of Candide, is selected to chair a committee of myopic, self-obsessed faculty members tasked with creating a new curriculum good enough to save the college. And a small band of students, led by a southern belle turned radical poetess, has decided that it has no use for school and will force it to close even in the unlikely event that Porterfield's committee succeeds.

A cynical professor expresses one of the central questions of the novel: "Do you really think anyone would care if Beet went out of business? And that's the way most people would think of it – going out of business. Would anyone care if every college in the country went out of business? [...] If you gave them the choice of tearing down all the colleges and putting Starbucks in their places, or better still, offered them one hundred smackers for every college torn down, don't you think they'd line up around the block?" Rosenblatt suggests that, what with all the bells and whistles, the influx of courses "specifically designed for popularity," the political correctness on the one hand and the drive for profit on the other, most people – even those at the cen-

ter of our educational institutions – have lost sight of the value of a rigorous, old-fashioned college education. If society has devalued universities, it is in large part because they no longer seem to serve the purpose for which they were originally intended.

The vision of university life presented in *Beet* is highly absurdist, but often embarrassingly realistic. The story is sprinkled with anecdotes that could have been plucked from a college paper. A recent Beet graduate has sued the school's "Department of Ethnicity, Gender, and Television Studies" because, "upon applying for a position at Microsoft, he'd presented his honors thesis, 'No Transgender Asians on Will and Grace: An Oversight or an Insult?'" The human resources official not only laughed out loud but called in her coworkers and bosses, Bill Gates among them, to share the fun. 'Okay,' said Gates after the laughter had subsided. 'What did you really study?'" A professor from the "I Am Woman Center" and self-described author of "the seminal work on Mariah Carey" is known for having "written and performed a one-woman play [...] called Yeast, in which she dressed as the infection. Reviewers found it 'vile yet brave'." A small group of white students dons blackface in an attempt to get a professor fired for having used the word "niggardly". The campus includes a "Free Speech Zone," a "twelve-by-twelve-foot plot of lawn" designated as "the area in which anyone connected with the college [can] voice an opinion."

Yet not all of the novel's humorous anecdotes or outlandish plot twists ring so true. The kernel of realism, and therefore the sting, of Rosenblatt's farce is sometimes missing. Rosenblatt fails to acknowledge the full absurdity of nonfictional university life. While he provides glimpses into the follies of political correctness on campus, he fails to explore them in much depth, reaching instead for arbitrary gags such as a music professor who incessantly bursts into song during committee meetings. (If only he knew how little of such embellishment college life needs to descend into farce!)

Nonetheless, he provides a highly amusing, and often a faithful, vision of university life. He bypasses the opportunity to create a campus at once perfectly true to life and abundantly absurd, preferring to convey a broader criticism of modern university culture without singling out any one factor. Rosenblatt pokes fun at all the absurdities of academia, but, like Professor Porterfield, holds out some hope for its redemption. **G**

# Movies:

## *An American Carol*

**Jeff Ditzler**

In the October 2008 film *An American Carol*, a group of Hollywood stars put their talents in the service of their political views. This isn't new. But *An American Carol* distinguishes itself from the majority of political films (like the rash of melancholy anti-war movies put out by Hollywood in recent years) by its humor and its unabashed conservatism. The film opens with Leslie Nielsen (star of *The Naked Gun* and *Airplane!*) at a Fourth of July picnic. Nielsen tells the story of Michael Malone, an obese, hairy, far-left-wing filmmaker from Michigan with a taste for baseball caps (remind you of anyone?) who begins a Scrooge-like quest to abolish Independence Day. Like his counterpart in Dickens, Malone is shown the error of his ways by ghosts (JFK and General Patton) and reconciles with his nephew Timmy, a Navy sailor headed to the Persian Gulf.

Lines like "I love America. That's why I want it destroyed," and "I'm the Angel of freakin' Death, you turdhead" set the movie's lighthearted tone. The comic scenes draw on outrageous premises like an Arab village where everyone is named Mohammed Hussein, a meeting between Neville Chamberlain and a singing Hitler, a Catholic priest hijacking a passenger plane by smacking the pilot with a Bible, and Malone's high-school girlfriend indiscriminately indulging her fondness for "men in uniform" (which extends to astronauts and postmen).

While *An American Carol* is entertaining, I'm not sure how effective it is in spreading the conservative message. Conservative viewers will probably nod in agreement when liberal professors sing a number about their nostalgia for 1968 or when ACLU zombies attack a courtroom where the Ten Commandments are displayed, but less ideologically driven moviegoers might find these scenes over-the-top. In fact, the movie's pro-

War on Terrorism message might have been stronger if the writers hadn't felt the need to shoehorn in other conservative causes.

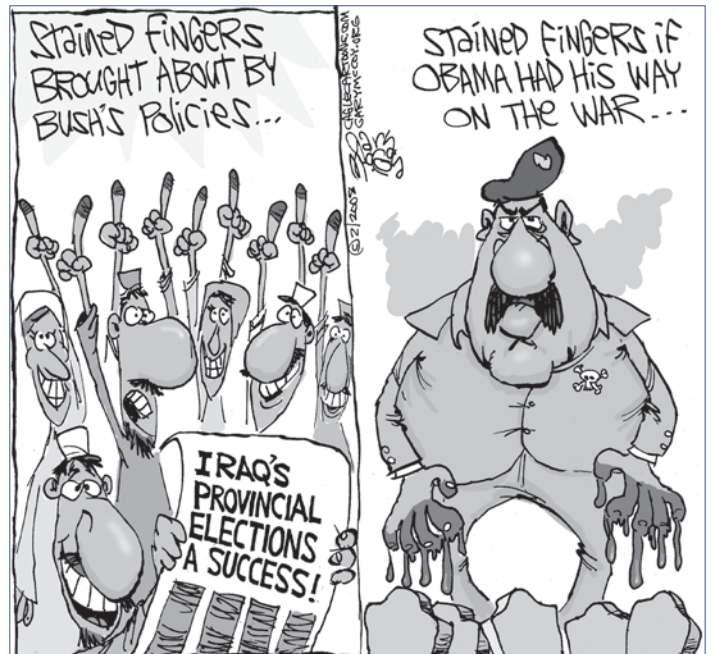
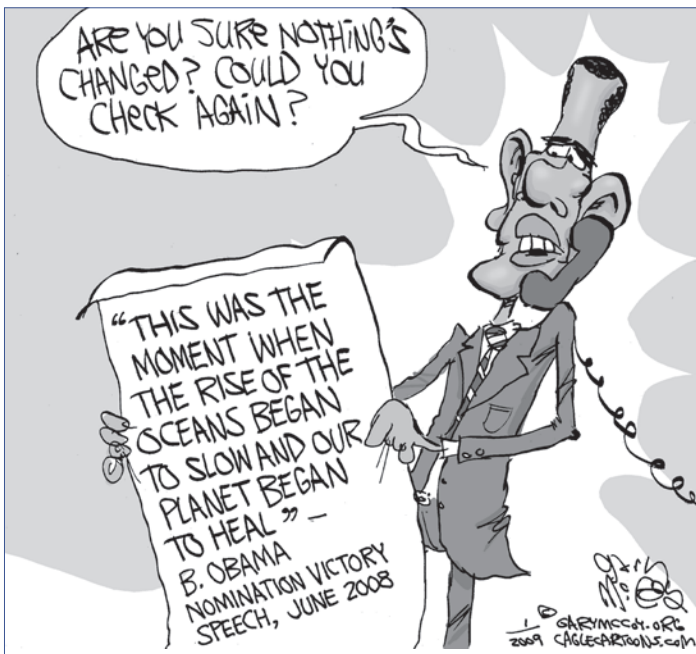
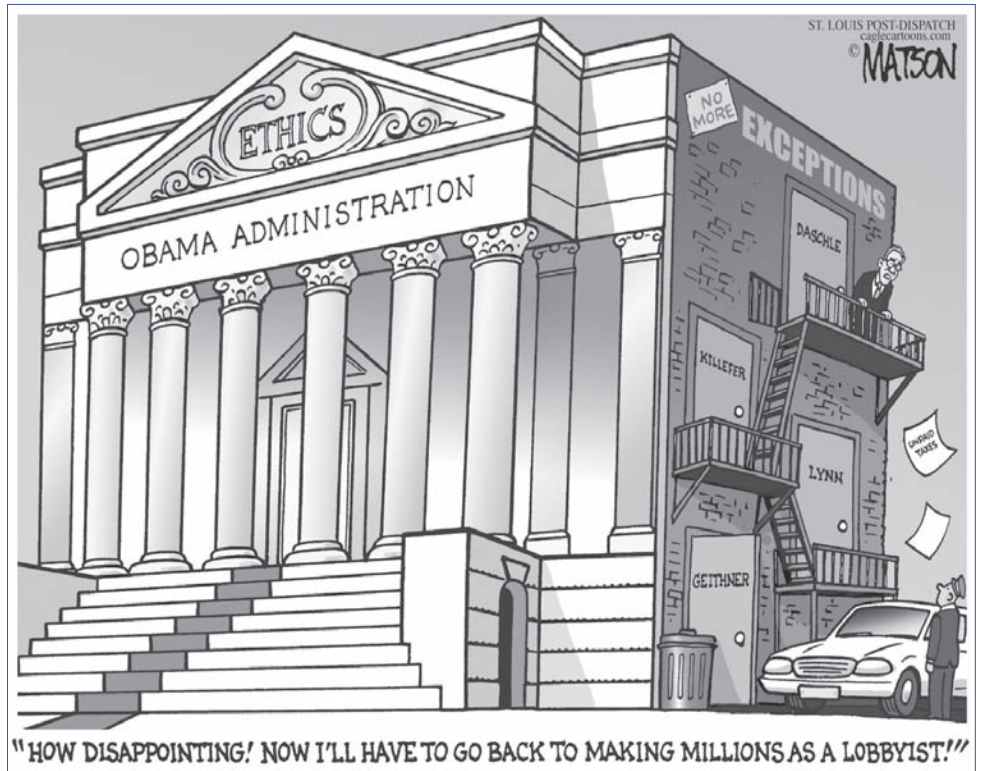
Like the liberal anti-war movies, *An American Carol* suffers from a tendency, if not an obsession, to put more effort into making a political statement than into telling a story. This makes the movie difficult to recommend for those who just want to be entertained without hearing a political message. Ironically, this may weaken the *An American Carol*'s value to the conservative movement; after all, it can't win moderates and wavering liberals over if it can't get them to enter the theater in the first place. This isn't to say, though, that a film has to sacrifice entertainment value in order to make a point.

Several popular movies in recent years have managed to slip in subtle political advocacy: Charlie Wilson's *War* presented a case for an interventionist foreign policy by depicting the sufferings of Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion (and hinting, at the end, that America's hands-off policy after the cold war led to further fighting and the rise of the Taliban), while *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* portrayed same-sex marriage in a positive light. Both these movies, though, focused more on telling a compelling, entertaining story than on conveying an ideological message, and *An American Carol* might have benefited from a similar focus. Hopefully, a renewed interest in the arts among conservatives will lead to more entertaining, and therefore influential, right-leaning films.

Despite its flaws, *An American Carol* is an entertaining spoof of Hollywood's pretentious liberalism. It may be preaching to the choir in some ways, but at least for once it's a conservative choir. **G**

# ART

A graphic commentary  
on our times



Cartoons courtesy of caglecartoons.com.



## Photo Story:

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia spoke at the Star Commons on Thursday, as part of the Law School's "Lives in the Law" series. Momentarily setting aside his status as a member of the Supreme Court, Scalia offered students a spirited recount of his life in law school and his life in the practice and as a professor, as well as some general comments about the state of law education in America today.



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