THE WHITE PAGES
Why hasn’t the Spectator Managing Board had a single black editor in the last four years?
by Josie Swindler

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO BUTLER SEX
by Christopher Beam

REBEL WITH URANIUM Why do dropouts have all the fun?

ALSO: GRANDMA RACIST, PERSONAL ADS, REGIS PHILBIN
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XII

FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS

No. V

COLUMNS

4 CAMPUS CHARACTERS
Cora Dean and Mario Yedidia, these are your lives.

30 DIGITALIA COLUMBIANA
Her breasts at attention like a pair of sickly toads.

37 PERSONAL ADS
Magazine staffers seek readers’ attention, virginity.

39 CAMPUS Gossip
Free pork, gentility, Kwame Spearman.

SPECIAL SECTION: RACE AT COLUMBIA

Josie Swindler 7 WHITE PAGES
Why are there so few blacks at the Spectator?

David Plotz 14 BLACKLISTED
Why won’t Columbia answer questions about affirmative action?

Hector Chavez 17 GRANDMA RACIST
Face it, your family has one too.

FEATURES

Brendan Ballou 18 REBEL WITH URANIUM
Why do dropouts have all the fun?

Jim Williams 22 WHO WANTS TO LIVE ON REGIS PHILBIN BOULEVARD?
The deal with all those weird street names.

Christopher Beam 24 THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO BUTLER SEX
An essential component of the Hard Core curriculum.

Zach Van Schouwen 28 VILE VIALS
Fast times at suburban Massachusetts drug screening labs.

M. Yates Crowley 31 ALL THE LIVING THINGS OF GLENBROOK
Excerpts from a short story.

CRITICISM

Kabir Singh 34 PAINT THE TOWN GOAT

Philip Fileri 35 THIS IS 18TH CENTURY SPINAL TAP
Film Review: Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story.

Paul Barndt 36 THE ZOO KEEPER
Book Review: Marjorie Williams’s Washington Zoo

WWW.theblueandwhite.org  COVER: “Voiceless” by Jerone Hsu

FEBRUARY 2006
Mario Yedidia

Mario Yedidia, C’07, has recently quit smoking, and it shows. Sitting across from me, he nervously chews gum and sips a large cup of coffee. Before our conversation even begins, I know a lot about him. I have read about Mario the child actor, slam poet, and political activist. Now, I am about to get a better understanding of Mario the man. I had pictured a hipster with trendy clothes and a killer smile. Instead I get someone who blends easily into the Cafe 212 crowd. Dark-haired with a few days worth of stubble, he speaks with a welcome, unforced friendliness.

Though best known as the mid-90s child star of the children’s film *Warriors of Virtue*, Mario played opposite a team of kangaroo warriors, and then starred in the Robin Williams vehicle *Jack*. A Google image search turns up picture after picture of cute young Mario, and a page of his own on Wikipedia. While attending an elite private school in San Francisco, he rocked the local slam poetry circuit, making his way to the Youth Speaks Poetry Slam Finals. The strong political bent of his poetry hinted at an activist future. He worked as a union organizer in New York City, and he took a semester off in 2004 to organize a get-out-the-vote effort in Florida as part of the League of Pissed Off Voters.

Mario convinced Bryan Mercer, C’07, to accompany him for that semester in Florida. Together they campaigned for a slate of progressive candidates and organized students from local colleges for an election eve sleepover at the Tallahassee City Hall. Neither Mario nor Bryan drive (legally), so the two pedaled around the swing state on bikes.

Returning from Florida, Mario was tempted to commit to organizing full-time instead of going back to school. Instead, he fully embraced his role as a student, though not without reservations about Columbia’s “exceedingly elite” attitude. A history and anthropology double major (with a focus on African-American studies), most of his time now is devoted to studying. “I’m not here to drink beer and smoke marijuana,” he said. “I’m from San Francisco. We have better weed out there anyway.”

Columbia is full of aspiring political leaders and would-be grassroots heroes, but not all of them have Mario’s background. His ancestry—Jewish father, Colombian mother—has helped him maintain a genuinely open mind and ability to communicate. Since losing guaranteed housing in the course of his semester off, he no longer lives in Columbia’s residential bubble, but in Washington Heights. And unlike many Columbia activists, he’s not sitting on College Walk, screaming in between classes about Bush’s record. He’s in Brooklyn organizing workers, in Tallahassee educating voters, in San Francisco speaking out through his art.

In a poem from the San Francisco days, “Homage to Chinese and Mexican-American Day Laborer,” Mario wrote:

…If we are to change the course of this purported meritocracy
Where hypocrisy reigns
And I daresay a first step lies
In looking the next Chinese or Mexicano-American
day laborer we meet straight in the
eyes.

What defines Mario Yedidia is his readiness to
look everyone—from Robin Williams to disenfran-
chised voters—straight in the eyes. -Will Snider

CORA DEAN

Strolling along the beach in Gulangyu this sum-
mer, Cora Dean, C ’06, noticed a crop of factories
had sprung up along the opposite shore and were
now dumping chemicals into the waters where she
swam as a child. This, she says, is part of the reason
she’s to the left of everyone. Even you.

She’s often difficult to argue with, as her lefty-
cred is unimpeachable. As her first year roommate,
I can attest to this. Her early youth was spent in
several villages in China, including Gulangyu, an
island off the coast. She shared a bathroom with
six families while eating meals cooked on the hot-
plate that served as a kitchen. Old Chinese ladies
pinched her cheeks and dispensed parenting advice
to her mother, especially when her father would
speed off to other villages on his motorcycle to do
research. And even after she settled in Montreal,
where her father is a Sinologist at McGill, her up-
bringing was a collective enterprise, undertaken by
friends, neighbors, grandparents, and, occasionally,
parents.

Like her history, like the clothes and the books
and the papers strewn throughout her Broadway
room, Cora Dean is all over the place. Her stagger-
ing disorganization seems to have less to do with
slovenliness than it does with her uncontrollable
charitable impulses. She’s simply unwilling to with-
hold the gift of her interest from any person or pur-
suit, even if it means she forgets to do her laundry.

Unless there’s math involved. She really doesn’t
like math.

But Cora seems to have fingers in all pies liberal
or literary, many of which she’s assembled herself,
filling niches most people didn’t know were there.
It’s not only that she pursues what interests her.
Anyone can do that. It’s that she invents avenues
that invite other people to explore what interests her.
When she entered the Creative Writing program as
a first-year, she founded a Creative Writing club that
included occasional readings and cookies. It didn’t
last long, but she plans to resurrect it, this time
with community service overtones, and is engaged
in discussions with the creative writing department
on bringing creative writing workshops to schools
in Harlem. The Undergraduate Theory Reading
Group, which Cora co-founded, spent last semes-
ter riffing on the theme “emerging from the West.”
She’s also filming a documentary on the Finnegans
Wake Society, a group that meets monthly to tackle a
single page of Joycebabble.

She’s not so much a serial joiner as a serial found-
er. Even her major, French post-colonial studies,
didn’t really exist before Cora, after a rapid cycle
through myriad other majors including French,
Chinese, and Comparative Literature, decided it
should.

This was done after she abandoned the idea of be-
coming a third-generation China scholar. Her grand-
father, David Dean, was a cultural attaché to Taiwan
and helped gain the country international recogni-
tion. And though she spent last summer helping her
father research Taoist temple associations and trade
routes in the Fujian province of her youth, she has
her own plans. When asked how she plans to sur-
vive without selling out, Cora seems confident that
there’s a way, albeit a modest one. Maybe she’ll go
to Cameroon, or return to China and help a friend
write comic books on Taoist myths. She doesn’t plan
to be comfortable and says she wants to live “in a
way that’ll hurt people less.” Surely, there’s an orga-
nization for that. -Kathy Gilsinan
This issue of *The Blue and White* has been brought to you in part by the Office of the University Chaplain and the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

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THE WHITE PAGES

Why hasn't the Spectator Managing Board had a single black editor in the last four years?

By Josie Swindler

Last fall, when I was the Spectator’s news training editor, I may have learned more from watching the first-years than they learned from listening to me. On day one, as I sat dangling my feet off a table in the front of one of Barnard’s empty classrooms, the newest members of the Spectator news staff trickled in, ready to learn leads, nutgrafs, and interview techniques. I smiled at each of them, they smiled back, and we began—a group of 30, with the lone black girl sitting in the middle.

While the University’s administration prides itself on painting our campus every shade it can find—about 38 percent of the student body is non-white—campus publications have staffs as white as the paper they print on. The current mastheads of the Spectator, The Blue & White, the Columbia Political Review, The Fed, The Jester, the Barnard Bulletin, The Current (well, it’s Jewish), the Birch (well, it’s Russian), and the Citadel (well, it’s conservative) don’t contain a single black editor. In the past four years, the Spectator Managing Boards, the top level of editors, have included 53 different people, with 43 of them white, two Hispanics, and eight Asians (six of whom were in business, photo, production, or web design).

The Blue & White has similar numbers, on a much smaller scale. Of its 11 current editors, none are black, one is Hispanic, and two are Asian.
When it comes to demographics, Columbia’s campus publications don’t adequately represent the student body. So, what is keeping students of color from leading journalism on campus? To understand why there hasn’t been a black Editor-in-Chief of the Spectator in more than a decade, one must determine whether students of color aren’t inclined to join these publications, or whether these publications aren’t inclined to welcome them.

If a black person succeeds on Columbia’s journalism scene, he or she hasn’t caught any breaks—instead, that person has overcome an ingrained tendency the current editors have to favor people who think as they do. Success at these publications has a lot to do with talent, but may have more to do with having attended a high-powered high school with a well-financed newspaper, seeing reflections of oneself in the coverage, and having the ability to readily assume the role of teacher’s pet to editors desperate to double as mentors. Oh—and being white helps.

The 129-year-old Spectator, independent since 1962, rules this one-publication campus and knows it. With a circulation of 10,000, it is a behemoth of campus publishing, and one of the largest student groups on campus—perhaps the only one of its size not focused on culture or politics. It may be the only student publication whose life isn’t in question with each new semester: its annual budget of nearly a million dollars dwarfs the funding other publications receive from the Activities Board and advertising. The Spectator’s word—especially within the editorial page—is the only daily word on campus and many see it as capable of setting the tone for debate.

Even if the editorial page does not always reflect the prevailing views of the student body, the paper theoretically serves as its representative. The paper has more trouble connecting to its audience in practice. “You can read the Spec and know who it’s for, and it’s definitely not for me,” said Jennifer Oki, C’07, and president of the Black Students Organization. It’s unclear whether the Spectator should claim such representation when its staff fails to reflect the student body’s diversity. Despite an aversion to reporting on itself, the Spectator must look at what’s wrong when some students see it as unrepresentative of the Columbia student body.

The current mastheads of the Spectator, THE BLUE & WHITE, the Columbia Political Review, The Fed, The Jester, the Barnard Bulletin, The Current (well, it’s Jewish), the Birch (well, it’s Russian), and the Citadel (well, it’s conservative) don’t contain a single black editor.

The problem is that no one knows the right approach. Every editor in recent memory claims to believe in the importance of diversifying the staff. But neither camp—the group advocating better coverage through representative staffers, and the group that believes better coverage will lure the underrepresented—has acted.

“We can’t help the fact that historically and currently the staff is composed of Columbia College students,” Moncada said. This is certainly true—but over one third of the student body is non-white, and many of the non-white students feel that they aren’t being represented. They’re right.

Of the 228 people who have served on the Spectator Associate and Managing Boards over that same
In fairness to the Spectator, blacks and Hispanics rarely apply for positions. During last December's application process, 30 people turned in an interest sheet for a managing board position; of the seven non-whites, none were black, and two were Hispanic. Of the 18 applicants who constitute the current board, two are minorities, none Hispanic.

Moreover, the paper has no trouble filling editor positions. There are many very good, future professional journalists who find their own way there. The past three editors-in-chief were offered jobs at *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, and *The Washington Post*, respectively, prior to graduation. They no doubt are finding that the professional world is barely better in having reporters who racially represent the people being covered. For reasons similar to what's
keeping them from the Spec, students of color aren’t entering the field of journalism at nearly the same rates white students are. But in the meantime, with people of such caliber volunteering at the Spectator, there is no obvious need to ask others to join. The one place in the paper in which people are recruited, the column system, yielded the only two black students whose bylines consistently appeared in the paper last fall.

This understanding would be most crucial to the Op-ed page, the main public forum on campus. But the page has had one black columnist for the past year, Candyce Phoenix, whose column was titled “Color Commentary.”

“After they asked me [to apply], I reasoned that I couldn’t criticize them for not having more people of color on the staff if all the people they asked turned them down,” Phoenix said. “Basically, it was time to put up or shut up.”

Over the last four years, five of 41 Spectator opinion columnists have been minorities, including one Asian, one Hispanic, and three blacks. There have been five minority editorial associate editors or editorial board members out of 28 total. In the last four years, no minority has served as Opinion Editor.

Just a few years ago, the Spectator didn’t have as many resources to address the lack of diverse perspectives in its pages. “You’re so desperate to fill the paper that you don’t have time to reflect on the balance of coverage,” said Alaya Johnson, ’04, 2002’s city news editor, who quit the position a semester early. “You have all these lofty visions but so few resources.” The Spectator even lacked would-be editors. Johnson and her predecessor Simone Sebastian, ’03, both of whom are black, ran unopposed for city editor in 2002 and 2001 respectively; without them, the position, and the majority of the newspaper’s coverage of the wider community, would have died. “I felt like I was fending for myself—and all the black students on campus,” Sebastian said. “If journalism wasn’t my life, I never would have set foot in the Spectator office.”

Both women would be shocked to see the machine that the Spectator has become since the fall of 2004, when it shifted from tabloid size to broadsheet and added color to its front and back pages. The news section ran about four articles per night in 2002 and averaged seven to eight last semester. It looks like a professional paper, more like the archetypes at Harvard and Yale, and its writers feel more professional as a result. The staff has grown immensely.
Moncada has said that he and Managing Editor Tim Shenk, C '07, will invite student leaders to their office weekly to discuss campus news and the paper's coverage of it. Such meetings would presumably touch upon coverage of issues pertinent to race. And while running for Editor-in-Chief, Moncada did send an e-mail to Oki regarding student attitudes toward Spec, though the two have yet to meet. “On campus, the responsibility of the Spec is to cover the issues that the students care about the most,” Moncada said, acknowledging that the newspaper ought to do a better job representing the whole student body than it has in the past.

SOME OF THE NEWS THAT’S FIT TO PRINT

When Sebastian took over as the Spectator’s city editor in 2001, she pushed for coverage of Community Board and environmental issues in Harlem, only to encounter resistance from the other editors. She soon found that she couldn’t do all she wanted. “There was a point where I realized I was going to lose that battle [for coverage],” she said. She knew the student body felt disconnected from the Spec, as well. “There isn’t anything to bring black people in,” like enough coverage of issues and people of interest to the black community, she said.

Coverage is a circular issue for campus publications. If they don’t cover minority issues well, then minorities dislike the publication and don’t consider writing for it. But how can a publication cover minority issues well without minority reporters pushing for those issues to be covered?

Brent Cunningham, Managing Editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and an adjunct at the Journalism School, believes that people will only pursue a profession if they see themselves reflected in it. That’s why, he says, it’s important to recruit minorities actively—as most professional publications try to do. However, on January 16, The New York Observer reported that the clubby offices of most magazines are still glaringly white and imposing a “vanilla ceiling” on writers. Additionally, in June 2005 the Knight Foundation reported that the forced retirements of older (mostly white) employees in the shrinking newspaper industry led to an illusion of increased minority hiring.

Yet professional papers are rallying to recruit minorities, and college papers aren’t; Sebastian said its partially because they aren’t held to the same level of accountability. If no one reads a professional paper, it goes out of business. If people don’t read the Spec, no one knows. Collegiate coverage can suffer from lack of diversity, Sebastian said, but only minority readers lose out.

Since Johnson left, and since this year’s senior class enrolled, the Managing Board has not had a black representative. Many students believe coverage of the minority community suffers as a result.

Oki said she appreciates what the Spec tries to do in its coverage of expansion and the community, but added, “I would like there to be a place other than the police beat where we can read about [blacks and Hispanics].” Oki also noted that the reporter sent to cover “black issues” is often one of the most inexperienced on staff. “If the Spec wants to attract minority writers, it’s going to have to look at” the message it’s putting out, she said.

That message has, at times, confirmed the worst of minority students’ suspicions—that the Spectator just doesn’t get it. On February 24, 2004, the paper weighed in on a series of racial incidents, including an offensive cartoon in The Fed and the Columbia College Conservative Club’s “Affirmative Action Bake Sale.” The end of the staff editorial read: “But in their efforts to achieve a more racially whole university, this week’s protesters should consider that Columbia is probably among the least racist campuses in America. … We’re glad students’ racism sensors are on a hair trigger—this country’s racial past is abominable, and we want to explode slavery’s legacy with all speed. But in students’ zeal for a more perfect university, they should remember that Columbia is more perfect than most.”

A year later, in a staff editorial from January 31, 2005, titled, “A Lasting Problem,” the Spec editorial board wrote, “Columbia is one of the most ethnically diverse universities in America, but the campus is balkanized. At the tables of John Jay, in the bleachers at Levien, racially homogeneous cliques are hanging out everywhere, making little effort to transcend their self-imposed segregation. Most students have hitherto assumed that this self-segregation on campus is benign. … It’s time to talk about concrete measures that we as a community can take to end our self-segregation.”

Another year later, the Spectator’s measures are still undefined.
A few notes of full disclosure: at the Spectator, I’ve served three semesters as an associate news editor, a term as news training editor, and now am a senior writer. More than a year ago I ran for campus news editor, and lost. Now I’m also a senior editor at THE BLUE & WHITE. I have been too busy building a portfolio to worry about the disparity between staffs and students. But then, that’s no excuse.

A little more than a year ago, when I was finishing up a stint as one of five white female associate news editors, the two news editors took us all to dinner so we could suggest our successors. Some of the candidates, mostly freshmen who’d started writing the September before, were predetermined based on talent and charm. Each of us had a favorite for the one or two remaining spots. One of us favored another white girl, another pushed for a minority. My choice happened to be a minority but I liked her because we were interested in the same field.

The point is that even though minorities were running for the position, I can’t remember race coming up in our dinner discussion. We chose people who we liked and who were like us. It didn’t cross my mind that a student of color could bring a new perspective to the paper and open doors to historically underexposed areas of coverage. I could laud my own color-blindness, or curse my blindness of what was best for the newspaper. In the end, a white girl won the race, resulting in five more white news associates (myself included). That girl was probably the only candidate for whom the edit test, position proposal, and interview mattered. But maybe they didn’t matter at all. She fit in.

At the Spectator, and increasingly at other campus publications, the path for some years has been singular for determined and journalistically minded young people. One enters as a freshman writer, by January has become an associate editor on the associate board in news, sports, arts and entertainment or opinion, serves for one calendar year, then runs to become the section editor for the next year on the newspaper’s Managing Board (Spec is now on its 130th MB). The top candidates move on to the corporate board by becoming the Publisher, Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief the next year. Elections take place at the end of each calendar year; students submit a proposal of what they’ll do as editors (some proposals are over 20 pages) and the outgoing Managing Board votes on each candidate. Any staffer will tell you that it’s all very diplomatic and fair—and completely false. Most people are chosen

If any publication wants to cover what’s relevant to the community—and to cover it fairly and adequately—it has not only the task of recruiting minority students, but also the more difficult task of convincing them to aim for uncharted territory: the top of the masthead.
as successors by their editors and mentors weeks or months before the actual job interview takes place. Javonni Judd, C ’09, who is black, came to Columbia from a mostly-white boarding school in New Hampshire, after attending middle school at an almost all-black school in her hometown of Newark, New Jersey. The newsroom was a familiar environment for Judd—like her high school, it is almost all white and she had to find her way without a role model or a critical mass. And though it may not register with white students, Judd definitely noticed the lack of diversity in the newsroom. She dismissed it as “odd” before finding her niche at the Spectator—with the beginning of the semester she begins a yearlong commitment as an associate photo editor.

Judd said that Spec kids are so enthusiastic at times, so pro-Spectator, that it’s easy to get lost in the cliquishness. “Sometimes you don’t feel comfortable if you’re not in the loop.” She hasn’t seen racism at Spec; what has turned her off is the cliquishness, the insularity, and the false authority of certain editors, but she still calls the experience a positive one—and she doesn’t even want to become a journalist.

As more and more people join the paper, more students are running for positions, but when regimes roll over, surprises are few and far between. The question becomes not, “Why don’t black students find success at the newspaper?” but “Who does find success there?” Alice Boone, B ’03, Spectator’s Editor-in-Chief in 2002 said, “[The culture of advancement] limits the pool to mostly white guys who believe it’s their God-given right to run their mouth.” When new editors take the reins, they are so similar to the ones they succeeded that they mightn’t have switched at all. Two years ago, the news editor relinquished the section over to his girlfriend; this year that old news editor’s new boyfriend took over the section. Proximity may breed love, but so might sameness.

THE SILENT COCKTAIL PARTY

Recent incidents of racial insensitivity, from 2004’s cartoon in The Fed suggesting that blacks were invented as slave labor and its resulting protests to last December’s hate crime in which two white students scribbled homophobic, racist, and anti-Semitic sentiments in a Ruggles suite hallway, have highlighted that the campus community has not come as far as students like to think.

Other massive campus groups also lack the sort of diversity they promote. The Executive Board of the College Democrats includes eight whites and one Asian. Even at Spec, the Asian population fits in better than other minority groups, but often Asians find themselves best represented by the design, artwork, and computer staffs. By contrast, when student groups are held accountable to the student body, they represent them much better. The Columbia College Student Council, which is elected by the student body, has four non-whites and one white.

Black students who do get involved in campus activities tend to join cultural organizations like the Black Students Organization, the United Students of Color Council, or Students Promoting Empowerment and Knowledge. Likewise, though the Asian American Alliance and Chinese Students Club are massive and influential bodies, they don’t make the front page nearly as often as the Democrats.

The atmosphere on campus is something like a silent cocktail party. Everyone—from the culture clubs to the politicos to the editors of tomorrow—are checking each other out from afar. But the legitimate fear of awkwardness is keeping the mingling to a minimum. As all involved agree there’s a problem, someone must form a plan. The prominent and influential Spectator is ideally positioned to start the conversation, and then, uniquely, to implement the ideas discussed. Thankfully racism isn’t of concern, but as long as students of color feel alienated by a mostly white newsroom, editors must seek solutions to the institutional barriers that come with running a 129-year-old pillar of Columbia.

This year’s seniors are going to graduate having read a limited number of black Spec bylines in their time at Columbia. The new Spectator Managing Board must realize that the issues concerning students of color on this campus constitute more than a handful of stories and a few thousand words. If any publication wants to cover what’s relevant to the community—and to cover it fairly and adequately—it has not only the task of recruiting minority students, but also the more difficult task of convincing them to aim for uncharted territory: the top of the masthead.❖
The chapter on admissions in the 2005-2006 Columbia College Bulletin has one sentence about affirmative action: “In its final selection, the College seeks a diversity of personalities, achievements, and talents, and of economic, social, ethnic, racial, and geographic backgrounds.” Underwhelmed, I scanned the index for “diversity,” which is not listed, and for “affirmative action,” which is listed for pages 120 and 121-24. This must be a misprint. Page 120 contains the last few lines of a chapter with no discernible connection to affirmative action. Pages 121-24 don’t mention affirmative action either, but they do comprise the bulk of the chapter on African American Studies. No, really. See for yourself.

It was probably naïve to expect that the admissions office would say anything controversial about affirmative action just because I asked. I spent a week trying to get an interview with Jessica L. Marinaccio, the Director of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. I sent her three e-mails, the last of which included a list of questions, which earned me, in order, five days of total silence, two encounters with her highly evasive assistant, an automated response claiming that she was out of the office, and finally a short personal response. (See sidebar for the list of questions I originally sent Marinaccio.)

The response only suggested I check the Bulletin—I’ve already disclosed the fruits of that investigation—as well as the amicus curiae brief that Columbia filed in Gratz v. Bollinger, the landmark Supreme Court affirmative action case initiated while Bollinger was president of the University of Michigan. The brief, supporting Michigan’s affirmative action program, is more helpful than the Bulletin, but it still doesn’t answer my questions. Although I asked how Gratz’s outcome—Michigan’s program was declared an unconstitutional quota system—might have changed the administration’s policies, Marinaccio only sent me the administration’s public position from before the case. Another Columbia employee involved with the admissions office told me that Columbia doesn’t practice affirmative action, although the administration does “work to ensure a diverse student body.” This is a fine
In the index of the Bulletin, "affirmative action" is listed as appearing on pages 120 and 121-24. Page 120 has nothing to do with affirmative action, and pages 121-24 don't mention it either—though they do contain the course listings for African-American Studies.

In high school, I had a friend who was white, Jew-
ish, upper-middle class, and American-born. He spoke English and high school Spanish, and he got a 1600 on his SAT. He checked his race as “Latin American/Hispanic” on college applications and received a full ride at the University of Michigan thanks to a program designed to help minority students with high SAT scores. He turned it down for a partial scholarship for minority students at Princeton. I was appalled, but my friend was unapologetic. His parents, after all, were born in Latin America, the children of German Jews who had escaped from the Nazis. It’s a common story that raises a lot of knotty questions. What is “Latin American/Hispanic,” anyway? How did it get to be a race? What is race?

Malfunctions like this don’t discredit the idea of affirmative action. But does anyone in the administration actually know how it’s supposed to work, or its original purpose? I’d like to assume they do, but my experience with the office doesn’t inspire confidence. Many of the objections I’ve highlighted might be easy to refute, but the admissions office hasn’t bothered to try. The results of the program are touted as a major accomplishment, while its specifics are discussed in hushed tones, if at all.

It would be refreshing if the admissions office would just come out and state the obvious: “Black people have been denied educational opportunities in this country for four hundred years, and the Supreme Court regards some kind of racial preference system as an acceptable, but temporary, means to promote opportunities for blacks and other disadvantaged groups. We recognize this introduces troubling possibilities, but accept it as a necessary sacrifice.” Then students could finally have an informed debate about affirmative action. Most likely they would find some aspects of the current system wanting, and press for change. Most likely they would also approve of the motives for the program. But as long as the administration discourages students from knowing the facts, students will make their own assumptions and myths about affirmative action will circulate campus unchallenged. This is not the kind of diversity Columbia wants to promote.

Letter to the Editor:

I am writing in response to a body of text that appeared in the December issue of your magazine, mocking the title for an event “The Virgin Birth: theology of gynecology”. The writer suggested other “subtitles for the discussion”, amongst them, “Blood in the wine, or blood on the sheets?” and “So, did God hit that or not?”

As a practicing Presbyterian and a Columbia student, I found this paragraph to be distasteful, and was hurt by its belittling of both God and the sacrament of Holy Communion, during the Christmas season, and, equally, in the aftermath of the unfortunate hate crimes committed in Ruggles.

I was troubled by this in the same way that I was perplexed by the scribbling that had appeared on the walls of Ruggles. I think it irresponsible of a publication funded by a college that prides itself on diversity and tolerance to publish something as insensitive as this.

Ken Lee,
C’07
Guess what, Columbia student: I know something about you. It’s a bit awful, and you probably don’t bring it up that often because you’re embarrassed.

Your grandparents are racist.

Ha! I was right, wasn’t I? It doesn’t really matter where they are from, what their own ethnic background is, or how wonderful they have been to you as grandparents. The fact remains that they’ve got beef with some other members of this little melting-pot world of ours.

Now I loathe magazine columnists who fancy themselves supreme commentators on society, writing sweeping generalizations about their audience in an attempt to sound relevant and wise. The phenomenon of racist grandparents, however, is simple fact, and my own canvassing of the student population has been met with uniform and fervent acknowledgement. The main variation can be found in the different ethnicities of the grandparents in question and, in turn, the different other ethnicities that they look down upon.

Within The Blue and White, for example, the backgrounds of the staff include WASP, Jewish, Latin American, and East Asian, to name a few. All their grandparents dislike at least one other category in this list, creating a pattern of mutual condescension that would be best represented graphically by something akin to the recycling symbol. To unnecessarily develop that analogy further, one might say that we children are caught unsuspecting in the middle—a new solidarity forged from within these chasing Mobius arrows of discrimination!

It would be more than foolish at this point to relegate racism to past generations and declare for ourselves a moral victory. Such smugness and complacency too often leads people to forget the very real barriers to equality that exist today. This trivializing attitude also breeds unwelcome and unfunny attempts at humor, such as the bizarre graffiti incident in Ruggles last semester and a long succession of fleeting “edgy” stand-up acts.

Clearly, though, a discernable difference in mindset exists between the average Columbia student and his or her grandparents. This generational trend, which some social scientists refer to as “extremely necessary progress for mankind,” has at least provided us with a bevy of supremely awkward exchanges between grandparent and grandchild.

You yourself probably came to realize all this through one or more startling utterances that Papa (or Pappy or Pépé or Tito or Gramps or Dedushka, whatever) breezily threw out there one afternoon. It set off the intolerance alarm in your head and caused you to listen—for real this time—to what he just said. What went through your mind? “That goes against so, so much of my RA cultural sensitivity training.” No doubt it did.

It would seem pretty difficult to respond aptly to an elder family member’s racist comment beyond an “Oh. My. God.” and an incredulous, slow shaking of the head. Our cultural relativism fails at this sort of impasse, and as easy as it may be to agree to disagree and skirt around a confrontation of values, I wince at the thought of any prolonged argument with a grandparent. “Not worth it!” screams my psyche.

Thus the much clichéd ritual of growing up continues, as we sort through seven, eight, nine decades of wisdom and experience, wars Great, Korean and Cold, and we decide what to learn from our Bubbe and what to reject. What do I hope to learn? Perseverance and affection. But I hope to spare my own grandkids racism and pleated short-cut slacks.
Rebel With Uranium

Stealing uranium. Breaking into Area 51. Oh yeah, and that Taliban death squad. Why do Columbia dropouts have all the fun?

By Brendan Ballou

“Students caught with CU Uranium”

You could think of Ken Hechtman as pretty harmless. ADHOC, his brainchild anarchist group, never hurt anybody. Hechtman and 11 other first-years stole and vandalized a bathroom door from Carman. They wrote their acronym on a Columbia ambulance. They built an eight-foot snowman on top of their dorm. Even their tough talk had a touch of innocence about it: “We do not disrespect authority, we disbelieve in it.” Most of the members never went further than these pranks. So what happened?

January 1987, the Columbia Daily Spectator: “ADHOC wreaks havoc on campus.”

“ADHOC, an acronym for Allied Destructive Hackers of Columbia, poses a serious threat to the security of this university. The question remains: what is to be done?”

Even while ADHOC was essentially a glorified first-year clique, Ken Hechtman seemed more serious than the others. He and fellow ADHOC member Jeff Bankoff conducted amateur chemistry experiments in their dorms. They toyed with explosive precursors and fertilizers that could be used to build bombs. But it was the uranium that got Ken kicked out.

“I always was a rule-breaker,” Hechtman said in a phone interview. Well, clearly. Still, it’s surprising just how many rules Ken Hechtman has broken. He was a famous explorer of the Columbia tunnels. He was rumored to have
caused a blackout in Carman and to have stolen the SAT scores of all first-years. He and ADHOC were the first to reach the Low Library roof, and as far as we know, the last.

Since leaving Columbia he’s been an anarchist squatter on the Lower East Side; he’s broken into the Yucca Flats Test Site in Nevada; and he’s entered Afghanistan without a visa—where he was captured by the Taliban.

Hechtman was young when he started—just a first-year. Yet he’s remained the same. In a photo taken after his release from Afghanistan, Hechtman wears the same revolutionary glare he had in a picture that ran in the Spec, nearly 15 years earlier, after authorities found uranium in McBain.

“Members of campus security and University Environmental Health Services [EHS] found chemicals including uranium 238 and chloroform in the rooms of two first year students Friday night.”

“Hechtman said he hoped to use the uranium to ‘possibly expose plant seeds to it under a radiation shield and plant them and get weird mutation.’ ”


Actually, Hechtman probably stole the uranium for health reasons. Two months earlier, in November 1986, Hechtman and Bankoff entered a small addition to Pupin Hall through the underground tunnels. In addition to the uranium, they pilfered thermite, caffeine, and nutmeg. Hechtman ate the caffeine and hid the uranium under a pile of garbage in the tunnels. But after a few months, Hechtman became concerned that the caffeine he had eaten was radioactive, so he went back to the tunnels and brought the uranium to his McBain double (first-years lived there back then), where he put both the uranium and the uneaten caffeine on photographic plates to test for radioactivity.

It wasn’t the uranium alone that got him in trouble. Rather, he and Bankoff had been conducting lots of experiments in their rooms. They were creating, among other things, hallucinogens and explosive precursors. The smell of those experiments, along with the rumor of radioactivity, drove Hechtman’s neighbors to call the cops.

But the uranium was sealed, and depleted—the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission called off its investigation when it learned the uranium was a fairly safe 238 isotope. Columbia’s Environmental Health Services checked Hechtman’s room and “found no radiation except for that coming from an alarm clock,” which, apparently, is normal.

But that didn’t change things. The student response was swift and vicious. Students Against ADHOC posted flyers around campus charging Hechtman with six offenses in addition to the uranium theft, including the Carman blackout. An angry editorial signed by Hechtman’s suitmates called for the administration to “impose the strictest sanctions it deems appropriate.” On campus, Hechtman was routinely called an “anarchist,” a ‘long-haired freak,” a ‘communist,’ a ‘menace,’ a ‘that uranium dude.” He told Spec: “I can’t walk into John Jay Cafeteria without being heckled.”

Bankoff, who was also implicated in the uranium theft, was merely put on disciplinary probation and expelled from campus housing (and let back on appeal just one week later). But Hechtman was suspended from Columbia for an entire year, and was told he would remain barred from campus housing and on disciplinary probation for the rest of his undergraduate career.

Hechtman faced a choice: wait the year and come back to Columbia or leave for good. Former ADHOC friends had abandoned him, and although he had some supporters (two of his friends wrote the “I got the ‘got caught with ADHOC uranium’ blues” for WKCR), even after a year’s suspension he knew he would remain a pariah on campus. So Hechtman decided not to appeal his suspension, saying it “would waste a week of my valuable time,” and dropped out of college. The whole crisis, from the day he was caught to the day he dropped out, lasted little more than a week.

Toward the end of the debacle, Hechtman wrote a bitter, angry, and altogether hilarious column for Spectator’s “Counterpoint” section. “As you must by now be aware,” he began, “I, Ken Hechtman, ex-long-haired peace freak, hacker, and instant media star ‘won’t be here to kick around anymore.’ They threw me out for a whole bunch of shit, some of which I did, most of which I didn’t.”

“The actual disciplinary hearing was a real screwjob. How can you bring someone up on charges of writing graffiti when nobody saw him do it? True, I can’t prove I didn’t do it, but then, Dean Lehecka probably can’t prove he didn’t either…."

The rest of the editorial was devoted to shout-
outs, and the last is particularly brilliant. This is how Hechtman ended his Columbia career:

“Last and least, to my roommate Rich, who cooperated with the cops and always wanted a single anyway: I hope you get cancer from your alarm clock.”

“Mr. Hechtman is an arrogant, irresponsible young man. Luckily the Canadian government came to his rescue and now he’ll make money from his experience.”


After dropping out of college, Hechtman was able to live his vigorous lifestyle in relative obscurity. “The tunnel-exploring was 1985-86. By 1988 I was an anarchist squatter living in the Lower East Side and fomenting riots in New York and all over the country. So by then, I had a new set of war stories. Some of those involved getting into places I wasn’t supposed to be and seeing things I wasn’t supposed to see. I got onto the Ethan Allen firing range in Vermont and I cut through 40 miles of Area 51 in Nevada to get to the Yucca Flats Test Site.”

But, “In 2001 I was doing documentary researching and news writing. That took me to Timothy McVeigh’s execution and to Afghanistan,” and once again Hechtman became an icon and pariah, though this time on an international level.

Though he had no training in journalism, Hechtman was writing for two alternative Canadian publications, The Montreal Mirror and Straightgoods.com. After September 11, as the United States moved toward war, he traveled to Central Asia with the goal of getting into Afghanistan. He traveled to Peshawar in North-West Pakistan, where he interviewed pro-Taliban militants whom most western journalists couldn’t reach.

He also spent a lot of time trying to get a visa into Afghanistan. Hechtman wrote in one of his dispatches: “The morning that Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance, I was in the absolutely-business-as-usual Afghani Consulate—the only place in Peshawar where nobody had heard the news, or if they had, didn’t believe it…” The country was falling apart, and the Taliban bureaucracy was less than welcoming to foreign visitors. By late November, after over a month in the region and still without a visa, he decided to cross into Afghanistan.

Hechtman snuck over the border into Spin Boldak, the city where the Taliban were founded. There he visited a refugee camp. He met some Foreign Office, Public Health, and military officials in the Taliban. The conversations were friendly. Then the war started. He wrote later, “That evening, the first American air strike of the war hit Spin Boldak and attitudes changed instantly.” The Taliban believed he was a spy and that he had called in the attack.

Hechtman was thrown into prison, beaten, and put on trial. As he described it, “Before the trial begins, the judge tells me to pick a name out of his hat. ‘What does he win?’ I asked, indicating the big, black-turbaned Talib with the shit-eating grin. ‘He gets to shoot you, just as soon as we finish this formality of a trial.’”

Hechtman wasn’t shot, but it took a while before he convinced his captors that he wasn’t a spy. At one point, in order to ascertain whether or not he was a foreign agent, the Taliban put Hechtman through an extreme language test he recounts as follows:

“That morning, the commander came into the prison yard with a dozen young soldiers...there was a kid on the roof with a Kalashnikov, shouting what I assume was, ‘You’re going to say something in Urdu or you’re going to die.’ ‘No Urdu! No Pashto! No Farsi! No Arabic!’ Click. Then the kid racked the bolt, pulled the trigger three-quarters of the way back and repeated his demand. ‘Oh shit, now he’s got a live round in the chamber! Look kid, I do not speak your language. I do not know what you want me to do.’ Click again. The whole ba-
nana clip was empty. They left convinced I wasn’t a Pakistani and never bothered me again.”

But he was kept in prison for several more days. Reporters Without Borders took up his case after Hechtman smuggled a note to a Pashtun man, who eventually gave it to a British journalist and alerted authorities. Two Canadian diplomats were able to prove he was indeed a journalist and not a spy, and on December 1, 2001 he was released.

Hechtman’s disappearance and hostage negotiations made (Canadian) national news and sparked outrage. It was the uranium story again in so many ways. There were the angry editorials denouncing Hechtman’s actions. And Hechtman was characteristically angry and defiant. After his car was chased and cornered by the press he issued his first official statement, “Try that shit with a Taliban Toyota pickup sometime—they’ll blow your ass off the road with a rocket launcher!” In his behavior, attitude, and rebel grin, Ken Hechtman was the exact same first-year. All that had changed was that now an entire nation, not just one college campus, was talking about his exploits.

Hechtman reflected on his Columbia experience:

“The uranium and even the science labs as a whole wasn’t even the exploit I’m most proud of. The dome of Low Library is the one I want to remember. We broke nothing, stole nothing, and left everything as we found it. We put a lot of planning and dry runs into that one. We had to get past a couple of locked doors, an alarm, and at least one manned guard post.

“And we were the first. Nobody had ever done the dome before. We saw ‘we tried and failed’ tags dating back to the 1920s, marking the spots where other tunnel rats turned back. When we lifted the capstone of the dome, it was sealed shut by corroded copper. Nobody had ever opened it before.”

Hechtman is now a computer-engineering student at McGill University in Montreal, but he remains the same angry, funny, bitter revolutionary: “What nobody ever got was that it wasn’t about building myself into a cult figure. I was never trying to do that. I was trying to show by example that there were no rules, not for me and not for anybody.”

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When 30-year-old Columbia graduate student Jodie Lane died in 2004 from stepping on an electrified sewer grate, she was walking her dogs down E. 11th Street. Today, if the same misfortune befalls another, that person will die on Jodie Lane Place. And they say the world isn’t fair.

The co-naming of a street is grassroots democracy at its best: anyone who cares enough can convince the city to immortalize a famous, or not-so-famous, New Yorker. The honored range from the colossal (Martin Luther King, Jr.) to the less monumental (no offense, George and Annette Murphy). And, over the last few years, the rush to ensure a three block stretch of immortality has gotten a little out of hand.

Historically, you had to fill certain requirements before you could have a street named after yourself; you had to be either a public figure or a public servant; you had to have made a substantial contribution to your neighborhood; and you had to be dead. But as political pressures mount and the City Council searches for tangible ways to keep constituents happy, the old rules no longer apply.

Almost anyone can have a street of his or her own these days. All you need is time, a willingness to sit through meetings of Community Boards and the City Council, and the chutzpah to hound your neighbors for their signatures on a petition. Before you know it, boom! Your-Great-Great-Grandfather Boulevard is created, and his place in history is ensured. Honorees don’t even have to be dead anymore. Just ask Jackie Mason, Yo-Yo Ma, and Regis Philbin.

According to District 6 Councilwoman Gail Brewer, the co-namings allow neighborhoods to bestow public honor upon local personalities, institutions, or political causes. “I feel that [keeping it] local is very important,” she said. She won’t advocate for a new street name unless it has the support of the neighborhood. Even though she wasn’t aware of some recent questionable namings until I asked her about them, she said that it’s important to give the people (see: voters) what they want.

But the majority of us trying to make our way from ‘Mr. Always-Kept-Up-With-The-Neighborhood-Gossip Boulevard’ to ‘Mrs. Gives-Out-The-Best-Candy-On-Halloween Place’ are hardly even
aware of the process, much less the identities of those who have been honored. “I think at one time, [the street names] meant something,” said Kenneth Jackson, Columbia history professor and editor of *The Encyclopedia of New York*. “I think it’s good that people know that Edgar Allan Poe lived in New York...but it’s gone so far that that it has become insignificant and nobody pays any attention to it anymore. You don’t even look.”

So many streets have been recently co-named—in the last 15 years, the city co-named 700 streets, 300 streets of them for victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks—that the city doesn’t even update its publicly accessible records. The only way to locate all the street names is by sifting through an old and imposing card catalogue in the City Hall Library at 31 Chambers Street. When I visited, the catalogue was far from complete—the Avenues of the Americas, the Strongest, and the Immigrants were missing, as was my personal favorite, the eloquently named People With AIDS Plaza. Brewer told me that there is pending legislation that would put a short biography of each honored person online.

Despite the indifference most New Yorkers feel toward the city’s constantly expanding address book, the act of co-naming can be scandalous. It has provoked neighborhood rallies, death threats, and international outrage. In 1983, Joseph Doherty, an IRA member and convicted murderer in the UK, was captured in the city. He was imprisoned in the downtown Metropolitan Correctional Center as the courts spent about a decade figuring out his status. In 1989, “Joseph Doherty Corner” was established at the corner of Park Row and Pearl Street, nine stories below his federal jail cell. The British were dismayed.

The Chinese government was even more pissed off a few months later when Mayor Ed Koch christened an intersection near the consulate “Tianamen Square Corner.” Things got worse when Koch publicly encouraged Consul General Weng Fupei to seek asylum in the United States so that he could reveal the truth about the recent massacre, forcing an embarrassed White House to explain that the mayor of New York did not represent the official views or policy of the United States government.

Sometimes, not naming a street can cause a riot (well, almost). In 1989, a Community Board declined to co-name a stretch of 91st street in Queens after a slain police officer, in part because no representatives from his precinct showed up at the to the Community Board meeting. After disgusted officers privately commissioned their own sign for “Edward R. Byrne Street” and installed it themselves, a minor controversy erupted, and Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward forced them to remove it. When State Assemblywoman Cynthia Jenkins publicly defended Ward’s decision, Mayor Ed Koch once again proved a fierce street-name fighter and denounced her character on television. She soon received over a dozen telephone death threats.

Byrne is in good company—Sammy Davis Jr., Rev. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Big Pun, and St. Francis of Assisi were also denied a place on the city’s grid. But there’s still space. And, just maybe, we can have a street-name scandal of our own. George W. Bush Square (116th, between Amsterdam and Broadway), anyone?

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**SO YOU WANT TO GET A STREET RE-NAMED? HERE’S HOW IT WORKS:**

- Pick an honoree—and figure out the reason they deserve to be honored.
- Send your petition to the Community Board. For the Community Board to consider your request, you need to produce a petition with signatures from neighborhood residents, building managers, tenant associations and co-op boards.
- Attend the Community Board meeting. Preferably with a posse to make it more difficult for the board to vote your request down.
- The Community Board sends your request to your city council member. Once the city council has it, they will add it to a bill that includes many other pieces of name-change legislation.
- Wait. Because the council receives so many requests, they only vote three times a year.
- When it is finally time for the council to vote, cross your fingers and hope (assume) your name will be approved. Chances are, it will be.
When it comes to self-aggrandizing myths, Columbia rivals the Greeks. The owl, 1968, Kerouac and Ginsberg at The West End—they all supposedly comprise Columbia’s collective unconscious. But despite what the tour guides tell you, these legends are dead to the average student. Only one myth still matters, as proven by the hush that descends when an anecdote begins—and ends—with “So we got off on level nine...”

“When you get to school, one of the first things people say about [the stacks] is, did you know Ghostbusters was filmed there?” said Andrew, a recent Columbia graduate who preferred to withhold his real name. “The second thing is, did you have sex in the stacks?”

Butler sex is our generation’s equivalent of panty raids—the tales emerge late in the party, after all other conversation topics have been exhausted. One person in the room has done it, five people have friends who did, and everyone else has thought about it but never acted on the urge.

It is one of Columbia’s few unacknowledged subcultures, and perhaps its most universal—an extracurricular that unites students of all political bents, racial make-ups, and religious persuasions. We all know the regular Butler cliques: the smokers, the boho-chic grad students who pound fists outside Room 301, the bearded men who sip tea in the lounge and loudly quote Heidegger. But the Butler sex community has no identifying mark. No secret handshake, no pinky ring. Most Butler lovers show scruples in revealing their secrets, and then only in hushed tones. The movement’s existence may be universal, but its stories have gone untold. Until now.
Unoriginal Sin: The Case of The Butler Masturbator

Butler has an effect on its inhabitants that can only be described as magical. Just as a soft lens forgivingly blurs the flaws of its subject, Butler turns every student into a romantic lead—the phenomenon known as “Butler goggles.” Immersed in their work, everyone becomes a strong, silent typist.

But when Anthony Perri whipped out his swollen fiddle and began playing for the girls, the honeymoon ended.

“He pulled out a book—the History of Abortion or something—and sat on the floor staring at me for half an hour,” said Joya Banerjee C’04, who was studying on the library’s third floor mezzanine. “I happened to look down and he had his dick out of his gym shorts (short shorts by the way) and was wanking off.”

Perri was arraigned a year later when Banerjee spotted him again in the library, this time pretending to browse for books while eyeing a gaggle of sorority girls. The case has since been sealed, according to a spokesperson for the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, and Banerjee never pressed charges.

“It was probably the most action Butler has seen in quite awhile,” she said. “Lucky me.”

Spectator covered the events with all the requisite gravity, quoting everyone from security officials to witnesses who had “heard the scream” and provoking a small debate about library security. But it failed to address one essential angle: that Perri’s behavior, however disturbing, was entirely consistent with Butler Library’s character. He had just taken it too far.

The Butler Effect

“Any time you have guys and girls in a room together, there’s a scene,” Andrew said. “At Butler there’s drinks and stuff to talk about, but none of the meat market pretensions of the West End.”

Whereas the ’Stend’s Thursday night clientele descends on that bar with a single purpose, Butler conceals its sexuality beneath a thin sheen of studiousness. By dressing up flirtation in the decidedly unsexy garb of academia, Columbia students mask what they do worst with what they do best.

“I wanted to work in Butler so bad because of all the dating possibilities,” said Annie Sweetland, B ’06, who currently mans the circulation desk. “In the most desperate times, I’ve even rearranged my schedule to get shifts on the busiest nights.”

The move paid off. She has cultivated a sizeable flock of admirers, including colleagues, professors, and grad students, one of whom “stands by the computer terminal for minutes on end and looks at me, contemplating whether or not to come over and chat before he leaves,” she said. “Once he asked me for 50 cents for a banana because he was starving and broke.”

Caitlin Keryc, C ’05, met a long-term boyfriend for the first time when he asked her out for coffee in a reading room. “I’ve been told it’s because I smile too much,” she said.

Keryc’s experience is an exception, as many women see Butler as a restraining order waiting to happen. Triveni DeFries, C ’06, has returned to her desk on many occasions to find a phone number waiting. A med student once trailed her all the way from Butler back to McBain.

The Butler Effect is undeniable. It gives its beneficiaries the courage of two shots of whiskey. It makes pickup lines of Virgil’s verse and ice-breakers of periodic tables. The momentary correlation between academic achievement and sexual prowess makes us all Casanovas.

Inside Voices

Reading rooms form only the tip of the Butler iceberg. Below the surface, deep in the stacks, the library’s legendary reputation is conceived.

Disclaimer: sex in the stacks is illegal. Intercourse and all forms of TV-MA rated pleasure-giving are prohibited in the libraries.
environment in all the Libraries that is safe, comfortable, and conducive to study and research,” he wrote in an e-mail.

But in a steel cage match between school policy and hormones, the glands always win. The fear of getting caught by security does little to deter dedicated sex-havers.

“If you plan it out, there’s not much chance of getting caught,” Andrew said. “You might think it’s a good idea to find the darkest, skinniest hallway. But then you’re [in trouble] if someone goes in there. You gotta be three-quarters down an aisle that has two exits.”

Like any art, Butler sex demands technical mastery. Location, timing, and approach all vary according to one’s sense of adventure and dedication to the craft.

• The Classical School teaches that one should enter the stacks just before closing time through the doors on the third floor. The doors don’t lock behind you, allowing for late-night exits.

• The Midnight Society recognize premeditation as a luxury some of us cannot afford. After hours, the best point of access is through the basement. The western staircase, right by the computer lab, takes you down to the lower level. Walk east and then south to the stacks elevators and ride them to any level.

• Followers of the Revisionist School understand that limiting oneself to the stacks can feel constricting. Take the elevator to the sixth floor and continue up the stairs as far as the grad student carrels, where phone booths, musty alcoves, and fire hose closets await. One intrepid student noted that “the roof, in addition to being too cold for sex all but a few weeks out of the school year, is gravelly.” Anyone expecting comfort should stay home.

But none of these traditions have untangled the central paradox: Butler sex is about as sexy as gefilte fish. You do it for the story more than the experience itself. But sometimes it’s barely worth the story.

One student, deep into his term paper for Richard Bulliet’s class on domestic animals (famed for its emphasis on bestiality), abandoned it for 1020, only to return with company an hour later. They found one of the wooden Eisenhower-era phone booths on the 9th floor. “It took forever,” he lamented in an e-mail.

For Miriam Datskovsky, B ’07, the Spectator’s sex columnist, it didn’t take so long. She described a failed escapade in the Arabic literature section, during which stack fright killed the moment. “You shouldn’t try it with someone who has chronic ED problems,” she said.
You Lost Me At Hello

There is a distinction between Butler sex and reading room romance. While both join to form the myth of Butler, the library’s cultures of study and nookie rarely intersect. Converting an innocent flirtation into a shelf-knocking romp could very well be the single most challenging act of social (not to mention physical) gymnastics at Columbia University.

Andrew, a veteran of two library trysts, does not see much connection between the furtive glances exchanged in Room 209 and the popularity of Butler sex. “I separate those two things,” he said. “If I were cool enough to approach a girl in the library and invite her up, then maybe they wouldn’t be separate.”

Strategies abound. In the oft-cited but rarely-used “one-card monte,” a student fills out a reserves card with a call number and a message to “Meet me in five,” and furtively slides the invitation across the table. Then there’s the point-blank “I’m about to graduate” move, which may arouse just enough pity to succeed.

Andrew has fantasized about taking women to the same section in the stacks—“something subtly evocative, like early Greek erotica”—and keep a running tally in a book jacket. “Turns out not to have worked exactly how I wanted it to,” he said. “But there’s always grad school.”

The study-sex culture gap can’t be bridged for one simple reason: Butler sensuality can only survive under a strict policy of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. The silent enchantment that Butler casts over its occupants is fragile. The least disruption—the ring of a phone, the drop of a pen—and the spell is broken. Indeed, a student’s sexiness relies on obliviousness.

At risk of pushing an analogy too far—otherwise what’s the point of making one?—Butler is romance at Columbia. We put ourselves out there for the taking, striking a pose with one eye on our book and the other on the cute guy across the table, hoping he’ll notice how consumed by work we are. But the instant he summons the courage to spill his soul and take action, the illusion falls away. Eye contact becomes awkward. Throats are cleared. He relocates upstairs. We’re left with a vague sense of disappointment and a pile of books we weren’t really reading anyway. ❖
Vile Vials

by Zach Van Schouwen

Fast times at suburban Massachusetts drug screening labs.

Our new favorite addict Norma—let’s call her Norma, I never liked anyone called Norma anyway—calls. They always call. Thank-fully, today I am at the top of my game.

“This is outrageous!” Norma screams with the affected rage of amphetamine users. I really prefer people who take speed. “How could I have brought in someone else’s urine?” There’s nobody at the company but me who could have told her that we knew that. Strike one.

It’s 2004 and I’ve graduated high school. I now work at a drug screening lab in an anonymous office park in a suburb of Boston. I have begun to find that this is not quite the glamorous, cosmopolitan life I was hoping for. When people call, it’s easier to tell them that I’m still unemployed and working on my novel. I have a vivid, imaginary personal life filled with imported beers and art-rock concerts, not of Saturday nights spent wandering the streets.

This morning my office smells like oatmeal. I work with some strange clients. Small town highway departments, college sports teams, interns all over the world. But not today. Today we’re screening hundreds of potential employees for a major telecommunications company (name withheld for my sake as much as theirs) to confirm that they’re upstanding members of a toxin-free society and fire them if they’re not. Last night, two of them came to a Dallas-area clinic with bags of their children’s urine duct-taped to the insides of their legs. (Remember Norma?)

The addicts are the best part of my job. The only thing that breaks the tedium of the thousands of law-abiding citizens is the contingent of reckless drug users who endanger everyone they love by smoking pot while they solder wires in Plano, Texas. It makes up for the fact that I don’t have a date.

It’s difficult to work at a company that doesn’t care about privacy. I don’t do drugs, but I also don’t care what people do at home. What entitles me to
persecute strangers? My motivations were hardly noble—I was down to the 12 dollars in my wallet (all crumpled singles), the rent was due, and I’d run out of ways to cook ramen. I jumped turnstiles to get to my job interviews and fished old razors out of the trash so I could look my best for every two-week opening. So of course I took the first available “real” job. I count myself lucky that I wasn’t approached to be a meter maid.

A minor but irritating part of my job demands that I ask employees hundreds of probing questions about their injuries, medications, psychiatric conditions, and so on. “Are you currently taking any mood-altering drugs?” “Are you taking birth control pills?” (flies great with the right-wing crowd). I call the clinic where Norma made her appearance and hear the story from employees, who relate the events in a Texas drawl further addled by the fact that in the Great American Middle of Everything it’s 8:05 and they haven’t gotten their goddamn coffee. I call the lab in Secaucus, New Jersey, and yell at them for accepting the contents of a plastic baggie. The telephone company calls and I assure them that we don’t know what’s happened to the test results, which I’m scanning as I talk to them. (This is a brazen lie that everyone on staff is required, by law, to tell. Only three employees are authorized to tell clients the truth and do so while walking on eggshells, under false names. The rest of us shred our paperwork at the end of the day.) The phone rings one more time. Guess who is on the other end? “Norma, I have to put you on hold.” I do, and pick up the next line. “Hi, this is Zach, can I help you?” Oh, boy, can I ever. His name is Timothy, 19 years old, from Charleston, West Virginia. He’s going to drive a truck around Metro Richmond, stapling things to other things—shit, I have no idea what these people actually do. I press on with the interview. “Any hearing issues?”

“Yes, sir”—so polite!—“20 percent point hearing loss, in both ears.”

“And how’d that happen?”

“There was an accident involving some fireworks.”

The blinking of Norma’s light is accelerating, so I let that one go. “Any other injuries in the last few years?”

“Well, I hurt my hand.” Go on. Tell the man how. “I put a stick through it. A sharp one.”

“A sharp stick?”
“Today my computer died and in the words of professor Thurman, I began to “freak out”. I don’t think it was an unusual response for someone who has their entire life saved in digital form, including the paper that was due for this class, the nearly complete predecessor of this rushed and shortened anecdotal-philosophical-narrative. My music, my work, my poetry, my slideshows, etc., all gone, possibly never to return. I punched a wall in rage and realization that a large part of me is gone. And then the walls came crumbling down all around me and I had what might be called a moment of Zen. “

Apart from searching for the meaning of life, it seems that philosophers thoroughly enjoy telling politicians how to do their job.

How should we imagine Don Quixote? As a caricature, as an aged man, a form purposely ill suited for knight errantry? Or by dialogue, speeches, ideas, personality, fantasy, and who he could have been? Of course, his appeal lies not in a synthetic extraction of that ideal he sought, but in the coexistence of the two. For any representation in visual art to be effective, I would argue it is necessary that it find a means to capture the visionary heroic, the physically pathetic, and the transcendent intersection of the two – a task, I should add, which I think is impossible.

I also want to work with the control of robots because I think one of the most useful and fascinating characteristics of robots is their ability to extend human capability. Robots can realize ideas that humans cannot, but they need human guidance. I want to learn more about how we can tell robots to do what we want.

After working on global AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) in a developing country this past summer, I am convinced that I am interested in a consulting career.

I felt claustrophobic. Ironic, that I was always dreaming of big, strong guys being this close. And then, there I was, and I wanted him, but I wanted him to be someone else, and I wanted him to give me an inch to breathe, but I wanted him to stay this close. I hopped off the counter, pushed by him and let the dog in.

Unfortunately in the middle of all of this I was diagnosed with psoriasis, which is simply irritating and not serious in the least, and had to return to Chicago for treatments etc since I was a bit of an extreme case and covered from head to toe. I considered staying in Chicago since I was having a great deal of trouble trying to find my niche in the ridiculously expensive city that is New York City but did not want to give up yet.

In the second place, wiretapping by the government will not ensure U.S. citizens a free-terror zone. Terrorist are very resourceful; when one door closes for them the will find a window. In present day, terrorist have religious motives that would make them stop at nothing. In order to gain eternal glory they would not care the means to it. In addition, most of the terrorist are illiterate.

It was at this moment of narcissistic obsession that her life ended—Leaving her water-waved, wood-worked body abandoned with her breasts at attention like a pair of sickly toads.
All the Living Things of Glenbrook

Excerpts from a short story by
M. Yates Crowley

The rain only let up when I reached Glenbrook, and it had been raining for days. It was interfering with the phone service, my mother wrote, a sort of splintering in the dial tone. She refused to call. Not while there were windstorms in the intervening states—what if we got cut off, she asked, with me not knowing who was dead, or when, or by whom? So she wrote, asking me to come home for my father’s funeral. And I came, through the windstorms to the fertile suburb by the lake, where it did stop raining at last. As though some natural force had been appeased, whatever governed the windstorms and the static.

With the sun out in Glenbrook it became that overfertile week in June, when the air is so full of seeds and pollen it sticks in your throat. You put forth buds. Trees and weeds grew in every corner of Glenbrook, under the sidewalk, between the houses, spilling over the fences and onto the roads, releasing their seeds like a fine mist into the air. Appearing motionless but spreading steadily into the abandoned lots. Causing the
elderly, the sedentary, to send their roots into the soil. Too much life for one town. And there, in the parking lot, my friend Theo was waiting for me, leaning his bike against a pylon and closing his eyes, and with him all the living things of Glenbrook lifted their faces to the sun.

Theo rode down the hill toward the lake and I followed him on foot, like we used to do every day after school. Most of the houses were shuttered against the rain and when the cars wouldn’t fit in the garages, they were covered with blue plastic tarps. They must have thought death would come from above, in the form of a soft rain. Newer houses had been built since I left, houses in warm friendly colors with privacy hedges, brick houses with oddly shaped windows, cement houses with landing strips instead of driveways. Modern sculptures in the yard, lake view in the back. Aluminum trim and satellite dishes, laundry wires, swing sets. More wires. More aluminum. More cement. For convenience and added value.

We passed the road to my house without speaking, headed for the lake instead. Theo popping acorns with his tires, trying not to fall over, scaring the squirrels, all of them looking guilty of sins they couldn’t remember. The wind picked up, whipping the late clouds off toward Indiana, where they were born. I followed Theo out onto the pier, as far as we could go, and then we stopped. On the water, yachts and speedboats turned in tandem toward the city, trailing wakes like white comet tails as the rich fled for safety.

Theo’s jacket was all ripped up, little holes like mouths opened up every time he moved. He said, “Did they tell you what happened? To your dad?” And I said no. And then we said nothing, just watched the slow evacuation of the lake.

***

I heard Rick and George before I saw them. It sounded like a struggle coming from the alley next to the school, but when I looked in I recognized the twins. One of them was halfway into a dumpster and yelling, the other was looking around nervously in case they were overheard.

“Rick!” I yelled. It was a guess. The one in the dumpster went quiet. “What are you doing here?” I said.

The twin, who must have been George, came up quickly and stuck out his hand. “Hunter? It is so good to see you. You have no idea how hard it’s been since you left. I mean, how much we miss you.”

“Were you looking for me?” I said. Rick made a strangled noise from the dumpster.

George ignored him. “What? Of course not. I mean, we weren’t looking, but we see you, and we’re happy to see you. Unexpectedly as it is.”

I asked what Rick was doing in the dumpster. George kept staring at me. “It’s an adventure,” he said. At that moment, Rick managed to propel himself backwards out of the dumpster with a crash, when he fell against the side, clutching something to his chest. We turned and he held up the prize—soda cans. “Hey Hunter,” he said, “look what I got.”

“Don’t just wave it around,” said George, looking back at the street.

“Are you saving those for the deposit?” I asked.

The twins were no good at subterfuge. George took a last look at the street and stepped close, whispered, “Precious metals.” Rick nodded gravely. I wondered briefly if we weren’t doing an injustice to Darwin by allowing kids like this to be tutored through high school. George went on, “It was on the radio, I’m surprised you didn’t hear. Production of precious metals has slowed, and when production stops. . .”

Rick continued, brushing the coffee grinds off his shirt. “We’ll have to find our own precious metals. Because metals are the key to civilization.”

“Exactly,” said George. “But Hunter knows all this, don’t you?”

There was something intense in the way they stared at me. I was suddenly glad I didn’t have braces any more. “George,” I said carefully, “those cans are aluminum.”

“Ha. Yes. We know that,” said George. “Aluminum. . . metal.”
“But it’s not a precious metal. It’s not even a valuable metal.”

He just laughed. “Wait till they stop production—then you’ll see how precious it is. Here,” he turned to Rick. “Give him one of your cans. Hunter is our friend.” Rick looked to his brother, and, receiving the signal, extended a crushed Coke can to me. I took it gratefully. George went on, in a kind voice. “You have to think ahead, Hunter. You can’t just pretend things will go on the way they always have. You see a Coke can; I see a thousand years of progress. Do you understand?”

“I’ll try, George.” He smiled and gave me that look again, the secret look. Then he turned to Rick and together they picked up their bikes. “We have to get these back home,” he said, and I saw the plastic bags full of cans tied to both of their bikes. “See you around, Hunter.”

“Yeah, be safe,” I said, and they biked down the alley in tandem, banging their secret bags against the walls and shedding cans behind them like the just married.

***

My father’s funeral was the next day. He never had a real job. When I was in school he designed plastic huts for displaced victims of war or other natural disasters, always in bright neon colors, visible from the sky. They’d put them up once, in a dry part of Utah, to see what would happen: deployment in under 12 hours, and the wind blew them down before dawn. I’d always thought it would be strange to see these orange and yellow boxes appear suddenly on the site of a disaster, like desert flowers, unexpected.

We dressed and stood in the living room, the twins, my mother and I, waiting for the car with the body to drive up. After she had checked the blinds and straightened my tie, my mother decided our faces were too bright for the funeral and wiped some of her make-up under our eyes. My sisters looked like they’d been in a fight, but mom was happy with the effect. I’d always assumed she was waiting for the twins to move out before asking for a divorce, but now that it was over, she was determined to show the neighborhood that we mourned him as a family.

The car drove up, finally, and stalled in our driveway. The county’s only hearse—newly decorated with the words “ICE-CREAM TRUCK” in uneven green letters. Possibly the work of vandals, but more likely the second calling of the driver. I remember the funeral home brochure advertised the car’s refrigerated compartment as an advance in “preservation.” If mom noticed she didn’t say anything.

The cemetery was hardly a mile away so she decided we could all walk there, following the hearse through town. The twins had delivered notices to the neighbors, but few were expected. None came. At ten after, Mom checked her watch and gave the sign. We lined up behind the car and began walking, haltingly, as the driver tried to follow her signals for too fast, too slow.

When the first neighbors came outside I was watching the tires of the hearse and didn’t notice. Only when the Johnsons’ kid slammed the porch door did I look up and see them, some in black, most in jeans and dirty shirts, staring from front steps and lawns. And, as we went by, beginning to move. By the end of the block, there were three or four other families following the car, walking discreetly behind us with the same halting step, looking stunned in the early sun.

Rick and George came out from behind a bush on the next block to stare. They were holding their bags of cans, probably on their way back to the bunker of civilization. They came too, out of curiosity or compulsion, shedding cans. And Theo as well, at the corner, looking like he probably spent the night on the beach. The noise woke the rest of the neighbors, the Kilroys, the Masons, Jessica Fairfax and her dogs; they fell in behind us and rubbed dirt on their faces if they had it, so as not to seem unfeeling.

That night my mother was the first to throw her torch onto the pile under the coffin, while I stood with the twins to make sure they didn’t run in after. When she straightened up, as if on cue, the neighbors began to roar. It would be a good fire, and afterwards there would be no need to look for the ashes. The wind would have blown them away, as it did the bright plastic houses my father built, to reappear somewhere else, like desert flowers, unexpected.
Paint the Town Goat

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 Fifth Avenue (at 82nd Street)
Through April 2, 2006


At a time when painting and sculpture were seen as two separate art forms, Rauschenberg synthesized the two with his “combines.” Abstract Expressionism (think Jackson Pollock) ruled the art world, and Rauschenberg tried to make his art more relevant by incorporating everyday objects. But works like “Mongram,” which consists of “oil on Angora goat and rubber tire,” are no less obscure than the most esoteric Abstract Expressionism. To a generation raised on Ed Harris’s Pollock, Rauschenberg’s work can seem less accessible than his “difficult contemporaries.” The curators don’t help: the Met exhibit, covering works from 1954-1964, is filled with excessive analysis that fails to provide any greater understanding.

Sometimes, it is difficult to see anything other than a barrage of visual detail. In “Untitled,” a three-dimensional L-shaped combine over seven feet high, an upright photograph of a tall man dressed in white perpendicularly opposes a flat mirror, creating a pleasing echo and lengthening the man’s height. Lost yet? That’s kind of how I felt. On the opposite side, we find a pair of shoes that have been painted white in order to match the shoes of the man in the photograph. Yet the wry touch of painting shoes white, rather than simply using white shoes, strikes the viewer more immediately than any structural or thematic concern.

This underlying levity is Rauschenberg’s most appealing quality. His “Coca-Cola Plan” is composed of three empty Coke bottles on the middle shelf of a spice rack flanked by cast-iron wings and topped with the titular “plan” of some other artwork. Apparently, when this work was on display in Venice, one of the bottles was stolen. The curator started panicking, until a friend told him to look for the nearest vending machine. The bottle was soon replaced. Then there’s “Interview,” where a ball is placed next to a fork, making, yes, a forkball. Apparently, Rauschenberg loved baseball.

Yet the curators fail to let the whimsy speak for itself. Their interpretation of “Levee,” a canvas work that juxtaposes a print of a sixteenth-century princess with a necktie makes no sense and seems to have no basis. They baldly assert that this piece is one of Rauschenberg’s most “moving” and suggest that the tie may imply a 1950s boyfriend for the Renaissance princess. While an interesting juxtaposition of unrelated objects, this is not one of his gems.

More representative of his work is “Winter Pool,” a canvas painting divided into two and joined by a wooden ladder, challenging the notion that a painting should be a window into another world. Also notable is “Gold Standard,” composed of six panels painted in highly valued gold leaf, to which Rauschenberg attaches work boots, a speedometer, audiotape cartons, and a ceramic RCA dog connected to the painting by a piece of twine that serves as a leash. And they’re all covered in gold. Whimsical!

Rauschenberg’s work could also challenge the viewer to experience painting as performance. “First Time Painting” is the result of a performance at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, where he placed the back of a canvas to the audience and painted until an alarm clock went off. (The clock is still visibly embedded in the painting.) He then left the stage without allowing the audience to see the completed work. Keeping a microphone against the canvas, Rauschenberg had wanted his audience to perceive the painting in an unconventional way—with their ears, rather than their eyes.

It probably sounded like art. Or so I’ve heard.

-Kabir Singh
**This Is 18th Century Spinal Tap**

*Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*

Directed by Michael Winterbottom
Commercial Release in NYC: January 27, 2006

Though the literary adaptation is a staple of a Hollywood that encourages creative expediency and built-in audiences, it must always be a partial failure. It is doomed from the get-go—betraying, simplifying, bastardizing, abridging, desecrating, to cite some favorite terms of abuse. Or perhaps, in a misguided striving for faithful reproduction, it ends up an un-cinematic retelling—loyalty at the expense of creativity.

So it’s refreshing when an adaptation navigates between the rocks and the whirlpool, and doubly so when it derives from the least promising of sources. The British independent film *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* sets out to adapt the unadaptable: Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen*, the 18th-century English classic famous for its literary hijinks (a black page following a character’s death, assorted loopy diagrams inserted throughout; you thought Jonathan Safran Foer invented such things?). Director Michael Winterbottom’s solution to filming this premodern postmodernist work is a dazzling comedy about the very attempt to adapt Sterne’s creation.

The book is the fictional autobiography of its main character, Tristram Shandy, the joke being the inordinate amount of time Shandy takes to tell it: after nine volumes of rambling, he is still filling in the context of his birth, set to take place in an English country house among his idiosyncratic extended family. A light-footed exploration of the interplay between life and art, filled with constant digressions and typographical tricks, Sterne’s hyper-reflexive work fits snugly in a tradition encompassing Cervantes and Fielding and continuing all the way up to David Foster Wallace.

The film depicts an attempt at a conventional film adaptation of Sterne’s book. In this film-within-a-film, British comedian Steve Coogan (who also starred in Winterbottom’s *24 Hour Party People*) plays Tristram, as well as Tristram’s father. Outside it, he plays himself, actor Steve Coogan, as do all the other actors; the director (Jeremy Northam) is a clear stand-in for Winterbottom. Winterbottom couples lively recreations of scenes from Sterne’s books with an exploration of the fertile terrain of movies about moviemaking, alluding to Godard’s *Contempt* and Fellini’s *8 ½*.

Winterbottom tackles the problem of adaptation on an absurd new level: *A Cock and Bull Story* is about the exuberant collision between a movie about moviemaking and a book about book-writing. This multiplied reflexivity produces a rich dialogue between two works of art about the very process of adaptation (one of literature into film, the other of life into literature).

*A Cock and Bull Story* is replete with logistical snafus of scheduling and financing, ridiculous visual conceits (an enormous model womb enters the picture), and, above all, the dynamics of performance. Game for self-mockery, Coogan relishes his narcissistic persona and meets his comedic match in fellow Brit Rob Brydon, who plays his rival co-star. On set, in the dressing room, and at the final screening of rushes, they bicker over the relative size of their parts and each other’s own posturing. And it is this improvised repartee of one-upmanship that captures the tone of Tristram Shandy, in a way that faithfulness to plot or dialogue can rarely achieve.

-Philip Fileri
The Zoo Keeper

*The Woman at the Washington Zoo*
Marjorie Williams, ed. Timothy Noah
PublicAffairs
384 pages, $26.95

On January 16, 2005, at the age of 47, Marjorie Williams died after a three-year fight against liver cancer; the doctors had given her a few months at the outset. Her death provoked warm and prodigious eulogizing from the nation’s intellectual aristocracy. Though not as immediately familiar as Maureen Dowd or Arianna Huffington, she was the woman who understood Washington, it was said, and she was a fine human being to boot. Williams left behind two children, husband Timothy Noah, hundreds of profiles, columns, and essays, and zero books.

So, Noah, a columnist for *Slate* magazine, took it upon himself to compile an anthology of Williams’s writing, and the result is *The Woman at the Washington Zoo: Writings on Politics, Family, and Fate*. The book, as the title indicates, begins with several long profiles, mostly of figures from the Bush I and Clinton eras, and then shifts to essays and columns about Williams’s experiences as a mother, a daughter, and a wife. The third section comprises Williams’s written attempts to cope with her diagnosis of Stage IV(b) liver cancer; as she points out, “there is no Stage V, and no (c).”

But the sum is greater than its parts: it’s not just a collection of political profiles, it’s a glimpse of the person who wrote them; it’s not just a cancer memoir, it’s insight into the patient’s family and faith. That Williams was a writer of exceptional gifts and admirable humanity, possessed of an inimitable voice and a fierce, probing intellect, makes *Washington Zoo* much more than just an anthology or a collection: it’s an absorbing autobiography.

I had not heard of Marjorie Williams before this assignment, and I can pay her this compliment: I was astonished to find that I had read almost every profile in this anthology in their original publications, somehow missing the byline every time. Her portraits of Barbara Bush (“The Wife”), Vernon Jordan (“The Rainmaker”), and the disintegrating Clinton/Gore relationship during the 2000 election season (“Scenes From a Marriage”) are definitive, searching analyses. Noah puts it best in the preface: his wife had an “almost frightening psychological acuity.” The best example is “The Wife,” which confirms that Mrs. 41 is indeed a heinous, vengeful bitch—albeit a bitch married to an aloof husband who left her the job of raising five children—with a precision that makes Williams’s word unimpeachable.

“The Alchemist,” previously unpublished, is another wonderful examination of a wife. This time it’s Marjorie’s mother, a woman with a chemistry degree who quit her job at Sloan-Kettering to become a meticulous mother and hostess. Williams’s account, filled with rich detail and conflicted feelings, is the most compelling kind of intra-familial writing.

These portraits of a lady are perhaps so successful because Williams gave much thought to what womanhood means. Her thoughts on feminism supply many of *Washington Zoo*’s most savory moments. “A Woman’s Place is at the Bar” and “Persuasion” are unflaggingly sarcastic and sassy but stern condemnations of ugly female stereotypes that persist in law schools and social situations. In “Bill Clinton, Feminist,” Williams scrutinizes the reluctance of women and women’s rights groups to chastise Slick Willy while explaining why Clinton shouldn’t be let off the hook that easily.

“Struck by Lightning,” Williams’s incisive cancer mini-memoir covers ground that’s been trod before. But it’s written not by the usual miracle survivor who “won the battle,” but by a patient with little to no hope of recovery. Ultimately, her story is poignant and gut-wrenching because, after three hundred pages, we really, genuinely like Ms. Williams, who, at this point, I feel more comfortable calling Marjorie.

-Paul Barndt

Illustrated by Liz Ferguson
True love may be foreign to The Blue and White, but the quest for it is not. Here we confess our hearts’ desires for the benefit of Columbia’s love-starved fops, aging professors, and resident perverts for whom the night has not yet been taken. The ads are followed by our Lerner mailbox numbers. Should particularly poignant responses find their way into our boxes (and hearts), you may find them printed in our next issue.

SEEKING MEN

Vagina Monologist looking to start dialogue. (4339)

1,2,3,4 I declare a tongue war! (2737)

When in Rome, do me. (3563)

I declare war on Christmas. And virgins. (5128)

Why invade Iraq when you can spoon with me? (3296)

Wow, I am the shit. Do you want a hug!?!?!? Meep! (2663)

Center of calm seeks chaotic world to conquer. (2064)

Mess with me and I will bite off your head and spit it out. Then I will kill your family. And sodomize your brothers. (2064)

Erica Jong fan seeks safe landing. And a zipper. (2153)

Two glasses of milk, a grilled cheese sandwich on whitebread, and no cussing. Underestimate me and I will crinkle my nose at you. And then you will die. Sorry! (2597)

SEEKING WOMEN

Three words: Facebook group sex. (3333)

Prophet seeks divine guidance, visions of the future, and an end to suffering. And groupies. (4827)

Long snaky tongue, velvety hands, and no sense of smell. I was built to pleasure a woman. (2480)

SEEKING MEN

Seek no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Just let it gently caress your side. (2490, 2492)

Sleep with me and I’ll buy you “Annie Hall” for your 16th birthday. (1909)

Nice shoes. Can I borrow them? (6747)

It’s the inside that matters, not the outside. Especially if you’re a wookie. (3386)

My spectacles need fogging. (1514)

I have a theory. You have the practice. Let’s fuse! (1270)

Gee! Wow! A tow truck! (5303)

I was born on December 25th. Really. Tempt me. (1300)

I’m open-minded, as long as you went to high school five blocks from the Met. (1909)

American idol seeks heathen to shit on my altar. (1373)

I’m going to end up with a Jewish girl and that makes me sick. Straddle my tension. (2480)

Mr. Potato seeks head. (6523)

Did you know there was a third Ace Ventura? (4178)

My story arc needs a climax. (3092)

Love-child of Orpheus and Oedipus seeks to play his mother’s flute. Don’t look back. (c/o GS Lounge)

Are you terribly attractive? I certainly am. You are probably not. Still, I want you to exist so that I can make snarky remarks about you and your aesthetic peers. (1346)
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Sunday: Noon - 10pm
CAMPUS GOSSIP

On an elevator at the Manhattan School of Music, a girl asked a boy what his name was. “Dan,” he said. At which point they made out like crazy for a minute. The elevator, which had been descending from the seventh floor to the second floor, opened. The girl stepped out. The doors closed. The elevator continued down to the first floor. The boy acted as if nothing happened and exited the building.

From a CPU e-mail:
“1. WHY WE FIGHT - A Success!

“Our thanks to the 400 students, faculty, and administrators who attended the advance screening of WHY WE FIGHT on Thursday! For those of you who couldn’t make it, WHY WE FIGHT has now been released to theaters nationwide - go see it soon.”

Mission Accomplished.

A History TA’s e-mail to a student who missed a test during the transit strike:

“I didn’t see you at the test. I don’t think I have your test. Did you take the test? I am basically on strike, and I don’t give a fuck. I am teetering on giving all As. Still let me know what the deal is. Have you been arrested? Are you going to take the make up? I have been chasing Roger T all over New York and I am fucking tired. When I finally found his ass he said strike. I plan to be spending quite a bit of time at the pickett [sic] line at the Jackie Gleason Bus Depot which is a few blocks from my house. Let me know what’s up and what is what. I don’t know when the make-up is. Maybe you do. Maybe you are on strike.”

Word Frequency Chart from a recent Kwame Spearman column:

“the” — 26 times
“a” — 20 times
Total: 46

“Kwame” or variants – 3 times
“I” — 25 times
“me” — 5 times
“metrosexual” — 1 time
“a non-threatening, 5’10” light-skinned black man with a J-Crew red outfit and penny loafers” — 1 time (may not be Kwame)
Total: 45

Posters for the Taiwanese Student Association’s spring general meeting (with seductively posed Asian women):

Haiku – ‘The Freaky feeling’
She gives me a look
Sweating, I walk towards her
Damn yellow fever.

The haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry, making the TSA’s statement either a capitulation to the imperialist force of Japanese culture, or a more subtle attempt to turn the form on itself and subvert the dominant paradigm.

The Columbia Department of Public Safety recently confiscated two full-length, ornate samurai swords in decorated scabbards.
Overheard in a Columbia finance class:

Professor: So, some companies reduce their tax costs by shipping inventory around the country when auditors come to the warehouse.

Idealistic Columbia Student: Wait, isn’t that illegal?

Professor: Of course it’s illegal, but who cares?

Ah, Columbia, preparing the next generation of white-collar inmates.

Overheard in Times Square on a Saturday night:

Jewish female A: What do you call a Jewish dilemma?
Jewish female B: What?
Jewish female A: Free pork.

[PAUSE]

Non-Jewish female C in a confused tone: Oh, I thought you were going to say the Holocaust…that’s a dilemma, right? Right?

Overheard on an E.C. elevator:

A: Man. This elevator only stops on even floors. I would definitely live on an even floor if I was in E.C.

B: Yeah, but I heard the 15th Floor has great views.

Overheard on day one of classes:

“Well, I read in n+1 that literary theory is dead, so that’s why I’m taking Introduction to Literary Theory.”

Found in the English Department course evaluations:

Anonymous responses to the question “What were the best aspects of the course?”

“The lectures are very thoughtful and inciteful.”
“The professor’s overall kindness and gentility.”
“The content and deliverence.”

Printing quotas. . . they’re unconstitutional!

The Blue and White goes 24/7 with its new blog.
Free food! More Gossip! Digitalia Tuesday!