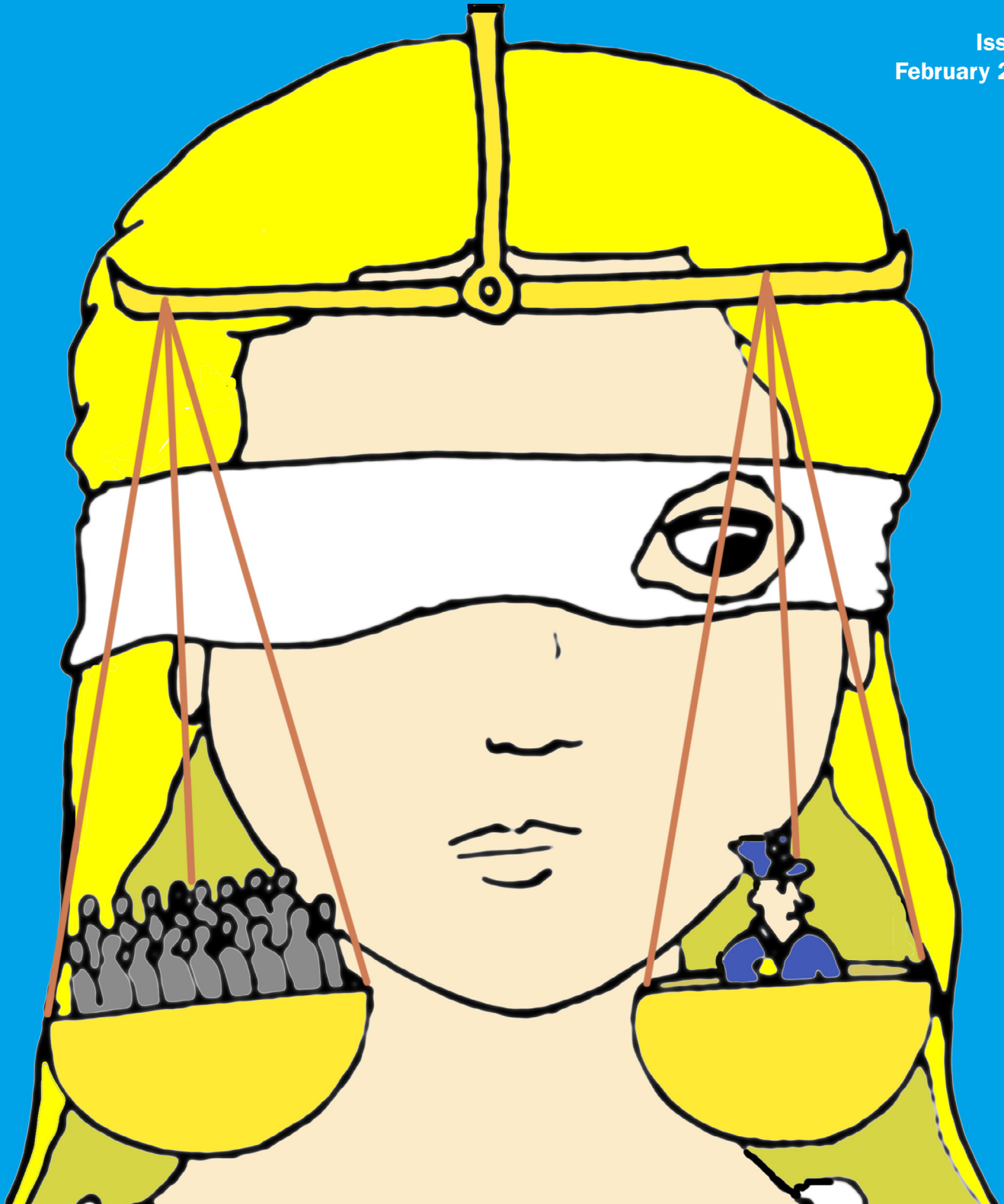


THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

Issue 3
February 2015



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THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

ISSUE 3, FEBRUARY 2015

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A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

Regarding “A Call for Rhetorical Reform” published in your last issue: Perhaps I misunderstand the author, but his thesis seemed to be: Conservatives shouldn’t provoke liberals. I agree. However, I would urge the author to consider the counterpart to his thesis: Liberals shouldn’t provoke conservatives.

From what I could gather from the piece, the author seemed to cite two things that some conservatives do that provoke liberals: (1) Promote bigotry, and (2) Act condescendingly. Both are indeed unacceptable, and I will gladly join the author in condemning such. Having said that, let me cite three things that some liberals do that provoke conservatives:

Using ad hominem. It struck me as ironic that in a piece exhorting us to rhetorical reform, the author seems to condone calling Professor Franck “asshole of the day”. This kind of name-calling is unacceptable, and it is a shame that the author neglected to say so directly. It is also a shame that many liberals self-righteously call conservatives “homophobes” and “racists”. All too often, this is mere ad hominem that should be roundly denounced. Address our arguments with counterarguments, not hateful labels.

Erasing distinctions. If we are going to have civil conversation, as indeed we should, we need to make genuine efforts to understand each others’ arguments. I would call this “civic empathy”. A key part of this is to recognize distinctions central to each others’ arguments, even if we disagree about their validity. In debating sexual ethics, for instance, social conservatives

distinguish between judging actions and judging people: we are in no position to judge people, but judging actions is entirely acceptable—after all, what is morality if not the understanding of what actions are right as opposed to those that are wrong? Yet liberals often ignore the distinction entirely, presupposing an identity between people and their acts. Even if we disagree about distinctions, these are the things we should debate instead of sweeping them under the rug and talking past one another.

Shifting the burden of proof. At the close of his article, the author wrote, “If conservatives want their ideas to survive, the burden of proof falls on them to show that they are not bigoted.” So we’re guilty until proven innocent? This burden-shifting is unacceptable, and it is the mark of bad faith in civil dialogue. We should assume each other to be people of goodwill who believe different things about what is good. Harboring a presumption that one side is hateful (until proven otherwise) is inimical to healthy public discourse. Lastly, if anyone is to bear the burden of proof in public debate, it should be upon those who wish to change things from the status quo. Indeed, more often than not, the onus should be on the liberal, not the conservative.

I hope that the author of the Call for Rhetorical Reform’ will join me in condemning these three manners of counterproductive provocation.

Cordially,
Thomas Z. Horton
Publisher Emeritus
The Princeton Tory



Where Are We Now?

PRINCETON AND POLITICS POST-GANSA

By GEORGE KUNKEL

FOR TWO WEEKS BETWEEN THE DEBATE on divestment and the fervor of Ferguson Will Gansa took over Princeton's campus. Who is Will Gansa you may ask yourself? Even as one of his campaign managers, I'm still not sure that I know. Some say he is a firebrand leader, some say a sexist; like all things, the truth is probably somewhere in between. At least that's what he told us in a New York Times article covering the recent Princeton Undergraduate Student Government (USG) election. Regardless of the character he may or may not be, Gansa's uncanny run for president raised some questions about student life on a college campus.

His platform touted the superiority of waffle fries and a need for greater structural integrity in our fruit. This compared with Ella Chang, who eventually won in the runoff election with a platform calling for policies ranging from more accessible financial aid programs to the establishment a campus pub. The Gansa joke spread like wildfire. Princeton loved it and those who didn't love it loved to hate it. Like every political maverick, Gansa had his critics. They called him out for mocking the election and propping up an already existent patriarchal culture. A girl could never have pulled

off the joke, they said, and the whole ordeal was just evidence of cultural norms: white males win.

But whether it was the critics, the Gansa pun-enthusiasts, or those who genuinely wanted to know if he was serious, people began discussing everything about the election, from feminism to the role of USG. Walking through dining halls and scrolling through Facebook or Yik Yak (a geographically focused, anonymous Twitter), USG was a topic of widespread discussion, possibly for the first time in years. Sure, some people were talking about waffle fries, but for most, it was their first time even considering campus politics.

What happened next was honestly, a bit scary. Princetonians didn't just talk; they followed through and voted. In the 2013 USG presidential election there were 1,981 total votes cast. This year, in the regular election, that number jumped to 2,704. The 36% increase in voter turnout swelled again in the runoff between Gansa and Chang to 3,116. That's 3,116 out of 5,244 undergraduate students, or 59.4% of the electorate. Compare that to 58.2% in the 2012 Presidential election. Many people have a lot to say, both good and bad, about the past election cycle, but all of that aside, it's hard to ignore what the numbers say: Will

Gansa's run, if only for two weeks, changed campus politics.

The election was facilitated largely through social media. The candidates did not make public appearances and most information was conveyed through campaign websites. Gansa's website contained hardly any personal information or details about what he really stood for. How would he get more waffle fries into the dining halls? Or ripen campus fruit for that matter? Bike reform, the third spoke of the platform, was never explained, even in a video purporting to do so. Yet, Princeton students, mostly through Yik Yak, latched on, inventing their own meaning for what seemed to be a totally nebulous campaign. Gansa was a political visionary or genius satirical comedian, with one post even commenting that he would go on to write for Colbert. Everyone seemed to have a theory.

Despite the initial interest, the hype on campus was a flash in the pan. For two weeks it was all we could talk about. It offered up a humorous break in the mundanity of our day-to-day routines of class, work, sleep, class, work, sleep... But talk quickly died down after the results were posted and Ella Chang was announced as the next President of USG. The joke was old, washed up, done with and we

moved on to the next issue that shook up our daily lives. That new issue just happened to be Ferguson. We protested and demonstrated for another two weeks and then went home for break. We seemed to lose interest in the exact same way. Campus ate up every piece of election news, only to abruptly lose interest.

The engagement with the election was eerily reflective of the general pattern by which we consume information. We get all of our news online. The U.S. is enduring what has been declared ‘the death of print journalism.’ The most recent of these developments was the overhaul of *The New Republic* just this December. The liberal intellectual magazine’s editor Franklin Foer was forced to leave by owner Chris Hughes. When Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor, and many more staff writers also left with Foer it was seen as a bloodletting that would mean the collapse of the magazine.

Ever since it began in 1914, *The New Republic* was a bastion of traditional print media. Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann founded the magazine, as Croly put it, “to give certain ideals and opinions a higher value in American public opinion.” The goal was to espouse the ideas of a new American liberalism, a movement based in critiques of the status quo, a call for a better society. For *The New Republic* such a critique did not exist without principled analytical thinking and deep, investigative journalism.

A century later, however, the business model wasn’t working. Like many other print news sources, the magazine announced in December that it had been forced to cut down on print issues. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, bought the publication in 2012 and with the early December announcement came the decision to change the magazine into a “vertically integrated digital media company.” To many involved, this and other jargon sounded like the rhetorical flourish of start-up movements and Silicon Valley.

It would be too simplistic to say that the conflict at *The New Republic* ultimately boiled down to what the magazine would prioritize going for-

ward, digital media or in-depth long-form journalism. Hughes had a vision of an online publication complete with pictures, videos, and an active social media presence. The writers who left acknowledged the needs of a business in a digital age, but had qualms about the way that changes were being made. The weeks leading up to the mass exodus were tumultuous and filled with personal politics, but the entire incident is reflective of the crisis for journalism at large: balancing readers and viewership with high-quality reporting.

The way in which we take in information is changing drastically. The internet has made it increasingly easier to access anything and everything and this has forced the media to change its methods. Whatever we want to know is just a few clicks away after we pull up Google on our ever-ready phones and laptops. We can’t get enough. This phenomenon seemed to hit Princeton during the election. We got a hint of Gansa and got hooked. The three videos uploaded to the campaign website were not part of our daily routines, but they were consumed in the same way.

Like most Princeton students I often find myself procrastinating. But that procrastination has evolved from

Reading five editorials about the Michael Brown grand jury is not the same as forming your own opinion on the case. The “I read an article” defense used so often in casual discussion is not an argument, let alone an original one.

the mindless Middle School years of scrolling through my Facebook newsfeed. Instead, I now waste my time getting around the New Yorker paywall (the monthly limit on articles is nowhere near enough) by searching for specific article titles. It is too easy to

casually mine through various media sites for hours of my time. Hours...

Maybe this poor time management is reflective of a weakening of my will. Maybe it’s normal. But what continues to drive this activity is an overwhelming feeling of not knowing enough. There is always the nascent sense that more can be read; there is more out there being talked about and if I don’t know about it I’m falling behind. The result is a sort of mass consumption of information.

The digital age has increased the amount of information available and that in turn has often increased the amount we read. Hopefully it’s also increased public awareness of pertinent news issues. But the accidental effect has been oversaturation. Is an environment where we hoard mass quantities of information really conducive to analytical thought? Reading five editorials about the Michael Brown grand jury is not the same as forming your own opinion on the case. The “I read an article” defense used so often in casual discussion is not an argument, let alone an original one.

Any loss of critical thinking is only perpetuated by the feeling of drowning in a sea of news. Our frantic need to read more and more facilitates an environment where media output must focus on competing for our attention. Writing begins to favor time-effectiveness over substance. There’s an odd focus on efficiency, cutting word counts to attract hungry readers. Slate has begun putting “X minutes to read” next to online article titles. X usually being ten or less. Vox, a relatively recent phenomenon, combines the BuzzFeed style of catchy titles and sleek presentation with highly context-focused news. And then there’s whatever Chris Hughes and associates at the new *The New Republic* meant by “vertically integrated digital media company.”

As a guest on “*The Colbert Report*” in October, while still literary editor of *The New Republic*, Wieseltier described the United States as an open and democratic society. Such a society, he said “places an extraordinary intellectual responsibility on ordinary

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men and women because we are governed by what we think. We are governed by our opinions. So the content of our opinions and the quality of our opinions and the quality of the formation of our opinions basically determines the character of our society.”

Wieseltier’s words are chilling. They resonate, not only because they describe an ideal that America purports to live up to, but also because they may reveal the average American’s deepest flaw, acceptance of uninformed apathy as the norm. Does the change in the way that we engage with information inhibit our ability for civic engagement? Are we forming our own opinions? Can we form our own opinions? Or instead, are we just choosing from the opinions presented to us?

Joseph Schumpeter’s critique of a democratic society at large in Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy describes a society in which “the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective.” The democratic citizen will always be one who votes and discusses politics irrationally, solely with immediate self-interest in mind. Analytical thought is not involved. The Schumpeterian vision of democracy is the antithesis of Wieseltier’s ideal. It’s a sentiment reminiscent of the electoral truism, “It’s the economy, stupid.”

After the initial hype surrounding the election at Princeton, the same analysis was thrown full force at the Gansa campaign and its seemingly narrow-minded supporters. A counter movement followed the general election that saw many students passively attacking their peers who had voted for Gansa on the grounds that they were adhering to a herd mentality. The “if you care about your school, vote for Ella (Chang)” line was popular across social media. The sentiment that it portrayed was one that reflected deep care for the role of student government and civic engage-

ment. It told us votes should be cast, not for the candidate who would provide the most laughs per capita, but for the best candidate for the campus community. It was an attack on apathy and narrow-minded engagement.

Unfortunately, the sentiment grew dangerously close to arbitrarily belittling a large portion of the student body. Anyone who voted for Gansa had bought into the hype. They had failed to do their due diligence as voters in a democratic system and really come to terms with what might happen if Gansa actually won. The assumption, at times was that any vote for Gansa was a thoughtless move of blind conformity. Critiques were not addressed at the campaign despite numerous issues that could have been raised about the efficacy of a joke candidate. He was talking about waffle fries for God’s sake! Instead, students felt the need to create a moral high ground from which they could belittle each other.

The problem with applying a Schumpeterian critique to University politics is one of scale. Put in the context of an election for President of USG, these attacks come off as a bit self-indulgent. How much does a vote for student government even matter? There is rampant voter apathy on most college campuses and quite honestly, it might exist for legitimate reasons. As alluded to earlier, students have extreme pressures on their time and are more than likely to prioritize that time in a way that favors work and social bonding over USG elections. When candidate platforms border on indistinguishable, offering similar solutions to the same issues year in and year out, is there really that much reason to allocate precious time for analyzing the minute differences?

Furthermore, most of candidates are well intentioned. There is no need to worry about student politicians being co-opted by special interests. One of Schumpeter’s conclusions was that in democratic societies there are “greater opportunities for groups with an ax to grind.” The idea that certain student groups with special agendas might gain some undue influence within the University community is as

far fetched as the idea that administrators won’t have a huge say in each and every decision. Its probably safe to say that the vast majority of anyone who runs for USG, or any student government, is someone who wants to do so and will also do a good job. Being honest with ourselves, USG elections don’t have a lot at stake. They are by no means comparable to national, state, or even our local elections.

But this is at a University. Things do change when we look at the larger picture. Politicians are not our well-intentioned, like-minded peers. Voting in a democracy serves the specific function of checking power. Voters have the responsibility to remove from office those politicians who have made poor decisions. They must also work to keep such ineffective politicians out of office in the first place. None of this is news to anyone, but it asserts the necessity of analytical thought and deliberation in the voting process. In national, state, or local politics it is not easy to tell which candidate to vote for and thus, the responsibility of the democratic voter is a heavy one only increased by the influence of special interest groups.

Herein lies the scary piece of what we saw at Princeton in the recent election. The democratic process that we experience at college is not reflective of the same process that exists off campus, on the national scale. The student government electoral system is one in which votes matter little and the system functions in a way that makes it seem as if they don’t matter at all. Couple this with the digital age and consumption of information and the result is the perfect environment to launch a successful satirical campaign for student government. Some students get a little enjoyment out of something different happening on campus. Not a huge problem. But extend this underwhelming sense of civic responsibility to the real world while keeping the same less-than-analytical political engagement? It may contribute to an uninformed, irresponsible populace—which is a problem if, as Jefferson told us, “An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” ■



Technology Can't Save Us (From Ourselves)

By TUCKER JONES

NEARLY EVERY DAY A NEW APP, INVENTION, or scientific innovation that is supposed to change the world comes out. Almost always, they fail to change the world in any significant way. This is the normal order of things.

We can't engineer all our problems away. Specifically, we can't engineer away our collective failures as a society. Yet policymakers hold these inventions up as cure-alls for what ails America today.

Policymakers use these technofixes, created in good faith by good people, as distractions from the larger issues. In reality, none of these fixes is going to do any serious damage to society.

They may even do some significant good for a small number of individuals. But technology can't save us from the greatest failures of American public policy. Only better policy can do that.

Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs, took the media by storm last year when they were hailed as the first major "disruption" to higher education. MOOCs generally consist of a series of prerecorded video lectures and assigned readings about a given topic, plus a few assignments, all conducted online. Major universities, including Princeton, partnered with companies like Coursera and Udacity to release MOOCs taught by star professors. At long last, supporters proclaimed,

anyone—no matter his age, socioeconomic status, or wealth—could get an Ivy League quality education for free. MOOCs could mark the end of elitist ivory tower academia!

But in the end, who actually uses MOOCs? In an October 1, 2013 article, *The Economist* noted as one example 15-year-old Battushig Myanganbayar of Ulan Bator, who got a perfect score on MIT's course on Circuits and Electronics. By contrast, a September 17, 2013 opinion piece in *The Daily Princetonian* opened with a story about the author's father, described as "a retired investment banker," who found himself reinvigorated by his participation in a MOOC about Einstein. Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that the average MOOC participant is more similar to the retired investment banker than to the Mongolian teenager. According to this study, more than 80% of MOOC students had already completed an associate's or undergraduate degree. In fact, the average MOOC student is already more educated than others within their country, both in the developed and developing worlds. In developing countries, where computer access is less ubiquitous, the vast majority of MOOC students hail from the wealthiest classes. In their current state, MOOCs have not yet meaningfully leveled the socioeconomic playing field for undereducated or poorer people in the United States or elsewhere in the world. Moreover no study has yet shown whether those who complete MOOCs generally have similar levels of conceptual understanding and information retention as those who complete classes in traditional educational environments. For now, at least, MOOCs seem largely to be educational entertainment for people who already have access to education.

But some politicians have been eyeing MOOCs as a replacement for traditional higher education. California State Senator Darrell Steinberg introduced a bill in March 2013 which would have forced state colleges to accept the completion of certain MOOCs as equivalent to course credit. The bill was proposed in an effort to reduce overcrowding in introductory-level courses.

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When these courses are over-enrolled, students who cannot take them get stuck—after all, it’s hard to complete a degree in chemistry if you can’t get into the Chem 101 class.

But this approach—funding MOOCs instead of more-expensive instructors—can create a dangerous long-term precedent, as Princeton Sociology Professor Mitchell Duneier has described in explaining his decision stop teaching a MOOC through Coursera.

“I’ve said no, because I think that it’s an excuse for state legislatures to cut funding to state universities,” Professor Duneier says. “And I guess that I’m really uncomfortable being part of a movement that’s going to get its revenue in that way. And I also have serious doubts about whether or not using a course like mine in that way would be pedagogically effective.”

Professor Duneier’s doubts are well-founded. Both in California and nationwide, those in power have promised universal high-quality education. Now that the time has come to make good on that promise, no one wants to pay for it. Instead, we have turned to untested but cheaper and efficient technological alternatives—like MOOCs—with no assurance of their quality or potential.

In late December 2014, The New York Times ran an article about the inventor of School Guard Glass—a lightweight, relatively inexpensive bulletproof and impact-proof glass designed for use in schools. This technological innovation was a response to the Sandy Hook massacre, in which a shooter gained entry into an elementary school by shooting out a window near the front door and letting himself in. School Guard Glass might have delayed the shooter’s entry, possibly long enough for police to respond before any students or teachers would be killed.

Maybe these windows will save a life one day. But a more effective way to reduce the number of school shootings might instead be to reduce the number of guns that potential shooters have access to. The Assault Weapons Ban of 2013 was an attempt

to do just this, but political gridlock ensured that the bill never made it past the Senate. In fact, at the federal level, our gun laws have not sustained serious scrutiny since the mass murder at Sandy Hook.

NRA-backed Republicans have tried to switch the narrative of gun violence to being a public health issue. It’s a small number of mentally ill individuals, they say, who commit mass murder with guns. This is certainly true. But it’s impossible to identify every would-be mass murderer in advance. Further, the Republican Party has done everything in their power to prevent serious federal reform in health care—witness the House’s dozens of votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Either way, preventing tragedies like Sandy Hook requires not a technological quick-fix but a serious reduction in the number of firearms in this country in conjunction with comprehensive health care, including mental health, for all people in the United States. But this would require serious government intervention and policy changes—Americans must come together to solve the root of this problem instead of relying on a technological innovation that asks us to quietly hope that the next school shooter also opens fire before he enters the building, not after.

On November 24, when it was announced that officer Darren Wilson would not be prosecuted for killing Michael Brown, the Brown family released a statement asking the public to “[j]oin with us in our campaign to ensure that every police officer working the streets in this country wears a body camera.” A week later, President Obama requested Congress to fund \$263 million towards this project. And just like that, the technology of body cams entered the narrative as the means to catch those few bad cops who do bad things.

An initial criticism of this approach was that police officers would either not wear the cameras, or sabotage their use by “accidentally” setting them up improperly, turning them off, or losing footage. On December 23,

2014, an officer wearing a body cam shot and killed an 18 year old, Antonio Martin, in Berkeley, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. The body camera was not activated. Police claim that Martin was aiming a handgun at the officer, but the lack of footage leaves room for doubt.

Yes, the implementation of serious legal and financial penalties might prevent police officers from refusing to wear their body cams, but the death of Eric Garner at the hands of New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo has shed more light on the limitations of this new technology. A bystander used a cellphone to film Officer Pantaleo clearly choking Garner to death, and yet a grand jury declined to indict Officer Pantaleo. In this situation, would a body cam have been more helpful?

Lack of evidence is only a minor part of the larger problem of American police violence. Even when video evidence is available, police officers have escaped penalty for their brutality—something we’ve seen since 1991, when a bystander captured the police beating of Rodney King. Our biggest problem is not a lack of evidence or even a few bad cops. Rather, our problem is that state violence against African Americans (particularly men in their teens and 20s) is considered normal and acceptable.

If we want to educate young Americans, then we must be prepared to fund education. If we want to end school shootings, then we must be prepared to reduce the availability of firearms to people with mental disorders. If we want to end racialized police violence, then we must be prepared to rebuild the entire justice system in the United States.

But none of these technological inventions—made by good people with good intentions—adequately fix the critical ailments of our society; instead, they are temporary band aids, technofixes to the symptoms of far more serious ailments. These are recurring problems, fundamental in our society, that will not go away without serious changes to our policies. We cannot simply widget, gadget, or app them away. ■



On State Power

By ANDREW TYNES

IN 2004, THE U.S. MILITARY-RUN ABU Ghraib prison in Iraq received international attention after 60 Minutes II broadcasted photographs of CIA and Army paramilitaries forcing prisoners to engage in traumatic and often humiliating poses and acts. The photographs and subsequent reporting exposed indignities that ranged from stacking naked Iraqis in a pyramid to a famous image of a hooded figure who was made to stand on a box and told he would be electrocuted if he fell. With the exception of some fringes of American conservatism, the pictures and accounts were met with disgust across the globe. Many of the war's detractors argued that these abuses were a side effect of the ambiguous objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Others called for the resignation of top officials like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who reportedly authorized the abuses. President Bush reflected that the events at Abu Ghraib did "not reflect the nature of the American people." Amidst all the blame and chaos that followed the revelations of Abu Ghraib, one psychologist noted eerie similarities between the conclusions of his work and that prison.

Philip Zimbardo conducted a social experiment in 1971 that later came to be known as the Stanford Prison Ex-

periment. In it, the researchers selected a group of men with excellent psychological health and no history of crime and made each one assume the role of either a prisoner or a prison guard. Zimbardo was shocked by the degree to which the subjects took to their roles within days. The "guards" volunteered extra time to the study, attacked "prisoners" with fire extinguishers, forced nudity and public defecation upon them, and became increasingly violent and cruel, even in the absence of the researchers. The results were so astounding that the experiment was ended in six days, less than halfway through the anticipated two-week period of study. Zimbardo summarized the experiment's findings in an interview, declaring that "the line between good and evil is permeable and almost anyone can be induced to cross it when pressured by situational forces." He would later serve as an expert witness in the trial of one Abu Ghraib guard, arguing that the man should not be held accountable for his actions. Instead, Zimbardo believed that the blame for excessive violence should be placed on the institutions that both put the guards in position and directed them to commit heinous crimes. The institutions responsible exercised and permitted harsh techniques that made the incidents of Abu Ghraib anything but in-

cidental. Abu Ghraib was and remains part of a broader pattern of excessive state power.

So in December, when the Senate Intelligence Committee released portions of their report detailing extreme techniques used by the CIA in detention and interrogation, the similarities between the report and Zimbardo's findings were immediately evident. Among the practices which the 525 page behemoth describes are waterboarding, threats of rape and murder, and sensory deprivation. The practice of making prisoners defecate in a bucket seen in the Stanford Prison Experiment is also documented at CIA black sites. What President Bush failed to recognize in 2004 was that these actions did not in fact just reflect the character of "a few bad apples" in the national security community, but rather the inherent nature of the institutions to which they belonged. Of course, this lack of insight cannot be blamed solely on the President or the American public; the report also noted that the CIA collectively misled them. According to the report, the CIA "impeded effective White House oversight" and provided "inaccurate information" to both Congress and the White House. Moreover, the organization selectively leaked information to the media in order to present

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enhanced interrogation as an effective tactic in the War on Terror. The CIA deliberately committed to a story that was both incomplete and untrue in order to cover for the excessive abuses of its members.

The institutional roots of these abuses are shared not only across national security agencies but also by domestic law enforcement. Critics of state violence in media and communities across the country have scrutinized the lack of police accountability in the wake of high profile cases like Ferguson and Staten Island over the past year, leading to widespread demonstrations and protests. But while the conversation on state-sanctioned brutality has largely focused on race, Zimbardo's research and the CIA torture report suggest that there is another, more subtle conversation to be had.

This is not to say that race had no place in these systems of violence. Psychological trauma at black sites and military detention centers was intensified by the prevalence of racial and religious bigotry. The excessive

nudity and forced sexual positioning at Abu Ghraib is a clear affront to human decency, but even more so to the religious and cultural modesty of Muslim detainees. The forced recital feeding described in the Senate report involved hummus, playing off of a traditionally Mediterranean food and subverting the comfort of culture. Interrogation officers made these decisions intentionally, informed by *The Arab Mind* which is both "probably the single most popular and widely read book on the Arabs in the US military" and universally detested by Middle East experts, one of whom claimed that "the best use for this volume, if any, is as a doorstep." In Ferguson, Don Lemon of CNN described a situation in which a member of the National Guard cautioned Lemon's white producer about "n****s, you never know what they're going to do." The action taken post-Ferguson has been a necessary effort in bringing attention to the institutional and cultural shortcomings in race relations. The racial disparities in the execution of the law are egregious and should be taken extremely seriously, and yet racism by

itself is an insufficient explanation of the broader lapse of institutional conscience.

Race alone fails to account for institutional reasoning for consistent abuses because they often come in the absence of external racial factors. It might be natural to conclude that the disparity between race in the police force and surrounding community corresponds to heightened tension between the two. But a 2003 meta-analysis across major American metropolitan areas concluded that "minority representation had no significant influence on levels of police violence." That is not to say that the tragedies of Michael Brown or Eric Garner would have befallen them regardless of their race. But the tendency of police to engage in unwarranted violence is exacerbated by, not derived from, the color of skin and ethnic origin. While individuals within the CIA undoubtedly held prejudices, the institution did not prescribe policy based on those biases. Procedures that involved extreme physical and psychological duress were often committed in the absence of racial tensions. A comprehensive theory of excessive state violence must then take place outside of racial parameters. Institutionally sanctioned brutality instead stems from a broader failure of the American justice system.

A more wholesome explanation for consistent excessive violence and injustice perpetrated by the CIA, military, and police can be derived through the situational attribution of behavior offered by the Stanford Prison Experiment. This interpretation of conduct explains these injustices by critically examining the environment in which actions take place. In each of these instances, high pressure situations and a high tolerance for force led these individuals to make decisions that they would not have without those conditions. The authority placed in these institutions is abused not because malicious or racist people join them, but rather due to the inherent state of mind that holds across any organization that gives its members state-sanctioned power over others. Police and the intelligence community have been given reign in the United States in a way that

absolves them of democratic oversight or responsibility to the public. In the name of local and national security, these groups have often censored and distorted the flow of information to the public in order to perpetuate their destructive cultures and in doing so have damaged not only their reputation but also their institutional goals.

If any of these abuses had been a necessary way to keep the American people safe or preserve justice abroad, this would be a different conversation. But this is a discussion of excessive state violence, where all available evidence leads to the invariable conclusion that these practices have made the United States less stable and global justice less secure. Domestic rioting has consistently followed police overstep, and torture plays into the strategies of American enemies: an essay by Osama bin Laden mentions “the crimes at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo,” as evidence of the United States disregarding “the conscience of humanity.” A key relationship between military and CIA abuses abroad and the events that unfolded in Ferguson, Staten Island, and elsewhere domestically is that the actions taken by authority figures were not necessary in their duties and produced no tangible or useful ends.

Many liberals have been aghast at these horrific overreaches domestic and foreign, and rightfully so. There have been whispers of comparisons to the 60s and 70s, where skeptics of U.S. policy were subject to beatings like Stonewall, slaughters like Kent State, and imprisonment like Birmingham. But this trend of excessive state power is not a return to the past, rather, a continuation of a trend that has persisted in the United States since its founding. The ideology that drives institutions to commit and defend atrocities not only employs violence, but is an ideology of violence for its own sake. Extreme use of state power can only be successfully curtailed through a radical reimagining of the role of security forces and their relationship with the public.

The logic of state security at the present is fundamentally reactionary, in both the procedural and political

senses of the term. Police and intelligence broadly act in response to situations, from a burglary to a bombing. This practice fails to capture the steps preceding the act itself, many of which have progressive solutions that have already entered the mainstream. Unarmed mediation teams consisting of former violent offenders can interrupt a situation before it becomes problematic, and they have done so in cities like Los Angeles. In New York City, more than 40% of the 14,000 in-

Abu Ghraib was and remains part of a broader pattern of excessive state power.

mates at Rikers Island prison complex are reportedly mentally ill and 77% of brutality complaints are filed by inmates with a mental health diagnosis. Communities across the country must invest the resources to get people treatment from medical professionals, not from the end of a baton.

Internationally, nowhere is America more approved of than Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than a million lives have been saved by emergency AIDS relief since 2003 and where more than 1/3 of annual American economic assistance is given. By contributing to productive economic and social development, USAID helps deny safe haven to terrorism which might otherwise take advantage of a disillusioned population. Anti-poverty initiatives, mental health, drug law, and truly humanitarian action must be increasingly drawn into the discussion of protecting the public proactively rather than reactively. In doing so, these institutions could be increasingly woven into the communities they purportedly serve in a way that strikes at the heart of truly destructive crime.

Much of the control of these organizations should be broken up and subjected to greater public discourse, preventing the institutional secrecy and fraternal mentality that obstructs proper oversight. The discrepancies in racial makeup between police and the communities they work should be

scrutinized and addressed, but this is secondary to a geographic disparity in which less than half of even black or Hispanic officers live in the cities they serve. Positive alternatives to traditional police and justice have been seen in globally, notably in Latin America. In Mexico, community militias or autodefensas replace federal police who often cover for deadly crimes like trafficking and murder. In Venezuela, hundreds of “communal” judges have revolutionized conflict resolution and attempt to find “win-win” solutions to community issues. Intelligence services are more complex, but debriefs to Congress and democratic outlets in the countries in question would force a degree of openness and public debate on the permissibility of violence. Of course it is important to recognize the boldness of the Senate report, but it was still released years too late. Without mechanisms to proactively inhibit systemic abuses of power, debriefs and reports do little to put an end to these destructive cultures. These steps would create a more wholesome and stable peace for the American people and the world at large.

The cultural and the institutional reform necessary to avert future abuses of state authority must take place in tandem and reinforce each other. As police continue to be integrated as constructive forces in communities, they will be more accepted by its citizens and vice versa. But at their core, the issues of excessive state power are, despite attempts to distance and obfuscate by the respective institutions, a reflection of the American psyche. As we ask more of security and community alike, as a nation we must provoke, discuss, and understand how these depravities have been and continue to be accepted and promoted by our society. While foremost our social organizations influence our individual actions, these associations are still comprised of individuals with agency. There exists an inherent institutional inertia that obstructs reform, but if nothing else, these past few months have demonstrated our willingness to question the assumptions of old. ■

By JOEL SIMWINGA

WHEN TRAYVON MARTIN WAS murdered in 2012, there was a lot of noise from the far right. Dismissiveness quickly became scorn; accusations of race-baiting became accusations of reverse racism; black anguish was drowned out by white peevishness. Any sort of reasonable “national discourse” abruptly ended when in a move that can only be described as utterly disgraceful, CNN aired photographs of Martin wearing dental grills and exhaling marijuana smoke. When Ferguson, Missouri erupted two years later, we saw our country begin to head down the same noxious path...—and then we saw Eric Garner die on camera. In the wake of a grand jury decision not to indict Garner’s killer, all but the basest voices on the far right have grown sheepishly quiet about race. This brief respite from a three-decade-long stream of neoconservative racial bile has provided us with a chance to slip out of our raincoats and to throw up what has been caught in our throats and stomachs. For once we feel that we are not so heavy and that we are able to speak clearly—that we might even be heard. For once we might—might be the ones who get to frame the national discourse on racial oppression.

Currently, we may be in possession of something that resembles political capital; what will we do with it? Perhaps we will be able to cash out on body cameras for police officers; perhaps we aren’t rich enough for that right now. Regardless of what policy changes catch on or don’t, I think that we would be wise to pay particular attention to form.

Form: the detail and context (in other words: the depth) with which we present instances of oppression

Most people who are close to the issue of institutional violence against black Americans understand that the deaths of Martin, Brown and Garner are merely some of the most visible symptoms of a racial prejudice that runs far deeper than what most left-leaning individuals—let alone powerful Democrats—are generally willing to admit. Perhaps



the primary reason for what I view as our rather shallow understanding of oppression is that we have spent so long fighting shallow battles. We have groveled for low-hanging fruit while the conservative establishment simultaneously discredits us as extremists and vilifies us as domineering snobs. The left has been intensely reactive since the Reagan administration, and as a result, our identity and the values for which we fight have been framed to the American public not positively, but in contradistinction to ultraconservatism. (The terms ‘equality’, ‘justice’, and ‘freedom’, for instance, have been seriously abused by the Democratic Party.) Fighting shallow, uphill battles, has conditioned us both to be shallow and to fight uphill.

Form: the reasons that we choose to present as justifications for our views

I say that it is high time for us to strengthen ourselves, and to do so by acquiring depth. We should not be so eager to pocket extra signatures on

Activism a

our Change.org petitions that we reduce “justice” to a single indictment, “freedom” to not being killed arbitrarily by law enforcement, or “equality” to a paltry statement: that black lives... “matter?” Whatever strength we do have does not come from the number of people that will agree with our ideas when we ask them to. Our strength—also what allows us to be good allies—comes from our love for people and our love for truth. Unlike self-righteousness, rebelliousness, defiance, and elitism (characteristics that many of us, including myself, share and effectively utilize in our political activities), love is an attractive thing to be full with. I say let’s think of this respite as an opportunity and a reminder to strengthen and deepen ourselves—and not just ourselves. I say let’s cultivate that which makes us strong, that which is attractive, that which makes us good allies in daily life.

Form: the way that our desires connect to our actions

The words “ally” and “activist” mean



and Form: A Critique

different things. Surely one can play one of these roles well without playing the other at all, but to do this would be to play in the nakedest sense. I would propose that ‘ally’ ought to be the anterior category—that every activist ought to be an ally first and foremost, and that there is one characteristic in particular that will make somebody good at being one. A good ally, I think, grounds her concern in her empathy. I say ‘concern’ as opposed to, for example, ‘altruism’ because ‘altruism’ is slippery, dangerous, and elusive (how can concern be disinterested or selfless?). Being altruistic very often involves disrespecting the agency of the individuals that one purportedly seeks to help. The idea of a ‘white savior complex’ is both self-explanatory and well known; I would posit that self-righteousness and political ideology are likewise treacherous grounds for altruism. Just as a white savior complex grounds actions taken to improve the plight of the oppressed in a self-satisfaction that is dependent upon faith in racial superiority, ‘self-

less’ actions motivated by self-righteousness or political ideology are perverted by their dependence upon the actor’s faith in her moral or intellectual superiority respectively. In all three cases, the motive for being ‘altruistic’ is grounded in an unequal balance of power. People who are motivated primarily by a savior complex, self-righteousness, or political ideology have no incentive to aim to alleviate the power disparity between themselves and the oppressed, and probably do much to make oppressed individuals feel uncomfortable.

Form: the incorporation of honesty and self-reflection into the structure of our political lives

In addition to—and perhaps even beyond—empathy, a good ally must ground her activism in self-interest. A good ally ought to understand her stake in an issue, and limit her involvement in that issue accordingly. To abstract one’s empathy and stretch it beyond what one can feel is a dangerous thing. To stand be-

side an individual who stands up for herself is potentially helpful in some immediate sense, but also oppressive and degrading when one has no emotional stake in helping. To engage in political activities towards which one does not feel compelled is to assert one’s intellectual or moral superiority (at the very least, the superiority of one’s reasons for becoming involved). When one supports another’s ‘selfish’ activity with their own ‘selfless’ actions for the sake of being selfless... what does that say about how one views the moral status of those who one seeks to support—to say nothing of their competency?

While feigned solidarity is by no means necessarily ‘ineffective’ in any macro-political sense, it is certainly vile. I anticipate that this may not seem like a legitimate objection to some of you, to which I say this: perhaps those of us who are not policymakers ought to reduce our faith in consequentialist ethics and treat that which is contemptible with contempt. And if we

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are not willing to stop thinking about the moral-political world in the reductive binary framework of 'good' vs. 'bad'; if we are unwilling to recognize the moral significance of words like justice, honor, shame, valor and loyalty—perhaps we should at least try to do a better job of understanding what these words might mean to those who lack status and privilege. At this point, I would like to share from my own experience with racial oppression, and to express how I feel that it has been severely misunderstood.

Racism is intensely unpopular. Owing to this unpopularity, the word "racist" has been all but reduced to an empty vehicle for ad hominem attacks in the public sphere. "Racism" is so abused and confused that most of the arguments in which it is deployed would gain clarity if every utterance of "racist" were replaced by an utterance of "bad". In the painful and embarrassing public discourse on race in America, with Republicans, Democrats, and sociologists all speaking mangled gobbledygook over one another, there is at least one thing that seems to be common: Americans of all sorts talk about racism as if it is the type of thing that obtains primarily in acts (e.g. slurs, profiling, violence, discrimination). What a terrible misunderstanding! Racism isn't so much an individual decision as it is a state of the world. Racism is (among other things) a historical phenomenon grounded in facts about geography and human psychology that permeates economic, sociological and political structures. How can people think that something like that might obtain in mere instances? Racism obtains in my existence. Racism is my shadow that grows and shrinks and changes in relationship to me throughout the day, but only disappears in very dark rooms and when I close my eyes.

That certain "liberals" insist on maintaining the devastating facade that racism is somehow grounded in infrequent acts committed by "bad people" irks me to no end. Few things anger me more quickly or wound me more critically than the "gotcha!"

game in which people who quietly harbor deeply racist sentiments try to 'out' other people who obviously harbor deeply racist sentiments as... racists! The hyena-like eagerness with which our "centrists" pounce on any racist sentiment that is verbalized by a conservative indicates, 'at best', their daft insistence on playing Whack-a-Mole indefinitely; 'at worst', it indicates their willingness to exploit my existence for easy catharsis, and cheap social capital. Frankly, I find the MSNBC-esque 'outrage' over Donald Sterling's comments, or Rick Santorum's comments, or comments made by the Grand Wizard of the Klan, to be as hopelessly stupid as Tal Fortgang's article about privilege. Worse: these fits are immeasurably more harmful. What have our "liberals" done here? other than to further verify that their own racism is acceptable? Such insipid treatment of racism from my friends exasperates me.

Some of the loneliest and most alienating experiences that I have consist in friends complaining to me about naked racism with the expectation that I might be appreciative and view them more positively. Can you see the misunderstanding, the irony? 'Anti-racism' as a deluded personal belief is common; anti-racism as a genuine personal maxim is uncommon; immunization from racism is make-believe. So when a friend tries to convince me that she is 'not a racist', I certainly don't believe her, but this is no objection to our friendship. On the other hand, that she refuses to acknowledge (let alone confront!) her own racism just might be. Fortunately for my and all ego-centric illusions about friendships, there is a serious dearth of awareness about the lived experiences of black people. I can believe in good conscience that my friends are not deficient in love, but rather in understanding. Herein, ostensibly, lies an opportunity to affect change with information.

If I speak clearly and honestly will you lend an open ear? Allow me to impart one or two ugly truths. After all, they are my truths, and I am entitled to share them.

As much as "the black experience"

is contorted and almost exclusively represented as either violence, servitude, or buffoonery, actually being black is perhaps best characterized by long, quiet, enigmatic pain. I'm not talking about pain that derives from crude and obvious affronts from somewhere outside—the kind of pain that people rightly complain and brag about. Being attacked is painful, yes, but it also presents one with the opportunity to love and defend oneself: to exert one's force on another, to be defiant, to affirm one's own existence. What's more, one has the opportunity to defend oneself righteously! Against lies, against slander, against pettiness and maliciousness. Pain is not so bad when it comes with honor. The kind of pain that characterizes my experience as a black person is different from this. It comes from somewhere inside.

It comes from all of the good and lovely things at home, in books and especially on screens, in my friends, in my family, and in myself that are, at bottom, rotten, cancerous, full with parasites and confused antibodies. There is no honor in this.

What I hate more than being followed around in a store or hearing car doors lock when I walk past them on the sidewalk (and especially more than being called a nigger) is this sort of long pain that I can best describe as a sense of shame. This shame comes from being taught nothing about the history of my ancestors in grade school apart from that they were enslaved and colonized; it comes from constantly having to prove that I am not dangerous; it comes from never knowing how to dress—because it's just as bad to come off as an Uncle Tom as it is to come off as a nigger, and what else might I come off as, really? My shame comes from watching my sisters use appliances and products to try to make their hair look like the kind of hair that white people have.

My shame comes from the fact that I live in the same deeply racist society that you do with the same news programs and movies and textbooks that are rooted in and continue to reinforce white supremacy. I am ashamed

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THE WEST IS THE BEST

By SARAH SAKHA

A MAN IS BEING DRAGGED ALONG THE cold concrete floor by his collar, out of his solitary cell in an Iranian prison. He is blindfolded. He looks wan and frazzled.

The man dragging him stops when they reach a small, confined space with light streaming in from outside. He abruptly brings the man—journalist Maziar Bahari—to his feet, telling him that the Iranian police had changed his mind about his fate, that he wasn't innocent, that his efforts to exonerate himself had been futile. Bahari realizes what is happening as his interrogator, Rosewater, cocks his gun and holds the gun to his head. Bahari is pleading for his life, sobbing in desperation. Rosewater goes to shoot his gun—but there are no bullets. Bahari crumples up onto the ground in a ball, weeping. He is then dragged back to his cell.

I began to cry right along with Bahari. But this was just one of the many torture scenes in Jon Stewart's movie *Rosewater*, which tells the story of how Iranian-Canadian journalist Bahari came to be captured, imprisoned and tortured by Iranian authorities for 188 days, after being accused of being an American spy while reporting on the 2009 presidential elections in Iran. The film's title is the name by which we know Bahari's main interrogator, a reference to his personal odor.

A few scenes later, the movie shows clips of various American political leaders denouncing Iran for arresting Bahari and such inconceivable human rights abuses. But that just made me angry at the United States. As Jon Stewart points out, "As much as we like to believe in American exceptionalism, there wasn't a lot of moments of, like, 'We caused this.'" Iran was the only guilty party as far as Bahari's detention went.

American exceptionalism has manifested itself in our turning a blind eye to our own human rights abuses. The media has followed suit. Western media will show politicians publicly decrying abuses in other countries. But when will it be time to show those leaders decrying the United States? In the mainstream media, the West, and more specifically the United States,

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seemingly stands upon an indestructible moral high ground. We find it easier and fairer to point fingers at others while ignoring our own grim history of torture, from Latin America to the Middle East. This hypocrisy only works against the progress we hope to make in addressing injustice.

The United States' hypocrisy on human rights issues was made more apparent when the CIA torture report was leaked, enumerating human rights abuses and "enhanced interrogation techniques." Mainstream media swarmed around the news unrelentingly, with much-anticipated epiphanies about our own torture tactics and about our use of torture on a widespread basis. But the U.S. cannot go from supporting international law to arbitrarily making exceptions and choosing to infringe upon the law.

The media coverage, the realizations and public apologies were all transient, and people turned to exalt the United States once more. According to a "New York Times" editorial, "many people... 'have paid attention to the courage of the U.S.' in releasing the report, 'rather than the crime of prisoner abuse.'" The United States was praised, rather than officially condemned, for the crimes against human rights it committed, with people justifying the terrible actions rather than highlighting the hypocrisy in them.

Time and time again, America will publicly denounce countries like Iran, North Korea, China and Israel. And yet, we commit many of the same human rights abuses that those countries do. According to Human Rights Watch, in the State Department's 2000, 2001, and 2002 Human Rights Reports on Iran, "suspension for long periods in contorted positions" is described as torture. In the 2005 and 2006 reports, sleep deprivation is described as torture. The U.S. practiced these same forms of torture, according to the CIA torture reports, but then refused to call them methods of "torture." Likewise, according to the 2005 report on North Korea, being forced to kneel or sit immobilized for long periods, being hung by one's wrists, "being forced to stand up and sit down to the point of collapse" is

The role of the media has been perverted from the full, impartial disclosure of the truth to what could be considered propaganda, abusing personal discretion and wrongfully introducing Western biases.

described as torture, and "prolonged periods of solitary confinement" in the 2002 report on China. Once again, the U.S. practices these same methods of torture. We simply choose not to accurately call these techniques "torture."

The media failed to adequately cover such discrepancies beyond the days right after the release of the CIA torture report. This hypocrisy was never brought to light. And the United States' image and record remained largely unmarred.

The few exceptions to this rule came from the U.S.'s most frequent targets for charges of human rights abuses. China spoke out against this façade, posing the question, "How long can the US pretend to be a human rights champion?," especially after Eric Garner's death. North Korea and Iran have also fought targeted censure from the United States. Their criticism suggested that the American charade of being a "world policeman" and ultimate protector of global human rights is an unfair one, when the conditions in our own interrogation techniques parallel those used in these other countries.

The United States needs to be held accountable for its actions, just like any other country. This duty, to hold the U.S. accountable, in theory lies with the media. But in practice, the mainstream media has lost sight of this, failing to carry out its most important duty.

The role of the media has been perverted from the full, impartial disclosure of the truth to what could be considered propaganda, abusing personal discretion and wrongfully introducing Western biases. Perhaps more emblematic of this than its coverage of comparative human rights abuses is the way the media deals with the issue of terrorism. Not only has mainstream media failed to properly condemn the West for injustices committed, but it has actively chosen to cover only those facets of the news that Western

audiences would care about. In fact, according to a recent poll from the Pew Research Center, Americans have paid greater attention to terrorist attacks that occur in Western countries, as opposed to such events as the 2013 attacks in Nairobi, Kenya and the 2002 attack in Bali, Indonesia.

In contrast, a good 30% of Americans claimed to have followed the terrorist attacks on the newspaper "Charlie Hebdo" in France. The story made headlines and front pages of publications everywhere—but nowhere did we see the killing of up to 2000 innocent civilians in a terrorist attack by Boko Haram in Nigeria. This disparity in attention can be attributed to the fact that we empathize more with those who are closer to us psychologically and ideologically (and physically). And in turn, the media exploits this empathy, covering the stories that pertain to us the most (e.g., a shooting at a Western newspaper in a Western country supporting Western ideals of free speech).

In actuality, the Western-centric approach contradicts Western ideals and modes of thought. It limits the public as to what they can and cannot think by introducing Western biases into what is reported on and how it is done so.

It is time to change how journalism works; journalists such as Maziar Bahari and Jon Stewart have pointed the way forward. Bahari risked censure, even death, to uncover the truth about the ruthless acts of violence occurring between government officials and citizens in Iran during the 2009 elections. And Jon Stewart actively tried to combat this notion of American exceptionalism in an endeavor to make things right regarding Bahari. Until the United States itself can recognize the error in its own ways, the burden lies with Western media to impartially point that out to the American people so that we may judge for ourselves. Just maybe one day we will come to realize that West isn't always best. ■



Show Me What Democracy Looks Like: Immigration and the Problem of Exclusion

By DAYTON MARTINDALE

IN NOVEMBER 2014, BARACK OBAMA took executive action on immigration, offering relief from deportation for some (though not all) undocumented immigrants. It was a step in the right direction that will help millions of people, although many had hoped for more. Of course, many had also hoped for less—conservatives derided the plan, and even called it an unconstitutional abuse of power.

It is ironic that the “abuse of power” in question rests in not deporting people. One would think that the real abuse of power might lie in tearing parents from their children. And yet apparently, that is not the political landscape we live in. This landscape is certainly malleable; there are powerful arguments for Americans to take the rights of immigrants seriously, grant amnesty and even open borders. These arguments can be rooted in basic human empathy, or the right to free movement, or the principle of equality of opportunity, and they deserve to prevail.

However, the odds are unfairly stacked against immigrants from the start. Noncitizens, practically by definition, have no means of representation. Politicians do not answer to them; employers can get away with violating labor regulations.

While winning full citizenship is a worthy goal for those who have made it across the border and established lives for themselves in the US, what about those who lack the resources to do so, or were caught along the way? Democracy rests upon self-governance, under the principle that people should direct the state, and not vice versa. So one would think that those most affected by the laws in question—the victims of armed border patrols, detainments, and forced deportations—should at least have a say. Yet potential immigrants and undocumented Americans have no say in America’s violent border regime.

At first glance, it may sound absurd and impractical to suggest that the undocumented should vote in elections, or even just on measures related to immigration. Yet it is equally absurd that millions of people are held accountable to laws they had no say in, subject to violence from a state of which they aren’t allowed to be members. If the former radically challenges our conception of state sovereignty, the latter violates individual autonomy and democratic ideals. In truth, a fundamental realignment of our system of nation-states is probably necessary. But until that day comes, our current paradigm can be at least par-

tially reconciled to democratic values by opening borders.

Democracy is about giving people control over their own affairs. Unfortunately, it’s not so easy to decide who are “the people,” and which affairs count as their own. Historically, these boundaries were almost never set through mutual agreement between neighbors, but through war and colonization—through violence that would be illegal under international law today. Even in supposedly democratic regimes, women, people of color, and the poor were (and still are) regularly excluded.

For example, take the current US-Mexico border. It was largely set in the aftermath of an imperialistic war in the 1840s, one of many injustices that a slave-owning nation ruled by white settlers perpetrated in the name of Manifest Destiny. Crossing that border may disrespect the “rule of law,” but it’s unclear how worthy of respect that rule is.

Or imagine a more ideal scenario: a group of geographically isolated humans has unanimously instituted some organized system—a government—through which to run their own affairs. There still are troubling questions. It is likely that the group’s decisions, from border control to trade

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policy to environmental pollution, will fundamentally affect the affairs of those excluded from the system. Even if the society strives for limited interaction with the outside world, the potential for immigrants means they will have to make a choice. Should someone wander in, will she be admitted as a citizen, forcibly turned away, or something in between? Under any situation but the first, the immigrant would be subject to state coercion under laws she had no say in, and has no means to challenge. Were a native-born adult human put in the same position, no one could call the state a democracy. (Though of course, that is precisely how the US treats millions of people convicted of felonies.) What could be morally significant about being born on the wrong side of the border?

So far I have been guided by the work of McGill political philosopher Arash Abizadeh, who argues that the act of coercion, or even the threat of coercion, is necessarily a violation of autonomy. The threat of state coercion, according to Abizadeh, can only be legitimized through the democratic process.

Border security, incarceration, and deportation are threats to which states subject outsiders, goes the argument, so according to democratic principles these outsiders should have a right to contribute to immigration policies. (The same might go for some military action and aggressive economic sanctions.) While a people may have some right to self-determination, the effects of border control are felt most heavily by non-citizens: more than these policies are self-determination, they are forcefully determining the futures of others.

Others argue for a still broader principle, calling to enfranchise everyone affected by a policy, not just coerced. Yes, direct threats of state violence—if they can ever be legitimated—require democratic consent, but other, less direct effects can be just as important. There is violence in the government-sponsored fossil fuel projects that drown low-lying islands and cause droughts across the world,

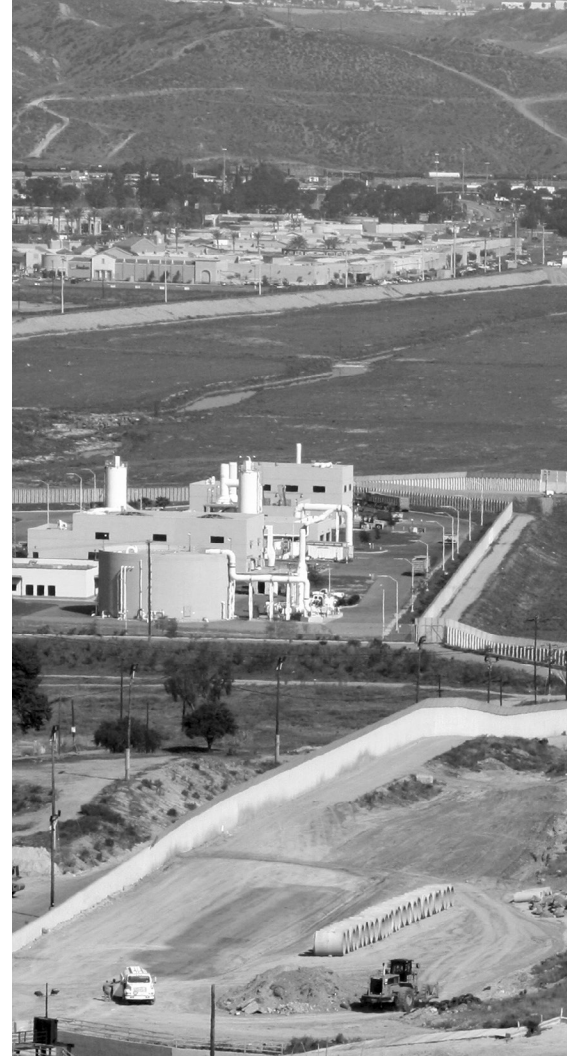
even if it is less visible than the violence of a prison or a border agent.

Implementing Abizadeh's ideas would dramatically enlarge the voting body and require a profound reframing of present borders; some of the other ideas go further still, and may seem impractical. But just because something seems impractical does not mean it is wrong. The present border system is an outdated relic of a wildly different geopolitical era.

Many of our social, environmental, and economic realities do not fit within the old model. Some parts of the American Southwest share more in common with parts of Mexico than they do with their own capital in Washington DC. Greenhouse gases seem to mock the concept of national sovereignty as they flit from industrial countries to ravage low-emitting regions. The rapid exchange of ideas allowed by the Internet can pave the way to a truly global community.

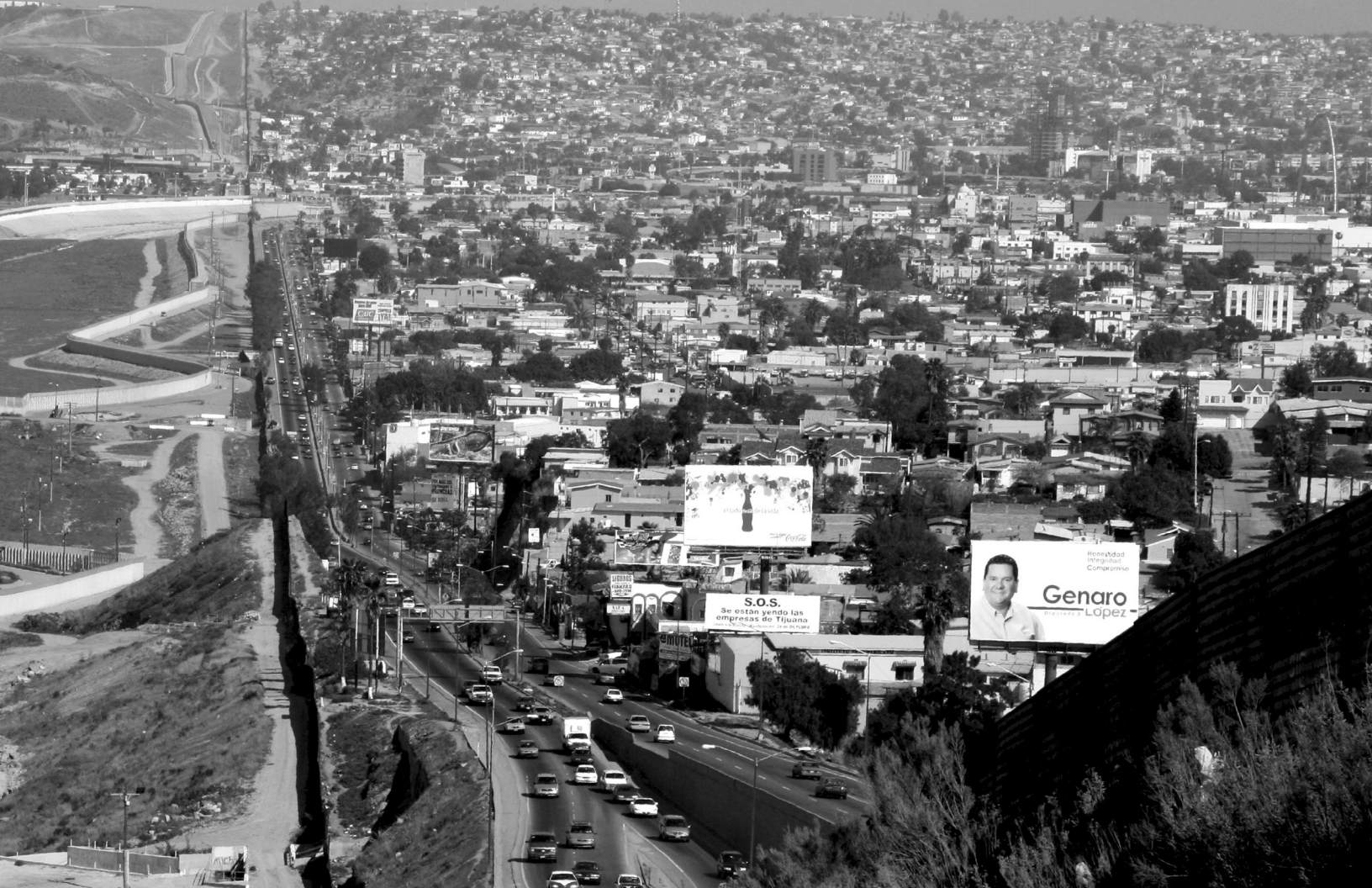
On the other hand, some issues truly are local, and subsuming them to some larger global government could pave the way to exploitation. Differences in geography, climate, culture, and history make local residents much better suited to govern their own communities. This is one (though not the only) reason why indigenous groups in the Americas find it so important to retain sovereignty and self-determination, and nearly half of Scotland wanted to leave the United Kingdom. There are elements of this embedded in US federalism: our own local mayor and council have (with community input) banned fracking in Princeton. Other Americans may have wanted cheap energy from the gas reserves beneath Princeton, but intuitively they should not have the right to sacrifice our environment for those perceived needs.

So some concerns are local, some are global, others may be regional—what exactly does this tell us? Only that the world is messy, and doesn't fit well within the lines drawn by kings and colonialists of the past. If and when those lines are redrawn democratically, then there may (or may not) be an argument that border control is justified.



After all, participating in the creation and adoption of policies does not prevent those policies from being implemented. The wealthy should not be disallowed from voting on tax laws, but they should still be taxed. Perhaps there should also be safeguards to prevent the wealthy from gentrifying foreign cities the way they have gentrified their own (though I'd prefer to see this accomplished through economic reforms rather than immigration restraints). The point stands: under democracy, potential immigrants, arguably, need not be given immediate citizenship—but they should at least have a say. Until there is a means for cross-border democracy, it seems at the very least we must remove noncitizens from state coercion.

Does that necessarily mean open borders? For an attempt at non-coercive border control, imagine that the wall along the US-Mexico border is complete. It runs coast-to-coast over land and water; it is indestructible,



too sheer and high to climb with even the best equipment. But there is no direct threat of coercive state violence: no guards, and those immigrants who make it to the US (by boat, by air, or from the north) are neither detained nor deported.

Were the US to unilaterally construct this wall, ludicrous and improbable as it may be, it is not obvious that it would violate Abizadeh's coercion-based principle. But this also shows that this principle may be incomplete. Families would be forever separated, and the money many migrant workers send home would never get there. Many who struggle with poverty and conflict throughout Latin America would have their dreams of a better future shut off to them. The US economy, too, would flounder without a regular supply of migrant farm labor. (And this doesn't even mention the disastrous environmental effects such a wall would have, particularly on the several endangered species that live along the border.)

Even if there were neither walls nor deportations, but instead only the withholding of citizenship, there would still be permanent residents with no representation in the making of the laws that govern them. We may accept that tourists are subject to our laws without a vote, but to deny such a right to a long-term resident with social ties to this country is unconscionable. Most crimes are subject to a statute of limitations, after which the offense is no longer prosecutable; surely the debatable "wrong" of crossing a border should not haunt an immigrant forever.

It is clear that any and all border control, directly coercive or not, is a form of direct or indirect state violence on individuals all over the world. The principles of self-government mean these individuals must be given some autonomy over their own lives, by playing a role in the allocation of national boundaries and the development of border control all over the world. Until then, the depor-

tations and detentions are necessarily authoritarian and oppressive.

Those of you who have attended a political rally or march—a much higher number, I suspect, than would have been the case a year ago—probably know the call-and-response chant: "Show me what democracy looks like," "This is what democracy looks like!" Embedded in this chant is the conviction that democracy is about more than letting politicians decide our fate; instead, it is an ongoing process in which we are active participants. It is a reminder that the state should be subject to the people, and not vice versa. And thus it cannot be the state's role to force people out—democracy does not and cannot look like armed border patrol taking aim at people who never asked for a wall to begin with. It is the voice of the undocumented activist, the voice of the poor family from Tijuana, the voice of the Cambodian refugee. And when they speak, there is no excuse not to listen. ■

Anonymous Technology and Sexual Assault: THE IMPLICATIONS OF A NEWSROOM EPISODE

By NINA CHAUSOW

THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY STUDENT body has remained alarmingly inactive on the subject of sexual assault. We've talked about the photographs taken at Tiger Inn, the phrase "Rape Haven" scrawled across their front wall, and the Title IX investigation and policy changes. Yet there have been no active student movements to address or reveal the extent of sexual assault on campus. The Title IX investigation clearly stated that the university had not responded promptly or equally to several sexual assault reports. In the middle of December, the Daily Princetonian reported on three sexual assault cases the university recently opened investigations on, one from two summers ago, one from a month ago, and one from the week before. Despite this, no one on campus lifted so much as a pillow, much less a mattress in solidarity with Emma Sulkowicz's "Carry the Weight" marches all around the country. No women have come forward publically at Princeton about sexual assault because of the stigma and shame attached to rape, yet no one on campus is fighting publically for a different sexual assault culture or stronger policies.

In HBO's show *The Newsroom*, however, a student at a fictional version of Princeton suggests that technology could help break this silence. In that episode, "Oh Shenandoah," a reporter seeks out a Princeton student named Mary who, in the face of the university clearing the men she had accused of rape, created a website where women on campus could anonymously accuse students of assault. Many news outlets and bloggers such as Emily Nussbaum for the *New Yorker* and Ariane Lange at *Buzzfeed* have critiqued the episode for the moral dialogue in which the reporter attempts to convince the student not to face her accused attacker on television. However, the actual concept of the site suggested by

Mary was given less examination. In the episode's world, the site serves as a last resort for women who have not received the justice they believe they deserve in a procedural setting. With the Princeton campus as the targeted audience, women could warn other women about the men they had accused of rape who still walk freely on campus. Whereas in Emma Sulkowicz's case, choosing to publicize the name of her accused assaulter thrust her name and face into the abusive public eye, through this forum a student could take action merely through the act of writing, protected by the veil of digital anonymity. Despite the concerns of the patronizing male reporter, Mary argues that the forum is not a form of vigilante justice, but an awareness-raising act designed to make the campus safer in a way that the university refused to do when they wouldn't expel her accused attacker.

Anonymous platforms have thrived in the social media sphere for many years. From Ask.fm, an anonymous question-asking site popular in middle school, to the Tiger Admirers Facebook page at Princeton, these social media platforms feed off people's desire to lower their personal filters. The wide popularity of these anonymous sites demonstrates the attraction of the higher level of honesty they afford, just as their use demonstrates the accompanying recklessness and cruelty that is often paired with anonymity. A site like Tiger Admirers demonstrates a directed use of anonymous sharing for compliments and romantic declarations. Tiger Admirers has recently, however, been co-opted for sharing experiences with depression and mental illness. These posts, sharing intimate details without a name, attracted an outpouring of sympathy, and prompted others to share their experiences and offer support. Someone also recently suggested on Tiger Admirers a related page with

an even more specific goal, "Can there be another page that is only girls where we can all post about the assholes and warn other girls away? ... Maybe that's bullying... But is it really bullying if it's true?" This idea speaks to the way that Mary's site uses community-based warnings. The range of emotional and controversial content that anonymous forums handle suggests that this technology could and most likely will interact with the current silence surrounding sexual assault. The nuances of the ways that anonymous sexual assault accusations could interact with the current social media platforms and community judgment suggest a range of possible consequences.

Yik Yak serves as a good platform for exploring both the content anonymity attracts, as well as the targeted community that receives the information. Yik Yak is an anonymous virtual message board available within a specific geographic area. At Princeton, Yik Yak has primarily housed a stream of witty remarks about Princeton life. At other universities and high schools, however, Yik Yak has become a minefield of offensive remarks, rampant cyber bullying, and direct threats. During the protests seeking justice for Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Princeton's Yik Yak erupted with racially charged comments and discussions, suggesting that students have recognized the app as a platform for controversial dialogue and polemic statements. What makes Yik Yak a striking platform is the impact of community moderation. Through the primary acts available on Yik Yak, up-voting and down-voting, the visibility and thus the impact of a post is determined entirely by the Yik Yak community. As a result of the judgment post's community audience, an accusation of rape could be the very first thing people see when they open the app, or be stuck at the bottom of the feed.

Giving women a space in which they can name their attacker for the school community without submitting their identity to probing investigation holds the potential to reveal the actual extent of sexual assault occurring at Princeton.

A bathroom wall at Columbia University, where four names of alleged rapists were scrawled in Sharpie, bears witness that some women are willing to make these names public for their community. While the effectiveness of this type of action is reliant on the chance that other women will read the names, posting names on a site places the issue at the will of the community. Realizing The Newsroom's hypothesized sexual assault forum through today's anonymous technology has the potential to shift control of sexual assault accusations out of the hands of a university or legal authority and into the community. Such a forum could similarly transition the conversation around sexual assault away from what the university is doing right or wrong in handling cases towards a more proactive discussion of how the community can protect itself against potential assailants. But just as a forum like this has the potential to break the silence in a beneficial way, it also introduces dangers to both the legitimacy of rape accusations and the privacy and integrity of students' actions and reputations.

Giving women a space in which they can name their attacker for the school community without submitting their identity to probing investigation holds the potential to reveal the actual extent of sexual assault occurring at Princeton. The episode focuses on the forum as a final recourse for women whose cases were denied or mishandled by the university. However, the forum could also serve women who don't want to undergo the official investigation process, which many women in other institutions have described as painful. Anonymity could be the first tool in shifting the conversation of sexual assault cases away from the faces of

the claimants (also known as victims, accusers or liars depending on the result of their cases), and placing the focus instead on the students accused of rape. By sending out a warning into the hands of the community that can make the decision whether to heed or ignore it, women would have the ability to take action without furthering the suffering they have experienced from the sexual assault.

Of course, potential consequences are equally high when both the definition of sexual assault and the truth of an accusation are determined by an unregulated, anonymous community. The university sexual assault policy seeks a preponderance of evidence, where it is more likely than not that what the claimant seeks to prove is true. On Yik Yak and other forums, the only standard that can be applied to evaluating whether an anonymous statement is true is the community's perception of the accusatory post. Members make the decision to up-vote or down-vote an accusation based on their personal evaluation of both the legitimacy of the accusation and the reputation of the accused person. The person accused has no ability to either face their accuser or mount a defense, and they may receive a punishment as unofficial as it is damning: the ruining of their reputation in the eyes of their community. Yet, even these consequences presuppose that the form of accusation is not being misused. The safety of anonymity could prompt people to make untrue accusations in search of revenge, or even facilitate a cruel joke. Anonymous forums have a long track record of attracting toxic, obscene and derogatory posts. Adding rape accusations to this destructive mix has the potential to devalue the accusations, reducing them to the

level of hateful and vengeful insults. Moreover, the infamous comments sections on posts could attract hurtful remarks towards both the accused as well as the anonymous voice speaking out.

This type of forum also holds the potential to damage the institution's system for handling sexual assault. If students became accustomed to recognizing the community's judgment of rape as the standard of recognition and punishment, even more students than already do would avoid the university's justice system. While breaking the silence surrounding sexual assault on campus is important, having a fair and effective official procedure for hearing sexual assault cases remains a top priority in creating a safe campus environment. However, as the university continues to struggle to create such a system, perhaps this type of forum could be a necessary push. While the backlash and consequences of an anonymous system could be enormous, it could at least reveal for the first time the extent to which sexual assault pervades our campus.

As he enters Mary's dorm room, the reporter immediately requests to move the conversation to a more public location. His motivation—fear of being in an intimate setting with a college student—was misguided, but his urge was correct: we need to move our conversations about rape into the public. While The Newsroom's hypothetical forum based in accusations may not be the right approach for addressing Princeton's sexual assault culture, what it does suggest is that Princeton needs to find a new, less restricted place to have this conversation. The danger that comes with using the internet as a platform is its lawlessness: the removal of inhibition that people experience through anonymity. However, if this freedom could be harnessed into a virtual space where women felt comfortable sharing their experiences with sexual assault at Princeton, technology could provide the first venue where the Princeton community is able to have an honest conversation about rape. ■

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to have had at least as many—really, many more—nasty thoughts as you have about how black people aren't as smart, aren't as pretty, aren't as emotionally complex, aren't as moral, aren't as human. When I walk into a nice store, I feel like a thief; when I walk behind a white woman up the stairs in my hall, I feel like a rapist.

I don't pretend to speak for anyone other than myself; and surely, many black people would disagree with much of what I have just said—but this is no objection. In fact, it quite clearly demonstrates what I am trying to get across: namely, that racism obtains in individual lives, in unique and particular experiences. Black America is not an integrated whole; it is a socially constructed group, the membership conditions of which are both constantly changing and impossible to define at any given moment. The fundamental unit in this group of people, as in any group of people, is the individual. There is a serious asymmetry between the needs of individual black people and the way that many on the left go about attempting (ostensibly) to meet those needs. What does the individual need? If I were to reduce and generalize the proper answer of this question to a single word, that word would be “respect.” What is liberal “idealism” to the individual, other than condescension? What is a “universal human right” to the individual, other than an insult?

What I have said up to this point is a problem for activists. Large-scale political activity inevitably involves abstracting the experiences of individuals to that which is typical, which itself is further distilled into specific action-demands. This may go without saying, but it is politically—and perhaps even metaphysically—impossible to effectively advocate for group interests in a way that comprehensively incorporates the interests of each individual. Nevertheless, we might do a much better job of accurately representing the general interests of those who are oppressed (not to mention that we will be able to stand alongside them in good faith) if we find the mo-

tivation for our activism in the actual lived experiences of individuals—experiences that we can understand and with which we can empathize—than if we, from the outset, place our faith in clumsy, ultra-general moral-political frameworks that we do not really take the time to understand like “human rights,” or even—and here you will surely disagree with me—“equality.” I would like now to offer a single, substantive example of how poor form and improper motivation for political activism have directly impacted me, to personalize what I said at the outset about the importance of form.

I have been charmed and encouraged by the solidarity expressed by my peers in response to recent police violence against black people. This is not to say that I feel gratitude—“appreciation” even is too strong of a word—but I am thankful in the sort of way that one is thankful when one contemplates the presence of a friend. Being at the Millions March on December 13th in New York City among a large and diverse crowd of people protesting racism gave me levity. I came to the protest as an advocate for—among others—myself, and there I found much love and hopefulness. It's hard to see your own shadow in a crowd; it's hard to feel lonely when you are among friends. Of course, neither one is impossible. I found many good things at the march, but I also found much confusion and misunderstanding; I found many clumsy phrases and many awkward, uncomfortable feelings.

I began to feel ill at ease early in the march walking alongside a dear friend who, with the best of intentions, began to chant, “black lives matter,” along with the crowd. I didn't know what to do! A deeply loving person—she didn't coin the phrase and probably never would have come up with it herself. I was, at the time, and still am, deeply dissatisfied with the slogan. “Matters” is a paltry word with no lower bound. From whence comes the conviction and resolve to declare that my life contains some minimal unit of value? Not, certainly, from a place of love; not from a place of empathy. What did Eric Garner say while he was in

the process of dying: “I can't breathe!” That his life mattered was understood. Who would ever shout, “my life matters!” with conviction, with gusto? Perhaps somebody who needs to convince herself? Otherwise, such a statement as “my life matters” could only

Racism is my shadow that grows and shrinks and changes in relationship to me throughout the day, but only disappears in very dark rooms and when I close my eyes.

conceivably be said involuntarily, out of utter desperation—a doomed argument, surfaced by immediate shock and horror. “My life matters” is the sort of thing one would expect to hear in a concentration camp. “Black lives matter” in 2014—in New York City—is an expression of severely misplaced self-righteousness. That we are using this as a rallying point!—this humble and diluted reiteration of the 200 year-old liberal thesis that has failed to keep with the times: ‘every human is a human’... How long have we fought uphill? How long have we been picking low-hanging fruit? And when did we start picking fruit up from the ground?

About halfway through the march I found a close friend who is also black and I stole away with him. My nonblack friends' reaching down to me—well, in their minds, probably not to me—had become too uncomfortable for me to not seize the opportunity. He and I talked casually about that with which we were dissatisfied in the protest: namely, its form. The lack of intensity! That it was sanctioned by the police! Not least of all, the way that many of the protesters chose to express themselves. There were white fists in the air! There was an all white brass band playing some fucked-up rendition of “Follow The Drinking Gourd!” How inconsiderate! How tasteless. All too often, one ‘misses the forest for the trees’, but here was incredible foolishness: missing the forest for one tree, attempting to fell it with a kitchen

knife, dancing around its trunk, and tossing about new seeds.

I remember in particular one portly white guy who was all worked up. Every time we passed an officer he took extra care to sneer at them. “How do you spell ‘racist’? NYPD!” “What a stupid man,” I thought, “you don’t know what “racism” means, let alone how to spell it! How could you really have hate in your heart for the police? That you would sneer at them says something bad about your heart. Even as a frustrated and unforgiving black man I readily concede that I, at my most hateful, regard the police with ambivalence. They do so much for me, and especially for you.’ One ought to be grateful for what has been given to her. Saying ‘no’ to a gift out of concern for someone else warrants solemnity and a healthy dose of shame. It is in very bad taste to sneer at a gift. It is also very uncommon, which makes it very suspicious. Over-anger is often under-genuine.

As the march wore on, my feet grew colder and the strength of my feeling faded to the point that I didn’t participate in taking the Brooklyn Bridge (incidentally, what I approved most of about the march). Instead, I went to a Christmas party in Brooklyn. After some food and beer, my feeling returned and I reflected on the march with my friends. We honored the good and happy day we had spent together and we talked about what could have been done better. I shared with them how I felt about the slogans that had been used. I told them that it hurt my dignity to hear my friends argue for my status as a human being, that it was embarrassing; that by arguing against the extreme and silly belief that black people are subhuman, they had somehow dignified that very belief and weakened what it means to

be a friend and ally, leaving all sorts of room for paternalism and white supremacy in our camp and even guaranteeing a dignified future for those sentiments. My friends understood me, and they became sad and regretful. How easy it would have been to stick to “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” and “No Justice, No Peace”, how easy it would have been to have remained silent; how much harm could have been avoided. If racism is a forest, it is a very dense forest under which the roots of each tree are inextricably tangled among other roots. How foolhardy it is to toss seeds in and around a forest like that.

Time will tell how this protest and ones like it will impact the future for black people. I enjoyed the time spent with my friends at Millions March and afterwards, and I ended the day feeling more loved by my country than when I began. Of course, I think that we can all recognize that institutional violence against black Americans isn’t going to end any time soon, but hopefully through and despite my winding and turning you have gained some sense of how racism feels and a better appreciation for the important element of activism that is form.

At this point and in closing, I would like to turn your attention to a photograph. If you visit the Princeton For Ferguson Facebook page, you will see a picture (above, right) of the December 4th on-campus walk-out and protest that has made me feel particularly hugged and loved. The image captures a still mass of people facing in a single direction, opposite the camera. It was taken from about two-thirds of the way towards the back of the crowd—a vantage point from which the crowd appears to be both very large and very dense. Something else, though, is also



achieved. From two-thirds of the way towards the back, one gets a pretty clear glimpse of whoever else happens to be standing two-thirds of the way towards the back. If you were at the December 4th protest, you know that the people standing on the front steps of the campus center facing the crowd were disproportionately black (and, not incidentally, disproportionately female). This ought to make sense to us. It is a particular type of person who makes their way to the front of a protest. It takes a bold person, but it also takes—and it ought to take—a person who feels not merely that they belong at the protest, but that the protest is for them; they have the right to lead the protest—a right to be indignant, passionate, defiant—because precisely what they protest is their own oppression. From two-thirds of the way towards the back, one ought to expect a different group of people and a different atmosphere. That is just what we see in this photograph: the people whose features are discernable from the aforementioned vantage point are disproportionately white and disproportionately male. The image betrays no facial expressions, but the protestors’ body language speaks volumes. They are looking straight ahead, paying serious heed to what is being said. Their hands are in their pockets; they are alone in the crowd; they are mildly uncomfortable and feel that they have come as close to the front as they ought to. There is no hint of self-righteousness, no stink of political ideology or moral superiority. They are there because they were compelled to be there—because they couldn’t not go. They knew that something atrocious had happened and so they came: to learn, to love, and to support. ■

It hurt my dignity to hear my friends argue for my status as a human being, it was embarrassing; by arguing against the extreme and silly belief that black people are subhuman, they had somehow dignified that very belief and weakened what it means to be a friend and ally.

