A low-angle photograph of the Statue of Liberty against a blue sky with white clouds. The statue is green and holds a torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left. The word "ORBIS" is superimposed in large black letters across the top of the image.

ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices

Vol. 8/No.4/December/2008

A City on a Hill

*Progressives can help America
regain the moral high ground...*

page 3

Changes to sexual misconduct policy are long overdue... page 5

a note from the editor

Every four years, we are once again reminded of just how broken our electoral process is. It is clear that not only do we lack an accurate and consistent system to tally our votes, but we also cannot be sure that our voting intentions will be honored by machines or humans who are charged with delicate recounts. This and numerous other electoral issues mean that many of us have lost confidence that our democracy is functioning properly.

Clearly, voting irregularities are not a top priority for our government at the moment, as we fall further into recession and await the exit of our lame-duck President. Aside from that, there was simply too much news to cover this month - from the Mumbai attacks, to the bail-out of the big three automakers, to the spate of new cabinet positions being filled, to the announcements of infrastructure-building efforts in the works. On top of that, we've all got finals stress and a bad case of the wintertime blahs. So this issue will be short. We look at some positive changes in student conduct rules, alternative gift-giving, ballot disputes in Minnesota, and the Bush administration's legacy. Our cover story is an optimistic one, and it's something we will continue to explore this year: how do we reclaim the moral high ground and promote progressive values as a foundation for a renewed left?

Like me, you've probably already checked out mentally, but I hope you will at least recycle this issue after skimming it (see page 7). In a few short weeks, we will all retreat back to our homes, finals and papers behind us, and take a short time to rejuvenate before we will return back here to do it all over again. I'm looking forward to a brighter and more economically stable future in 2009. As long as we're still in school, the problems of a looming global recession and unemployment can remain somewhat distant, for the time being. *-Robyn Hyden*

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ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices

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Volume 8, Number 4

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 Please recycle.

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97,828 high-end estimate of civilian deaths in Iraq, based on well-documented cases from police and military reports

4209 number of American military deaths in Iraq since March 2003

Cover design: Robyn Hyden

Orbis aspires to change the atmosphere on Vanderbilt's campus and provides a voice for liberal, multicultural and minority viewpoints. This publication strives to inform the public about issues that these groups face as well as to promote diversity and unity within our community. It is a forum for discussion of social, political and religious commentary relevant to Vanderbilt, the nation and the world. Orbis was founded by a coalition of students seeking to raise consciousness about diverse ideas, cultures and backgrounds in our society. We hope to challenge the existing social atmosphere at Vanderbilt and promote a rebirth of acceptance.

Liberal family values

Progressives can take back the values label from conservatives

By Claire Costantino
COMMENTARY EDITOR

Now is the time for liberals to retake the moral high ground from conservatives. The recent election of Barack Obama gives progressives a chance to enact meaningful change and begin to define our political identity not through defenses against attacks, but on our own terms. Certainly, there is still work to be done, as shown by the disappointing results of so many ballot issues concerning issues of gay rights and immigration policies at the state level. A progressive fever does seem to be sweeping the country, but we still have a lot of ground to cover.

Despite the disarray of the Republican Party after this election, they are still able to brand themselves as the party of "family values" and morality-minded voters. This is odd not only because Republican policies are routinely in direct conflict with the interests of the very rural, middle class, or minority voters that they court, but also because it paints progressives as godless freaks. Sure, some of the people who think the most pressing political question of our time is the legalization of marijuana are weirdos, but they're no representation of our whole movement. In fact, liberals can make a much more legitimate claim to fight for the real values and needs of the middle class, minorities, and non-corporate interests. It seemed for a while that the unusual marriage of fiscal and social conservatives that formed the neoconservative movement would last, but this presidential election has

proven that marketing trick was little more than a temporary ploy. Karl Rove must be mortified that his great political trick blew up in his face when the most extreme incarnation of neoconservatism, Sarah Palin, largely cost his party the election.

Liberals should be able to attract a new type of 'values voter,' one who believes in expanding civil rights, upholding human rights, and offering opportunities for prosperity to all.

In Orbis' continuing analysis of the progressive "culture of life" movement, it has become more apparent that liberals are once again reclaiming moral credibility in the political forum. We have our Bill Clintons, and they are frequently embarrassing, but we also have our Barack Obamas, and they are rejuvenating. For far too long, we have been on the defense against conservative attacks. With the newfound progressive control, the diversity of the progressive wing may be acknowledged and embraced. Believe it or not, there are liberals who pray! There are liberals who are just as motivated to political action by their faith as conservatives. It seems to me that many conservative policies that I see as detrimental to our neighbors are in direct conflict with many religious values.

Liberals should be able to attract a new type of 'values voter,'

one who believes in expanding civil rights, upholding human rights, and offering opportunities for prosperity to all. The fact that people would find anti-poverty policies, guaranteed health care coverage, or an affinity for peace out of step with their moral compass seems, frankly, absurd.

Now that we find ourselves in the midst of a depression and two wars, it is time for liberals to define that culture of life as a series of policies and methods that promote the advancement of many, not just a few. Instead of worrying about legislation and policies that exclude people from prosperity, limit civil rights, and infringe upon personal privacy, a progressive platform informed by moral principles would extend opportunity to all. Encouraging signs can be found in Obama's new public works plan. Creating jobs across all skill levels to update our country's infrastructure and develop a green economy will help employ more Americans and invest in struggling communities. The corporate bailout plans have been necessary, but success is not promised and they haven't done much to directly help Americans. Unemployment has spiked to almost 7 percent, and the number of Americans receiving food stamps is expected to reach 28 million this year, so policies that directly help individuals will be needed from the new administration and Congress. Anti-poverty measures, withdrawal from costly wars abroad, and repairing our image abroad - these are the progressive priorities that will salvage a country humbled by eight years of Republican reign.

"Who's Who" in the new Obama administration:

Eric Shinseki

President-elect Obama's nominee for the United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Historical significance: First Japanese American to become a four-star Army general and the third Asian American to serve in a President's Cabinet.

Degrees: Bachelor of Science from the United States Military Academy in 1965; Master of Arts in English Literature from Duke in 1976.

Served as: Decorated veteran of the Vietnam War; Deputy Chief of Staff for Support of the Allied Land Forces Southern Europe; commander of the 1st Cavalry in Fort Hood, Texas, from 1994 to 1995; Deputy Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army in 1996; Army Chief of Staff from 1999 to June 2003.

About: General Shinseki is most famous for publicly disagreeing with former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's plans for the Iraq War. Shinseki testified to Congress in 2003 that the Iraqi occupation would require hundreds of thousands of troops, a claim that the Bush administration rejected. Five years later, Shinseki's views have been vindicated. He's also the recipient of multiple military awards, including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

Analysis: After years of inept policies and underfunded projects, Veterans Affairs is in need of a massive overhaul to deal with the rising problems of homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and unemployment that plague our nation's veterans. Shinseki has shown that he's not afraid to disagree with the administration he serves, which bodes well for more accountability in military policy. Some progressives developed buyer's remorse about Obama when he started nominating hawkish members of the old Clinton Guard, but Shinseki's appointment is a small glimmer of hope that the President-elect will stick to his promises about ending the Iraq War. Shinseki's nomination represents a pattern of Obama's commitment to diversity in his administration. The President-elect has thus far made eight Cabinet nominations, including three women and a Hispanic. Of course, diversity for its own sake is nothing to brag about, but nonetheless this represents an exciting time for many minority groups who previously felt trapped under a glass ceiling. -Erika Hyde



Liberal at Vanderbilt? ... you are not alone ...

Contribute to ORBIS

Next meeting: Tuesday, January 6, 9 PM, Sarratt 116

Anyone interested in writing is welcome! No experience necessary.

News Briefs



English-only bill will not die

Nashville's "English First" bill, voted into law last spring by the Metro City Council, was vetoed by then-Mayor Bill Purcell. But Eric Crafton, the bill's author, will not rest until all official business in Davidson County is conducted strictly in English, and he believes that voters will agree with him. A petition campaign spearheaded by Crafton has led to a costly referendum election, scheduled for January 22, to reinstate the bill. Crafton, a Vanderbilt alum, has claimed that American immigrants are similar to the barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire. "It was overrun with illegal immigrants: Visigoths, Franks, Anglos, Saxons and Vandals, who at first worked as servants but then came so fast they did not learn the Latin language or the Roman form of government," he wrote in a Tennessean Op-ed this summer.

During his time on the Metro City Council, Crafton has also devoted his time and energy to other important ideological issues, such as the "war on Christmas." In 2005, apparently outraged that a public Christmas tree, paid for with taxpayer money, was dubbed the "holiday tree" in official terminology, Crafton successfully pushed to bring back Christmas. Because calling something a "holiday tree" or saying "Happy Holidays" defeats the "true meaning of Christmas," according to Crafton. Glad to know this guy has used his time in public office to address these very important issues. Because obviously, the only way to keep the barbarians from the gates is to mandate they pay their taxes in English and learn the "true meaning of Christmas" - homogeneous beliefs and cultures.

"Uncle Ted" Stevens joins coterie of Senators with vaguely sketchy nicknames

There were many surprises in the rather bizarre farewell reception for indicted Sen. Ted Stevens (Rep. - AK), but perhaps the most interesting revelation came in a fond farewell speech by former Idaho Senator Larry Craig. You will of course remember Larry Craig as the guy who got busted soliciting sex in an airport bathroom, leading to the nickname "Wide Stance" Craig. Craig also had the discomfiting habit of referring to Sen. Stevens exclusively as "Uncle Ted," which apparently caught on. Craig reported the origins of this nickname: once, as he was being driven to the Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage, Alaska, he said to himself, "Oh my, Ted's got an airport, that's neat." His cabdriver responded, "Do you know Uncle Ted?" Craig neglected to explain why on earth random cab drivers refer to Sen. Stevens as "Uncle Ted," but we will file it away with other hilarious Senatorial nicknames - including that of Saxby "Big Daddy" Chambliss.

George Bush's AIDS-fighting legacy

Despite some flaws, PEPFAR was a great program

By Nakul Shekhawat
STAFF WRITER

President Bush's overall legacy may be controversial, but one product of his presidency has garnered significant praise from both sides of the aisle. Thanks to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Bush has been able to fundamentally change American and global thinking about the scale of international health funding.

Announced in early 2003, PEPFAR aimed to treat two million people, prevent seven million new infections, and support HIV/AIDS care for 10 million people. PEPFAR especially focused on fifteen countries (twelve of which are in sub-Saharan Africa) with the most troubling HIV/AIDS statistics. The plan has already committed \$19 billion to HIV/AIDS prevention & treatment, making it the largest international health initiative directed towards a single disease.

So far, PEPFAR has granted life-saving antiretroviral treatment to 2.1 million people and has prevented nearly 240,000 babies from acquiring HIV via mother-to-child transmission. In some cases, the effects have been transformational. In Rwanda, only four percent of AIDS patients received drugs in 2003. Within four years, that statistic shot up to 92 percent. In Uganda, the number of people receiving treatment has increased by 100,000 while over 1.5 million more people receive HIV testing annually.

Of course, PEPFAR has not been devoid of its share of controversy. When the plan was first passed, President Bush favored the use of costly brand-name medications instead of generic drugs, even going so far as to block use of the inexpensive option. Since then, the Food and Drug Administration has approved a generic antiretroviral drug, but PEPFAR has continued to purchase mostly brand-name drugs - an approach that increases the profits of pharmaceutical companies but fails to make the best use of the plan's money. In addition, the program

does not fund needle exchange programs for drug addicts, barring promotion of a proven prevention approach.

The biggest criticism by far, however, has been PEPFAR's dogged insistence on the abstinence-only approach to prevention. There is no consensus that such programs, which are often administered by faith-based groups and de-emphasize the use of condoms, are successful in halting the spread of HIV. The scientific consensus is that comprehensive prevention programs promoting abstinence along with partner fidelity and condom use are the best means of reducing transmission. Ignoring such evidence, PEPFAR has required that 20 percent of all its funds go toward prevention and 33 percent of all its prevention funds promote abstinence-only programs, an approach deplored by Democrats, AIDS activists, and health workers alike.

Since PEPFAR has required that participatory countries abide by its 33 percent rule, comprehensive prevention programs have been undermined globally. For example, Uganda had implemented a successful prevention program emphasizing condom use since 1990.

When the country decided to accept PEPFAR funding in 2003, however, such scientifically proven approaches were significantly undermined, causing the HIV infection rate to double within two years.

This past July, PEPFAR was re-authorized and its funding expanded to provide \$48 billion in services over the next five years. In addition, the 20 percent and 33 percent

rules described above have been removed, freeing up money for more effective approaches. The prevention and treatment of tuberculosis and malaria, diseases that often go hand-in-hand with AIDS, have also been given new focus. For a program that has already achieved many of its goals ahead of schedule, such significant improvements bode well for the next phase of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

So far, PEPFAR has distributed anti-retroviral treatment to 2.1 million people and has prevented nearly 240,000 babies from acquiring HIV via mother-to-child transmission.



President and Mrs. Bush stand in front of a giant red ribbon commemorating World AIDS Day. Photo: Pefpar.gov

Student sexual misconduct policy updated

Changes to the student handbook provide clear guidelines for students and make punishing sexual assault more feasible

By Robyn Hyden
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Last spring, Orbis published an article entitled "Vanderbilt's Rape Crisis," calling for an update to outdated student misconduct policies and an unresponsive student conduct system. In addition, we charged that Vanderbilt offered little support to victims of sexual assault, aside from the overtaxed women's center, and that students were often discouraged from bringing up conduct charges by administrators who knew firsthand that a conviction would be unlikely.

After months of waiting, one of our biggest complaints has been addressed with an update to the Student Handbook. A committee convened by the administration recently announced a newly revised and expanded sexual misconduct policy, which brings our campus more in line with the policies of our peer institutions. The biggest change is the switch from a "clear and convincing" standard of evidence required for convictions to a "preponderance of evidence" standard, meaning more likely than not, which is the policy of 65 percent of our peer

The new policy will be "more of an educational tool than a hammer to hit people with," notes Sandine.

institutions. The committee based this and other changes on the recommendations of Brent Sokolaw, J.D., a university risk management advisor who wrote "Creating a Proactive Campus Sexual Misconduct Policy" and numerous other guides for institutions concerned about the widespread problems of campus sexual assault and disciplinary action.

Julie Sandine, Assistant Dean at the Law School and co-chair of the committee, expresses satisfaction with the new policy and believes that it will be "more of an educational tool than a hammer to hit people with." The old policy was too general, Sandine notes, "just a lot of words that didn't really hold meaning for students" and could be broadly interpreted by the conduct panel; the new policy fleshes out the details to make University expectations more clear and understandable, and can serve as an educational tool for students concerned about their own rights and responsibilities in sexual encounters. The updated policy will protect both the accused and the accusers in sexual misconduct cases, and will treat both parties equally in a way that "makes sense in terms of real-life situations," Sandine says.

Sandine notes that, especially in emotionally charged cases dealing with sexual assault, "sometimes people ask the wrong questions" and end up confusing the issue. Much of the confusion grows from misinterpreting issues of force, consent, and incapacitation and times when these issues are relevant. This is why the new policy provides clear guidelines to the student conduct panel for investigating sexual assault charges, which should lead to a more equitable standard for trying different types of cases.

In cases where force is used, the panel is advised to ask one set of questions. For example, it would be inappropriate to ask a student who had been forcibly raped whether he or she had previously flirted with or made advances toward the accused. It would also not be appropriate to ask about consent or whether the victim had attempted to "fight off" the attacker; the questions instead would focus on the force used. Force used can include physical intimidation, verbal threats, or coercion.

In situations where the victim is incapacitated, the panel should ask another set of questions. In these cases, it is inappropriate to ask either party about consent, since an incapacitated person

is incapable of giving consent. The questions would instead focus on the extent of incapacitation and the accused party's awareness of this incapacitation. Sandine notes that evidence from witnesses and circumstantial evidence can provide clues about whether the victim was obviously incapacitated at the time of the incident.

Finally, in cases involving neither force nor incapacitation, the panel should focus on whether consent was obtained. The new policy clearly states, "the person who wishes to engage in sexual activity with another bears the burden of specifically asking permission if consent is in question or ambiguous." Also, "consent cannot be implied by attire, inferred from the buying of dinner, the spending of money on a date, or being invited to a person's residence."

The new policy, which is excerpted below, is one that should be examined by all students who engage in sexual activities and are concerned about their rights and responsibilities. It should also be presented and discussed during freshmen orientation. It addresses many weaknesses of the old policy, and is an important foundation for addressing the crisis of rape on our campus.

Sexual misconduct will be evaluated differently, depending on what type of assault is involved:

1. cases involving force
2. cases in which one party is incapacitated
3. cases in which one party does not give or withdraws consent

Excerpts from the student handbook on sexual misconduct

"Incapacitation is the inability to make a rational, reasonable decision. Evidence of incapacity can be detected from one or an accumulation of context clues, which can include but are not limited to the following: *one person may have knowledge regarding how much alcohol another person has consumed or whether some other drug has been ingested * slurred speech * blood-shot eyes * the smell of alcohol on the breath * shaky equilibrium * vomiting * outrageous or unusual behavior * unconsciousness * elevated blood alcohol level * blacking out.

It is the burden of the person wishing to engage in sexual activity with another

to specifically determine the capacity of that potential sexual partner to provide "Effective Consent," as explained, below. (Intoxication is not the equivalent of incapacitation. Therefore, the use of alcohol/drugs by the accused is not an excuse for violation of the sexual misconduct policy.)

Effective Consent is informed, freely and actively given, and consists of mutually understandable words or actions indicating a willingness to engage in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity. Mutually understandable consent must be obtained by both parties throughout the sexual interaction. Consent to sexual activity may be revoked at any time, as long as the revocation is com-

municated clearly, at which point sexual activity must cease immediately. A person who is the object of sexual aggression is not required to physically or otherwise resist a sexual aggressor. Rather than saying no, this policy is predicated on communicating "yes" by word or action (as interpreted by a reasonable person). Previous sexual relationships and/or a current relationship with the accused student (or anyone else) are irrelevant and, therefore, may not be taken to imply consent. In addition, consent cannot be implied by attire, inferred from the buying of dinner, the spending of money on a date, or being invited to a person's residence.

Because of the need for clear communi-

cation, the person who wishes to engage in sexual activity with another bears the burden of specifically asking permission if consent is in question or ambiguous.

Consent expires. Consent lasts for a reasonable time, depending on the circumstances. For example, consent on Thursday night does not mean one automatically has consent on Friday night, or at any other time.

One who is incapacitated as a result of alcohol or other drug consumption (voluntary and/or involuntary), or who is unconscious, unaware, asleep or otherwise physically helpless, is incapable of giving

See **Student Conduct**, page 10

The Senate's Final Four: elections that just wouldn't end

ALASKA

FINAL RESULT:
 Mark Begich (D): 151,767
 46.36 percent
 Ted Stevens (R): 147,814
 45.16 percent

While some pundits had practically called this race for incumbent Republican Ted Stevens on election night, it became clear over the next two weeks that challenger Mark Begich had defeated the Senate's only convicted felon. Begich, the current mayor of Anchorage, will become the first Democratic senator from Alaska since Mike Gravel left office in 1981. Sen. Stevens's farewell speech on Nov. 20 got him a standing ovation, as well as several short tributes, from his colleagues. Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho, famously arrested last year for lewd conduct in a Minneapolis airport men's room, recalled his words upon seeing the Anchorage airport named for his "Uncle Ted" for the first time: "Oh my, Ted's got an airport. That's neat."

OREGON



Merkley celebrates his primary win in May. Photo: AP

FINAL RESULT:
 Jeff Merkley (D): 825,586
 48.79 percent
 Gordon Smith (R): 773,387
 45.70 percent

In this state, which had been considered a toss-up among pollsters, Democrat Jeff Merkley, speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives, defeated incumbent Republican Gordon Smith by a margin of three percent. Smith had been the only Republican holding statewide office in Oregon and the last Republican senator on the west coast.

GEORGIA



Chambliss poses with supporter George W. Bush. Photo: AP

RUNOFF RESULT:
 Saxby Chambliss (R): 1,220,854
 57.41 percent
 Jim Martin (D): 905,637
 42.59 percent

After incumbent Republican Saxby Chambliss failed to win more than 50 percent on Nov. 4, state law sent the race to a runoff, held on Dec. 2. As turnout became the deciding factor in the race's second round, the two campaigns began running eerily similar ads, both promising that Democrat Jim Martin would provide the last needed vote to pass legislation in the Senate for president-elect Obama. Fear of a supermajority likely helped Chambliss secure a 15-point victory.

MINNESOTA

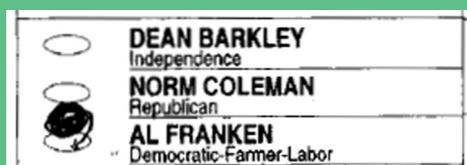
ELECTION DAY RESULT:
 Norm Coleman (R): 1,211,590
 41.99 percent
 Al Franken (D): 1,211,375
 41.98 percent

FINAL RESULT: Undetermined

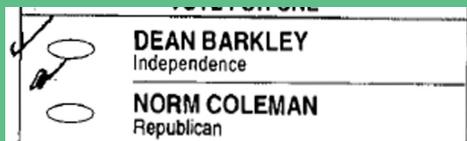
After a hand recount of all ballots, this final undecided Senate race still has no clear favorite. The Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune currently estimates that incumbent Republican Norm Coleman is ahead by 192 votes (of more than 2.9 million votes cast). The key to deciding the race will be the more than 6000 ballots challenged by Coleman and challenger Al Franken's campaigns (see our feature below for examples). The Franken camp believes that if all challenges were rejected, their candidate would be behind by about 50 votes. The review of the challenges is set to begin on Dec. 16. Another concern will be the 133 votes that have gone missing in one Minneapolis precinct (where Franken won by a considerable margin) since the election.

Minnesota Ballot Challenge *Can you discern voter intent in these ballots?*

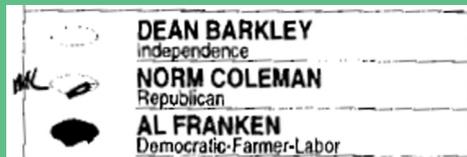
These images are examples of actual challenged ballots in Minnesota's U.S. Senate recount. The State Canvassing Board will meet to begin a review of the more than 6000 challenges on December 16. All images courtesy Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune.



Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: not a vote for Franken
 Interestingly this voter voted exclusively for Democrats and placed several marks slightly above the appropriate ovals.



Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: shows intent to vote for Coleman



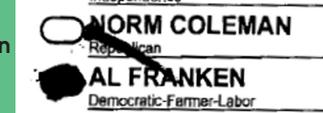
Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: shows intent to vote for Coleman



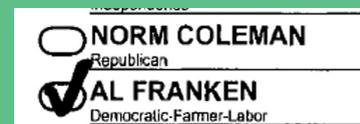
Challenger: Franken
 Reason: shows intent to vote for Franken



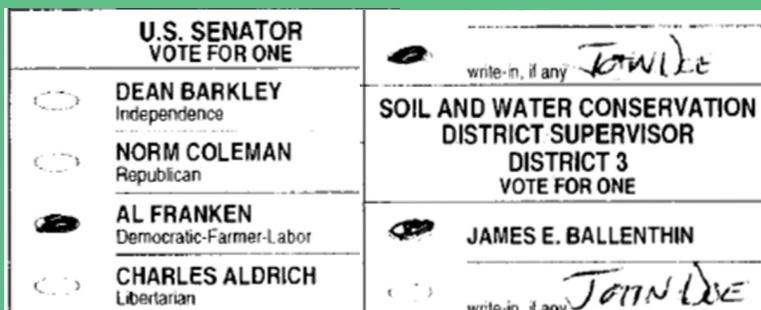
Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: overvote



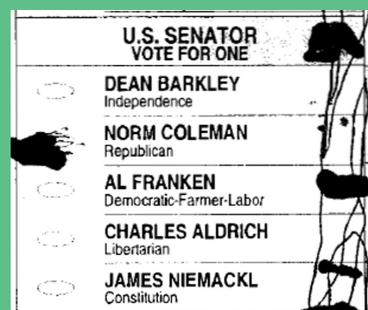
Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: overvote



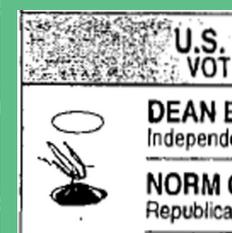
Challenger: Coleman
 Reason: overvote
 This vote may indicate a need to change the popular voting logo from a check mark. It is hard not to see voter intent here.



Challenger: Coleman Reason: identifying marks. Minnesota law voids ballots with signatures or other identifying marks, though it is not clear why several write-ins for "John Doe" would constitute self-identification...



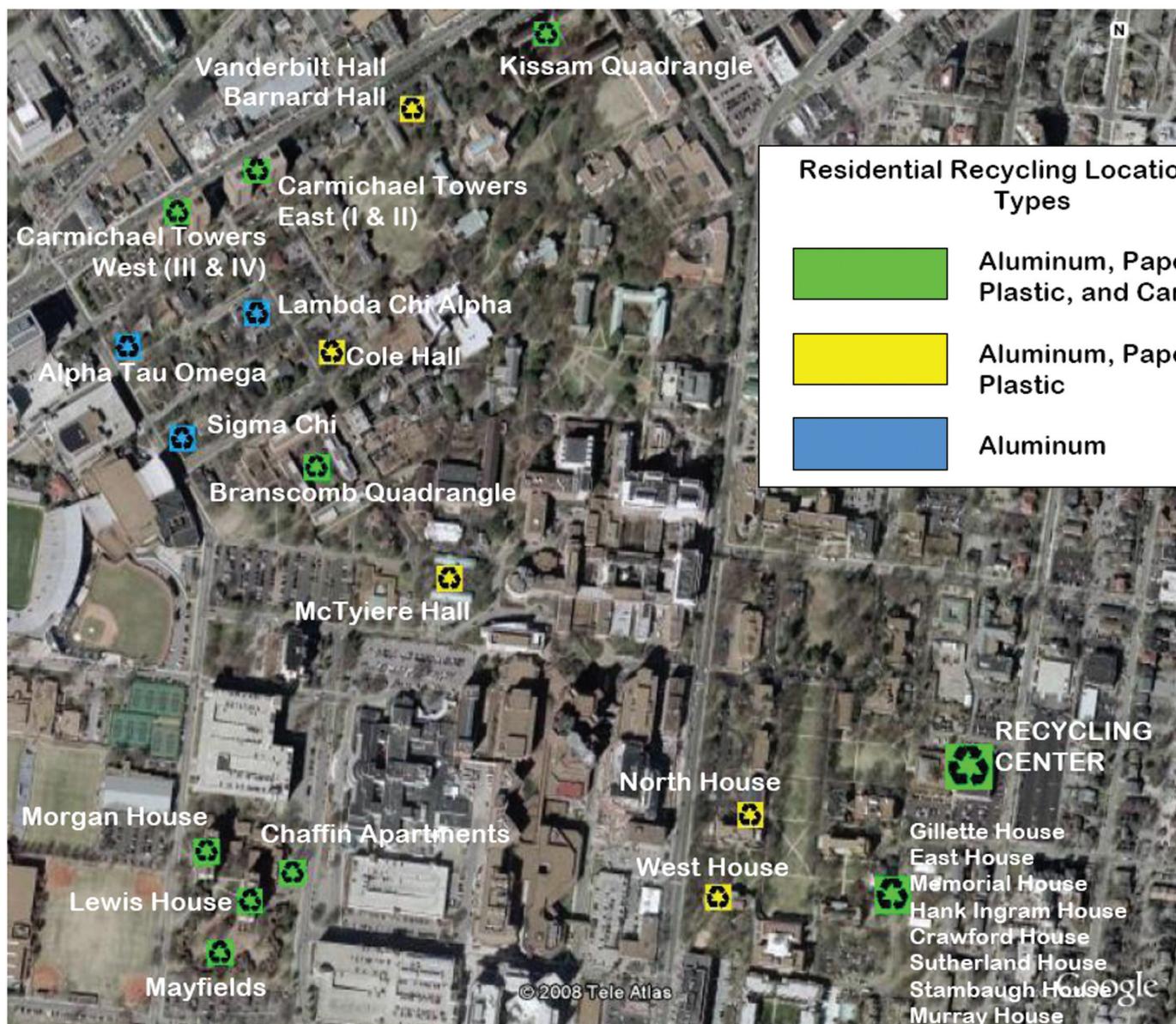
Challenger: Franken
 Reason: distinguishing marks ...or decorating his ballot.



Challenger: Franken
 Reason: stray marks

Campus recycling guide

With new recycling bins available in most dorm rooms and recycling collection sites located across campus, recycling is easier than ever. But take note - you can't recycle just anything.



Throwing dirty recyclables into the bin will contaminate the rest of the items and attract pests. They will then be thrown away at the collection center.

Recycling by the numbers:

3.8 barrels of oil are conserved for every ton of plastic recycled

6 weeks is the time it takes for a recycled aluminum can to be back on store shelves as a new can.

96 % less energy is used to make recycled aluminum products than to process the new material

76 % less energy is used to recycle plastic than to create new plastic

45 % less energy is used to recycle newspaper than to make more paper

Map and recycling information courtesy of Vanderbilt Students Promoting Environmental Awareness and Recycling; studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/SPEAR

Mixed paper

RECYCLE - White and colored paper, newspaper, magazines, cardstock (e.g. fliers and paper bags), paperboard (cereal boxes and other thin, non-corrugated cardboard), envelopes.

DO NOT RECYCLE - Anything contaminated with food, corrugated cardboard (packing boxes), wax-coated papers (e.g. some instant dinner boxes), or envelopes with plastic windows.

Aluminum and Tin

RECYCLE - Soup cans, soda cans, aluminum foil. Empty and rinse all cans before recycling them.

DO NOT RECYCLE - Aluminum or tin that is contaminated with food. Please rinse all cans before recycling them, otherwise they attract pests and will be thrown away instead of recycled.

Plastic

RECYCLE - All #1 or #2 plastics (the # is usually on the bottom of containers). This includes most soda bottles, plastic grocery bags, milk jugs, and shampoo bottles. Empty and rinse all bottles before recycling them.

DO NOT RECYCLE - Any #3, #4, #5, #6 plastics. Cup lids and solo cups are usually not recyclable. Rinse all bottles before recycling them, otherwise they attract pests and will be thrown away instead of recycled.

Printer cartridges

Small white boxes containing pre-paid mailing bags can be found at most reeve desks and at the Rec Center. Simply place your cartridge in a bag and drop it in the mail.

Individuals and departments who are interested in participating in our free cartridge or toner recycling programs should contact recycle@vanderbilt.edu

Batteries

Vanderbilt Recycling Coordinator, Jennifer Hackett, collects them in her office, Bryan Building 125, behind Featheringill and the Black Cultural Center.

Cardboard

RECYCLE - Any corrugated cardboard (this is the thick cardboard made of two flat layers and a sandwiched spacing layer, e.g. packing boxes).

DO NOT RECYCLE - Any cardboard that has been contaminated with food (e.g. pizza boxes).

Not accepted

Glass; styrofoam; plastic numbered 3, 4, 5, and 6; food-contaminated items; trash.

What's the matter with the GOP?

Big Republican losses in 2008 signal a collapse in conservative leadership and ideology

By Erika Hyde
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

With crushing defeats in last month's elections, Republicans across the country are nursing their wounds and asking themselves what went wrong. The obvious answer seems to be the glaring unpopularity of President Bush, but conservatives can't afford to forget the other compelling reason: a breakdown of their party's ideology. What does being a conservative in today's world actually mean? No one seems to have a comprehensive answer, and until they do the Republicans face several bleak years in political exile.

During the 2008 primaries, each of the Republican candidates argued that he alone represented true conservative values, name-dropping Ronald Reagan so often that they inspired drinking games. It was painfully obvious that none of the contenders, including the eventual nominee John McCain, could satisfy and unite the party they were supposed to represent. The coalition between the Religious Right and fiscal conservatives was always a marriage of convenience, but cracks have begun to form, paving the way for a schism that may deeply divide the current conservative movement.

After Barack Obama declared victory at Grant Park, the 2008 presidential election was supposed to be over. Yet, weeks later, instead of accepting the results and moving forward, small groups of conservatives refuse to acknowledge the GOP's sound thumping. Instead, they continue to flock to websites like nobama.com or WorldNetDaily where they fixate on debunked conspiracy theories of Obama's religion and citizenship status.

The bloggers don't realize that petty jokes about the Messiah won't fix their party's problems, but denial and finger pointing seem to be a contagious problem that's taking over the GOP. In the days surrounding the election, the McCain campaign imploded as disgruntled aides leaked stories about Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin's ineptitude. Primary also-ran Mike Huckabee devoted several pages of his new book "Do the Right Thing" to blasting conservative comrades like Mitt Romney. Readers of the conservative site Free Republic called for a boycott of the right wing Fox News for being "too liberal" and for being mean to Palin. For months, social conservatives bristled at the thought of voting for a "Republican in Name Only" like McCain. Most of all, everyone's throwing insults at the so-called propaganda of the liberal media that supposedly crucified the McCain-Palin ticket.

It's only natural that a losing political party spends



Who's going to save the Republican Party? And...does it even deserve to be saved in its current state?

(pictured from left to right: Charlie Crist, Florida governor; Mike Huckabee, talk show host and former Arkansas governor; Bobby Jindal, Louisiana governor; Mitt Romney, primary candidate; Sarah Palin, Alaska governor and former VP candidate.)

some time regrouping and looking for scapegoats, but the Republicans are scrambling to right their ship without much success. That's because they have an exhausting list of challenges to deal with in the coming years. First, they need to decide the direction and philosophy of their party. Should they embrace the hawkish tendencies of the neo-conservatives or the limited government angle espoused by their libertarian buddies? Next, they need a standard-bearer who can articulate their new conservative philosophy. Palin can't articulate her way out of a paper bag, so she's out. Finally, they have to ditch some of their limiting traditionalist values in order to appeal to young voters or they risk losing the generational war.

The Palin-Huckabee branch of the GOP embraces archaic notions of "family values" in a world that becomes more progressive and open with each new generation. Most young voters don't even remember Reagan, so worshipping the Gipper doesn't build a lot of youth support. People in their teens and twenties have also grown up in a world that is increasingly multicultural, so the demonization of Arabs and Muslims falls on deaf ears rather than eliciting xenophobic fear. To put it bluntly, the bulk of the social traditionalists that favor the Republicans are older and dying out. The younger the citizens, the more likely they are to support gay rights, to be pro-choice, and to oppose military intervention.

The new generation is rejecting the myth of a center right country and setting a progressive agenda for the future. As a result, the social conservatives are on track to losing the country. If the Republicans refuse to evolve and play catch up, they'll become extinct. Unfortunately, some Republicans don't even believe in evolution, which doesn't bode well for the fate of the party.

Of course, it's premature to write off the GOP com-

pletely. After every election, it's routine behavior for the pundits to discuss the impending death of the losing party. After both the 1994 and 2004 elections, the Democratic Party seemed on the verge of collapse, only to recover with renewed vigor and an embrace of the diversity that our country holds.

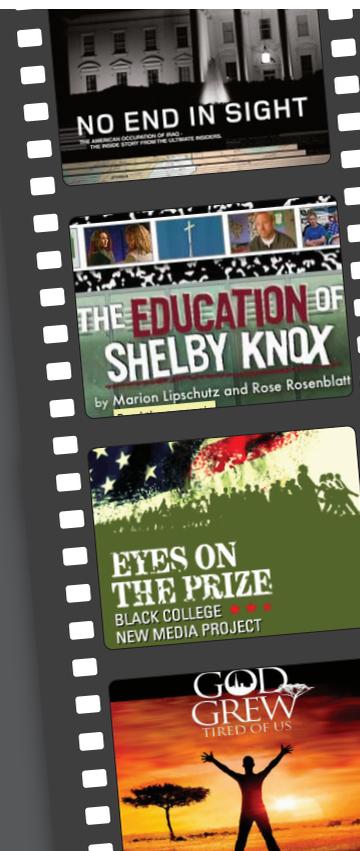
However, in light of global warming, economic woes, a broken health care system, and a crumbling infrastructure, Americans are crying out for innovation. If Republicans ever want to be the shoulder that the public leans on, they need to get their act together, quit pointing fingers, and build a coherent philosophy that looks towards the future instead of clinging to the failed ideas of the past.

It's only natural that a losing political party spends some time regrouping and looking for scapegoats, but the Republicans are scrambling to right their ship without much success.

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No child left behind (for real this time)

With a new administration waiting in the wings, an unlikely coalition—including Bill Ayers!—has formed to push education to the top of the president's agenda.

By Celia Segel
CAMPUS PROGRESS

Bill Ayers, the “terrorist” Sarah Palin accused President-elect Barack Obama of “pallin” around with” on the campaign trail, has a day job as an education reform advocate. He recently asked a crowded church in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C., “Yes we can... what?”

Ayers, a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago-College of Education, was talking about the dire situation of America's public schools. Ayers condemned the “savage inequalities” that still exist in schools today: “The fundamental injury is that [students have] been denied the right to think for themselves about the circumstances in their lives and how it might be otherwise.” While he begrudgingly ended the night answering questions about the negative attention he received leading up to Nov. 4, Ayers devoted most of time to public education reform. Ayers believes that true democracy is only possible with school reform that teaches all students their responsibility and potential as citizens.

The conversation was, in large part, jump started by the Bush administration's controversial No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that was passed in 2001. The legislation revealed more than a decade of declining test scores and a growing achievement gap, and thrust education reform back onto the national agenda. While the achievement gaps between African American, Latino and white students were cut dramatically between 1970 and 1988, the gaps have widened ever since.

The goal of NCLB was to take a multi-faceted approach to closing the achievement gap that grew in the '90s. Alongside its highly contested goal to enforce accountability in school systems with the threat of funding cuts, NCLB also: sought to improve the quality of teachers through incentives, training, and professional development; advocated increased funding for special education and English language learner programs; supported increased school choice; established focus curriculums for cultural minorities; and created incentives for innovative educational programs, research, and data collection initiatives. Most critics attribute the failure of the bill to the lack of government funding, but NCLB has seen a lot of reworking in its reauthorization during the final months of this last session of Congress.

Ayers, who has now shed his role as a member of the radical 1960s group the Weather Underground, is now part of a growing movement of social justice leaders, public school faculty, journalists, politicians, and parents that aim to bring education reform to the forefront of Barack Obama's agenda. Bigwigs like Reverend Al Sharpton, New York Governor Michael Bloomberg, and New York City and

D.C. School Chancellors, Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee (who was the subject of a recent Time magazine cover story), met in New York for a conference that produced headlines declaring education inequality the “civil rights issue of our day.” Washington Post journalist Richard Cohen hopes that Joel Klein will make it as Obama's Secretary of Education—a position that, Cohen hopes, will be given the same level of attention given to foreign and economic policy. And in the spirit of modern day advocacy, activists are working online to recruit supporters in Web-based campaigns for education reform (campaigns such as EdVoters.org, Democrats for Education Reform, and others gained attention this fall).

Indeed, policy makers and reformists are calling now one of the most exciting times in education. Nearly every major city across the country is either fixing or laying out the blueprints for teacher preparation and recruitment programs (promoted by the New Teacher's Project, a nationwide education consulting group) and innumerable districts are experimenting with ideas that range from teacher merit pay, public school redistricting, charter schools, and even student incentive—giving students money for getting good grades. Many of these ideas are, of course, controversial.

Teachers' Unions reject merit pay; parents worry about public school redistricting; and public schools lose funding to charter schools. But, like it or not, these initiatives are on the table because of funding threats from NCLB. Many hope that Obama will improve plans to encourage this innovation while reworking controversial standards in his highly anticipated agenda.

Obama has also pledged to recreate successful comprehensive programs in target cities across the country. Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone has received a lot of attention for influencing the new administration's “all hands on deck” approach to public education and urban reform. Canada's program invests money into an all-inclusive program in 97 blocks of Harlem, starting with pre-natal healthcare and parenting lessons and ending with college prep and in-college tutoring. Canada's plan is simple: Get kids in Harlem through college. And at the preliminary stages of the program, nearly 95 percent of his 10,000 students are passing statewide tests with scores above average.

Baltimore is one of the many cities that has begun plans to replicate Canada's model.

School choice is advocated for on both sides of the aisle. Many policy makers are adapting a sort of “whatever works” attitude towards public education and many states are opting for vouchers and charter schools. Rather than competing with public schools for funding, many charter school administrators have begun to view themselves as microcosms for successful public education policy. Steve Barr's Green Dot Charter Schools stretch across the country in a movement that replicates and recreates successful models in at-risk neighborhoods across the country. Barr encourages a sort of grassroots participation among parents in the school district and has centralized departments for education research and advocacy work. Other similar successful charter school systems include the KIPP Schools and the MATCH schools. Vouchers are a bit more controversial because they take students and their resources out of the public school system altogether. Still, the challenge for the government now is creating assessment tools to measure school success.

Education reformers are now, more than ever, fired up and ready to go and they hope that Obama will give them the resources they need to ensure that all kids receive the education they deserve. While all politicians talk about prioritizing education in their agendas, for the most part, education is usually left on deck as it regularly faces fund-

ing cuts and program failures in the name of national security or tax reduction. As Bill Ayers said, “We find money for the things we need to find money for. Why are we not finding money for education?”

The American K-12 education system is in dire need of rethinking, and policy makers need to find a way to maximize its best practices into law. At this point, education inadequacy has become a civil rights issue. Thanks to NCLB, the conversation has already started. Now it's time to write

the successful ideas that were products of the reform debate into policy so that they can be replicated around the country. But it will take money from the government, leadership, and a sense of immediacy from the public to push public schools to where they can and should be.

Celia Segel is a Policy and Advocacy Intern at Campus Progress. His article is re-printed with the permission of Campus Progress.

Policy makers and reformists are calling now one of the most exciting times in education.



Bill Ayers, a radical anti-war activist in the 1960s, has long advocated for reforms in education policy. Photo: Creative Commons

Presbyterian Student Fellowship hosts alternative gift fair

'Tis the season of giving, but during this economic downturn, charities are having a hard time collecting donations

By Erika Hyde
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In light of the country's current economic troubles, many charities in Nashville have an increasingly hard time meeting fundraising goals and helping the less privileged. The Presbyterian Student Fellowship decided to lend a helping hand to several of these charities as the holiday season began. PSF, along with Manna Project International and Wesley-Canterbury Fellowship, hosted the first annual Alternative Gift Fair on December 5 at St. Augustine's Chapel. The Fair was open to the Nashville community and introduced the Vanderbilt campus to the idea of alternative gift giving.

Rather than buying a traditional holiday gift, students had the opportunity to make a donation to a local or international charity in honor of someone on their Christmas gift list. These "alternative gifts" benefited 21 charities, including Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee, the Ronald McDonald House, Thistle Farms of Magdalene House, and others. The gifts available for purchase included soup kitchen meals for homeless men, books and musical instruments for lower-income children, and resources for refugee centers.

"Vanderbilt students are very committed to the idea of community service, which

is why we thought an alternative gift fair would be successful. They care about both the Nashville community and the international community," said event coordinator Hannah DeZeeuw. The Fair raised over \$9,000 for the 21 charities who participated.



The event's committee chairs included Lauren Turner, Ashley Zeiger, Elizabeth Eiland, Nina Myers, and Heather Scott. The Fair was made possible by grant money and in-kind gifts from several organizations, including Vanderbilt Student Government, Kroger of Green Hills and Belle Meade, and SunTrust Bank.

Community service is not a new idea for PSF members. In the past, PSF has organized school supply drives, volunteered at the Nashville Dismas House, and attended spring break mission trips in Guatemala. PSF boasts about 100 members on campus who participate in fellowship, Bible studies, community service, and mission trips.

Campus Minister Jennifer Fouse leads weekly worship services on Tuesday nights at St. Augustine's Chapel. For more information on PSF, visit www.psf-nashville.org.

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Student conduct

continued from page 5

consent. Because consent must be informed, an individual may not engage in sexual activity with another who one knows, or should reasonably know (based on the reasonable person standard), to be incapacitated.

Incapacitated persons, whether male or female, are considered incapable of giving effective consent because they lack the ability to appreciate the fact that the situation is sexual, and/or cannot rationally and reasonably appreciate the nature and extent (who, what, when, where, why and how) of that situation.

Because consent may never be provided by an incapacitated person, one must assume consent has been withdrawn should an individual become incapacitated at any point during a sexual act or encounter.

Consent obtained through the use of fraud or force (actual or implied) whether that force be physical force, threats, intimidation, or coercion, is not consent.

Consent may never be given by the following: * a minor (someone under the age of 18 in the state of Tennessee) to an adult * individuals with cognitive disability rendering them incapable of giving consent * incapacitated persons.

Proof of intent is not required to show a violation of the Non-Consensual Sexual Intercourse policy, as engaging in intercourse without effective consent is all that is required. Intent may be an appropriate consideration in some Non-Consensual Sexual Contact complaints (such as when one person brushes up against another person in a sexual manner in a crowded room), and in other actions that fall within the broader range of sexual misconduct."

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Take a study break at the movies

Oscar-worthy or not, these entertaining films offer a refreshing break from the wintertime blahs

By Robyn Hyden
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Milk: Sean Penn totally inhabits the role of charismatic gay activist Harvey Milk, the man who brought San Francisco to the front lines in the battle for gay rights. Spending his first 40 years as a closeted homosexual while working a series of corporate jobs in New York, Milk did not seem the most likely candidate to become the first openly gay elected official and founder of the gay rights movement. The film, by Gus Van Sant, spares us the dull years of Harvey's life; we first encounter Harvey when he picks up a younger man (Scott Smith, played by James Franco) in the subway to celebrate his first day at a new job – and his fortieth birthday party. “I’m forty, and I haven’t done anything I’m proud of,” he reflects, before presciently stating, “I won’t make it to fifty.” You know that Milk has a special charm when he can sweet-talk someone as young and utterly gorgeous as Franco’s character is in this movie. Before long, Scottie and Harvey run off to San Francisco, settling into the Castro, a gay neighborhood that will become the center of the gay rights movement.

Harvey’s interest in a political movement springs up suddenly, after he witnesses the widespread police brutality and discrimination directed at himself and his neighbors. It is his dedication to this movement and his own political ambition that will eventually overtake his relationship with Scottie. But this biopic doesn’t focus only on Harvey’s career; the characters and the relationships between them form the core of the story. Each member of Harvey’s inner circle has a fascinating life of their own, as does political rival Dan White (Josh Brolin), a conflicted character who carries resentment in the set of his jaw and shoulders. A mix of archival footage and authentic scenery create a strong feel of what 1970s San Francisco must have felt like; the atmosphere is one of undeniable, unstoppable change.

Van Sant doesn’t shy away from showing us unselfconsciously erotic encounters between Harvey and his lovers, and the open sexuality of this film is what kept me glued to the screen. In their first encounter in the subway, Smith and Milk kiss deeply, before Milk looks around furtively; when they open their camera shop on Castro, Harvey and Scott make out in the street next to the sign that says “We’re open.” This double entendre is hilarious, but their love is not a joke, and Van Sant does not put homosexuality on display to shock or incite viewers. Some scenes between Harvey and Scott are intimate in a way that is shocking only in their

realness, believable in a way that makes you feel you are seeing a truly private moment. At home together, they are playful, energetic, unselfconscious, and obviously in love. These scenes are the best in the film, and it is the kind of normalizing of gay relationships that Milk advocated for, though it remains generally absent from mainstream film.

Milk successfully led the campaign to defeat California’s Prop. 6, which would have allowed workplace discrimination against gay teachers and their friends, by urging homosexuals across the state to come out to their friends and family. “As long as they know one of us, they can’t hate all of us,” said Milk. He criticized politicians who attempted to tiptoe around the issue, sending out flyers about human rights that failed to even mention homosexuality. “We have to let them know who we

are,” fumed Milk, before assembling his own group of activists in his Castro apartment, instructing them to out as many people as possible. As many critics have noted, Milk’s ballsy approach to activism seems to have been forgotten by the activists who recently waged a similar battle against California’s Prop. 8, failing precisely because they attempted a sanitized, impersonal approach to raising support for their cause.

While the gay rights movement currently lacks such a central rallying figure as Harvey Milk, it is clear that we need one now more than ever. Depressingly, the arguments made against homosexuality in the 1970s by anti-gay crusaders are just as popular as ever. But the film ends on a note of hope, and inspires in one the feeling of, dare I say it, radical social revolution. It is clear that we have become complacent in our current situation. The gay rights movement succeeded initially because of tens of thousands of angry protesters who took to the streets and made their presence known. But where is this energy today?

Australia: This movie is perhaps just a tad grandiose, and long. But since I love Baz Luhrmann (self-conscious pastiche and kitsch – not for everyone) and believe that Hugh Jackman can do no wrong (he was worth the price of admission), I was inclined to enjoy it. The plot centers on the plight of half-caste children in early twentieth century Australia, who were sent to missions to be assimilated

into mainstream white society. Young Nullah (Brandon Walters) is adorable in the role of a young half-aboriginee boy.

Unfortunately, the film gives into the temptation to mysticize aboriginal characters in a way that makes them seem more distant, not more sympathetic. When a key plot device is a “magical negro” character (Spike Lee’s word for the stock character of color, who shows up to assist the white character in times of need, is usually preternaturally wise, and totally opaque in terms of character motivation or

description) you know the film has some problems. Some have written this off as “magical realism,” which would be acceptable, if only the other characters would behave in this matter.

For a more realistic and moving epic, go see *Slumdog Millionaire* instead.

Twilight: This new film is based on the popular YA series of fantasy novels, which depict a restrained love affair between an average teenage girl, Bella Swann, and a tormented vampire, Edward Cullen. Sounds harmless enough; but there’s something deeply wrong with the Twilight books that manages to suck all the fun out of an otherwise cheesily enjoyable series.

First, the retrogressive gender roles. Bella is an extremely passive lead; far from a kick-butt action heroine, she is a klutzy girl with low self esteem who seems to have no interests or ambitions, aside from cooking dinner for her dad, and living forever with her vampire lover. In contrast, Edward is the perfect being – more god than man, really; every other page of the book is filled with descriptions of his chiseled physique, perfect hair, and radiant skin. (He sparkles in the sunlight.) Bella’s thoughts are constantly filled with thoughts of inadequacy, which are only soothed by Edward’s reassurances that she is the most desirable woman in the world to him. In short, she is not exactly an ideal role model for pre-teens.

Even worse, the dynamic between Edward and Bella is characterized by his creepy stalkerish behavior; he follows her around everywhere in the guise of “protecting” her. It progresses into a queasily co-dependent and controlling relationship. Oh, and Edward constantly has to control his urges to kill her all the time, which sounds a lot like an

unhealthy relationship to me.

I could go on – there is the fetishized portrayal of a local Native American tribe, the Quilutes, as an ancient breed of wolf-people. And the extreme pro-life scenario in the fourth book, in which (major spoiler alert) Bella decides to keep an unwanted, parasitic pregnancy that ends up killing her in the most spectacularly gory scene I’ve ever encountered in YA fiction. Oh, and don’t even get me started on the weird pedophilia relationship between her wolf friend Jacob and a two-year-old.

So yeah, the books have their problems. But I will sheepishly admit that I enjoyed reading them, and I liked the movie. Then again, I love terrible movies: think of a mid-90’s teen drama with the most ridiculous musical cues imaginable and random sideways camera angles. Also, expect terrible acting from lead actor Robert Pattinson; his fake American accent is bizarrely inflected, and his tormented reaction shots are a riot. Certainly, the clumsy dialogue does not help. Kristin Stewart, as Bella, is believable as a teen girl, projecting her desire for Edward while still depicting a self-possessed, somewhat uptight and endearingly awkward young woman. The scenes with her high school friends, who all seem like actual teenagers rather than actors playing them in a teen movie, are comical; even funnier is Edward’s constipated-looking vampire family. (Just wait for the moment when the entire clan all crouches down and starts hissing. Or, better yet, the moment when Edward tears open his shirt to reveal a sparkly bare chest.) And the evil vampires are the best – wearing ridiculous costumes and flouncing around killing people, they remind me a lot of the absurd bad guys on HBO’s much more salacious *True Blood*, who also flounce around half naked, or wearing tacky club wear.

Notably, this movie was written and directed by women, based on a book by women, and has reached success because of its largely female audience. Director Catherine Hardewick brings a light and insightful perspective to this story, improving on the book in many ways. And did I mention that the scenery is actually quite gorgeous? But in the end, the movie and book both depict a deeply unsettling relationship. When Bella discovers Edward’s “secret,” (the he wants to kill her) he asks, “are you afraid?” And she says, “no” – but it’s not very convincing. She looks terrified. And she should be! This guy keeps telling her he’s a creep – and sneaking into her room at night to watch her sleep.

Uh, it’s called “The Gift of Fear,” y’all. Check it out. And then run screaming from any guy who looks or acts remotely like Edward Cullen.



“I’m Harvey Milk, and I want to recruit you.”

Can we expect real change in military strategy from Robert Gates?

Gates is a disappointing, uninspiring choice for Secretary of Defense

By Jon Christian
ISSUES EDITOR

President-elect Barack Obama has made a mistake in deciding to stick with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. In spite of the risk involved in changing a key figure during such a vulnerable time as a change of administrations, the decision to prolong the term of such a prominent Bush appointee sends a clear message to the progressive community: that Obama's decisive rhetoric on foreign policy during the early election was merely a gimmick conceived to sway the far left. In conjunction with Gates' troubling intelligence record, the decision is a damning condemnation of the Obama administration's willingness to depart radically from the modern tradition of American imperialism.

In 2005, Gates turned down George Bush's offer of the position of Director of National Intelligence in order to continue his presidency at Texas A&M University. The following year, however, he accepted the position of Secretary of Defense to succeed the overwhelmingly unpopular Donald Rumsfeld. While by any metric a better military strategist than his predecessor, Gates has been criticized for failing to turn around the depressing theatre in Afghanistan as well as for looking the other way regarding the Pentagon's laughably inefficient budget. In many ways he represents the very worst values of the Bush presidency; if Obama feels the need to carry over figures from the Bush

administration, then why tap those caught up in the lies and deceit of the War in Iraq? Why opt for the most disturbing remnants of the last eight years rather than the most inspiring - for example, why not the consistently anti-war Colin Powell?

Of equal concern is Gates' patchy record in the CIA. During his confirmation hearing in 1991, tempers flared as former aides accused him of promoting biased intelligence in the 1980s, which greatly inflated the threat posed by the disintegrating Soviet Union. Of significant note was a memo prepared by the CIA in 1981 under Gates' direction implicating the Soviet Union in the shooting of John Paul II, which was later revealed as highly inaccurate. Sold to the public in 2006 as a change from the incompetent and abrasive Rumsfeld, it is problematic that his earlier abuses of power so closely mirrored the strategies used by Dick Cheney to drum up support for the War in Iraq after September 11th.

Barack Obama has made another disappointing pick in his rapidly materializing cabinet. Does the Gates appointment foreshadow a centrist administration unable to stick to its guns even on Obama's most solemn campaign promises? I hope not, but unless the next Cabinet appointments are wild departures, the future looks grim indeed.

Gates is a safe and unsurprising choice to remain as Secretary of Defense

By Claire Costantino
COMMENTARY EDITOR

Barack Obama's decision to keep on Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense is a strong bipartisan move and a clever policy decision during this war. Obama can use Gates' existing credibility and relationships in the Pentagon to alter Iraq policy instead of having to go in and start with a new cabinet member. Critics

of this move have far overestimated how far Obama leans to the left, but hopefully watching how his Cabinet fills out will remind them that he is a centrist figure. Additionally, Robert Gates is pretty agreeable as far as Republicans go. It is more like token bipartisanship than a real commitment to an ideological challenge in his Cabinet. And it is important to remember that Robert Gates, though conservative, is no Karl Rove or Dick Cheney.

It is surprising that many progressives have been so quick to condemn the relative centrism of Obama. Obama always ran as a candidate of unity and compromise, so it would have been counterintuitive for him to stack his Cabinet with radical appointments. And truthfully, Obama himself is a pretty centrist person. He has been centrist to the point of non-committal on many important policy issues. He supports neither same-sex marriage nor a constitutional ban on

it. He has spoken in favor of both corporate bailout plans and more populist efforts to help the proverbial Main Street.

In fact, the war is the issue that makes him look the most liberal. He has been opposed to the war in Iraq since day one; so choosing to be bipartisan on the issue where he has the most liberal credibility seems like a very politically savvy move. Robert Gates is probably a fairly convincing guy, but Obama, and the nation, have spoken on how Iraq policy will go in the future. With or without Gates, we can look forward to a deceleration of troop involvement.

Another important factor in the decision to keep on Robert Gates is that he looks like he is basically a people pleaser. His career has mostly been characterized by efforts to reconcile institutions and policies with one another. He has demonstrated a high respect for institutional patterns in places such as the CIA and the Pentagon instead of his own personal agenda. One source at the Pentagon, talking to the New York Times, described Gates as having a "very sophisticated understanding of how to make the boss successful. That's what [he's] about." If Gates' past performance is any indication, then we can expect him to work diligently to further Obama's agenda.



Secretary of Defense Robert Gates Creative Commons

Orbis Asks

What do you think of President-elect Barack Obama's cabinet appointments so far?



Hunter Holt

*Sophomore
Neuroscience*

"Hillary was a bad pick for Secretary of State, but on the positive side she has valuable diplomatic experience."



Alice Wang

*Sophomore
Peabody*

"I'm a fan of Hillary. I believe that picking her for Secretary of State was a wise choice for Obama."



Erol Koymen

*Sophomore
Blair*

"I think it's good to select people with experience, especially in light of the fact that Obama is relatively inexperienced."



Fred Adom

*Senior
Mechanical
Engineering*

"I believe [the choice of Gates] was a safe choice. He's chosen to take a lot of former Clinton cabinet members while maintaining his political positions."

-Compiled by Jon Christian