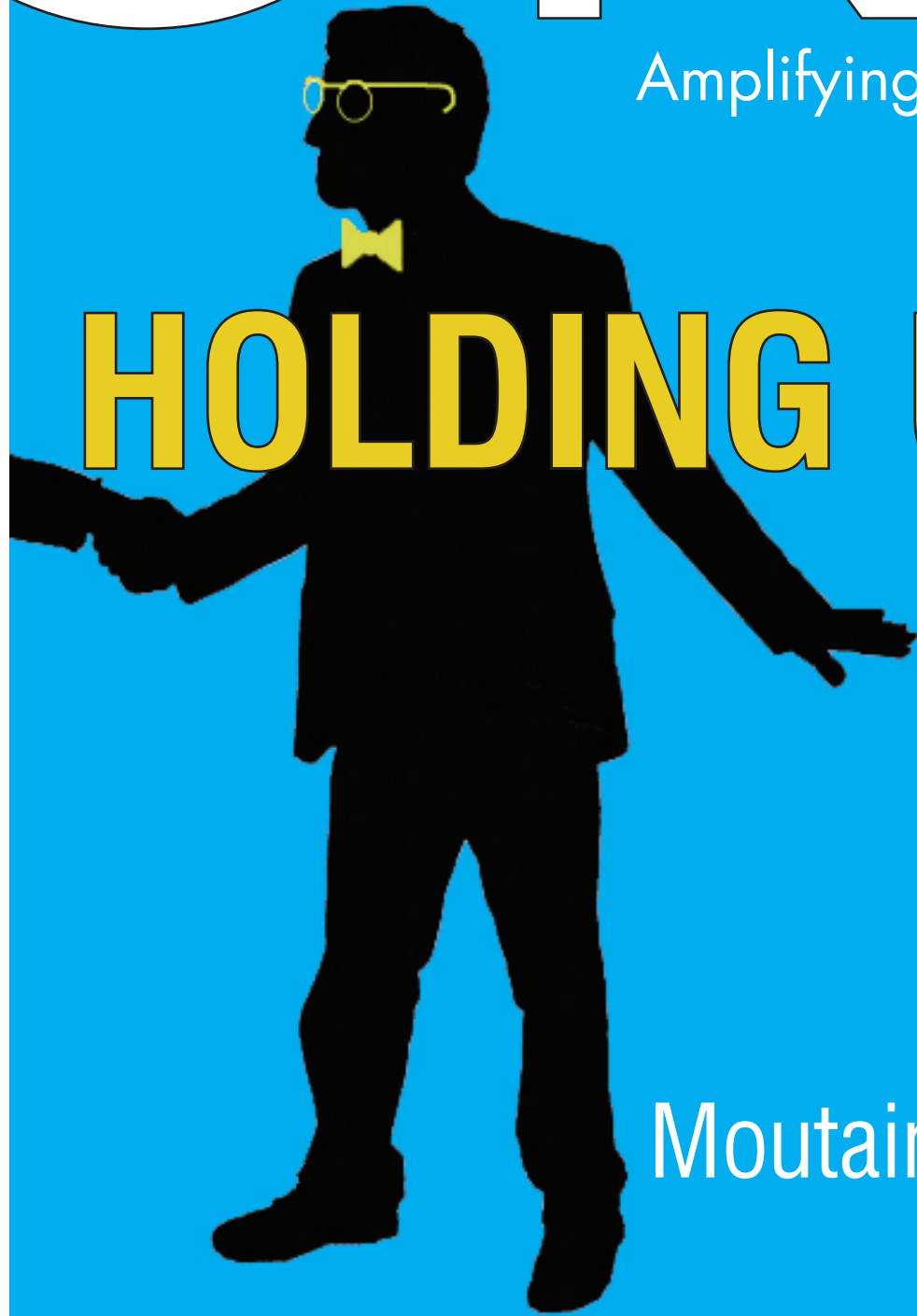


# DIRBITS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voice  
Vol. 5/No. 5/Feb. 1/2006



## HOLDING US BACK?

Union **Blocking**

Misusing **Title IX**

Moutaintop **Destruction**

**Also inside:** Hugo Chávez, The False Virtue of Moderation,  
Personal Ads, and Valentine's Day Fun for the Cynical

## a note from the editor

Our Chancellor Gee enjoys astronomical approval ratings among the student body. To his credit, Gee has accomplished much worthy of praise during his tenure here. The dissolution of a separate athletic department, the construction of the studio arts building and Vanderbilt's increasing competitiveness with other top-ranked universities are all laudable achievements. However, with the skill of a veteran politician, Gee's public actions and oratory are often contradictory to his behind-the-scenes doings.

Recent issues like the Student Life Center and the abolition of the men's soccer team are perfect examples of this. Infused with self-congratulation, Gee hailed the Student Life Center as a building where students could gather and study. Instead, it is a new revenue-generator for corporate gatherings with students only present in the sign hanging on its facade. Gee preached the virtues of student athletes only to disband the embodiment of those athletes for a faulty interpretation of Title IX.

Students may not be as familiar with other instances of Gee's malfeances. We have included two examples in this issue: anti-union actions and Gee's involvement in environmental destruction. These issues reinforce our belief that Gee should be viewed with the same skepticism as any politician.

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# ORBIS

*Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voice*

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

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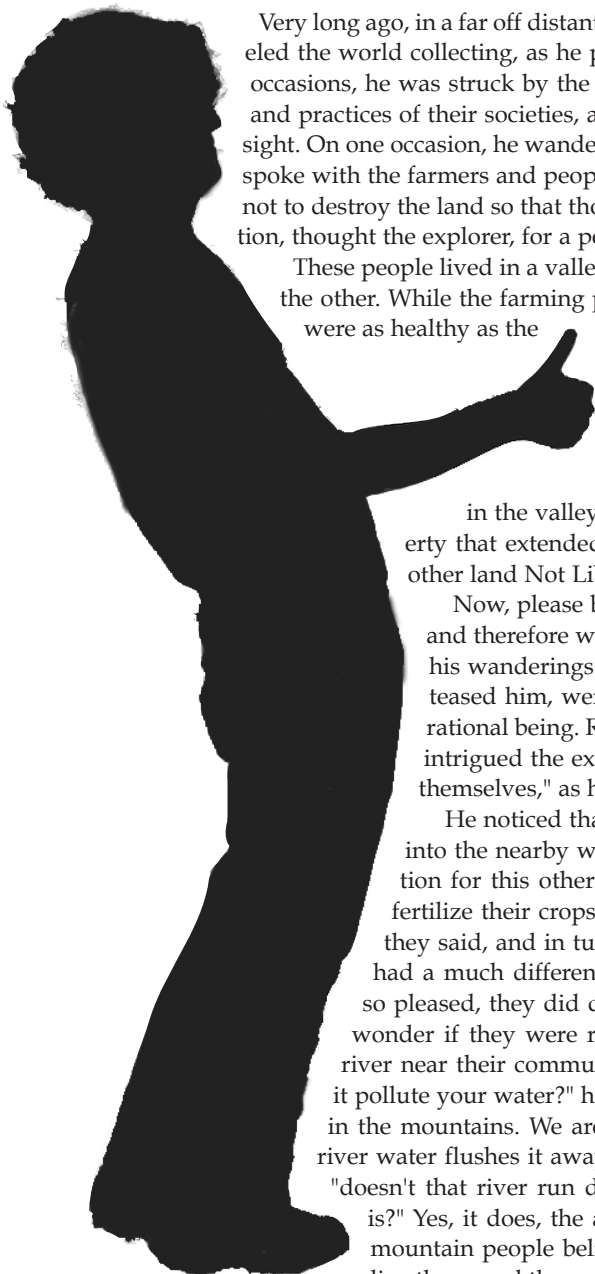
**2238** number of American military deaths in Iraq since March 2003

*Orbis* aspires to change the atmosphere on Vanderbilt's campus and provides a voice for the 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.

# Thoughts written on napkins...

## *A parable of libertarians*

By Dan Rosenberg  
LE ORBISIER



Very long ago, in a far off distant land, there was a man who, seized by wanderlust, traveled the world collecting, as he put it, the collective knowledge of the world. On many occasions, he was struck by the simplistic elegance of primitive man. He saw the tools and practices of their societies, and marveled at not only their ingenuity, but their foresight. On one occasion, he wandered into an idyllic country untouched by modernity. He spoke with the farmers and people of the town. "We farm on a rotation," one said, "so as not to destroy the land so that those after us may too benefit from it." A striking observation, thought the explorer, for a people with no concept of the measurement of time.

These people lived in a valley surrounded by mountains on one side and a forest on the other. While the farming people lived in the valley and were very populous and were as healthy as the

land around them, the explorer found another group up in the mountains. This group, while far less healthy looking, believed in, the explorer found out, the idea that they had the most comprehensive knowledge of not only the world around them, but their place in it. This was a group with far fewer people than the people

in the valley. What they did have, however, was a concept of property that extended so far as this: they named their land Libertia, and all other land Not Libertia.

Now, please bear in mind that our explorer was hardly an academic, and therefore was not interested in the usual anthropological aspects of his wanderings. The things that stuck in his mind, as his friends often teased him, were of significance only to man the animal, not man the rational being. Regardless, one of the practices of these two peoples that intrigued the explorer was the way in which they dealt with "relieving themselves," as he so called it.

He noticed that in the valley, the people were very modest, and went into the nearby woods to do their business. There was no great explanation for this other than the fact that these people used cattle manure to fertilize their crops, and felt that they owed it to nature to "give back," as they said, and in turn help nature. The people in the mountains, however, had a much different practice. While they didn't simply go wherever they so pleased, they did do something the appalled the explorer, and made him wonder if they were really so cognizant of the world after all. There was a river near their community that they used. This baffled the explorer. "Doesn't it pollute your water?" he asked. No, he was told, we get our water from higher in the mountains. We are actually rather brilliant in doing it here, because the river water flushes it away, far from our concern. "But wait," the explorer asked, "doesn't that river run down into the valley where the other group of people is?" Yes, it does, the answer came. However, as the explorer found out, the mountain people believed that since it was by the valley people's choice to live there, and they were not forced to, it was really their choice to accept the contaminated water, not the fault of the mountain people. The explorer had one last question. "Don't you trade with the people down there? Aren't they your only source of meat and sustenance production?" No, the mountain resident said, almost insulted. He explained that they chose to trade with them, but were not forced to. Indeed, they had many options in trading partners (evidence of which the explorer couldn't see), and had no tie to the people in the valley.

So the explorer moved on, resuming his travels around the world. However, he returned to the idyllic valley five years later. He expected to find a thriving and evolved valley society. What he instead found was a ghost town, and a terrible stench coming from their river where all their wells had been. Shocked, he went into the mountains and saw the mountain people still alive, yet very sickly looking. They were eating only berries off of trees. However, as the people assured him, it was because they chose to, not because they had to.

The explorer laughed and moved on, thinking to himself that it was very sad to see a society so promising ruined so needlessly by a daily tide of irresponsible, Libertarian shit.

## eye on obama



Barack Obama, incumbent Democratic messiah from Illinois, called the recent findings of Jack Abramoff's impropriety "a Republican Sin." Responding to the news that shows many high level Republicans receiving gifts and expensive meals from the D.C. lobbyist, Sen. Obama went on to say that these are "very particular problems of this administration and this Congress."

Obama has been very busy this month, between supporting Congressional lobby reforms, speaking on education and investigating consumer access to alternative fuels. However, he has still found time to take his wife Michelle out for an elegant, expensive dinner while lavishing her with gifts. For while it is wrong to treat your congressmen like that, Obama likes to show that there is more to being a Stallion (which he is, incredibly so) than the boudoir.

-By Dan Rosenberg

### By the Numbers: Abramoff lobbying scandal

- 5** The number of guilty pleas entered into by Abramoff
- \$82 million** The amount received by Abramoff from the four Indian tribes he defrauded
- \$185,000** The combined amount Rep. Tom DeLay and his wife Christine have received from Abramoff
- 15** The approximate number of members of congress and congressional aides who are involved in a corruption probe on Capitol Hill
- \$100,000** The amount President Bush received from Abramoff for his reelection campaign
- \$5,000** The amount received by Sen. John McCain from Abramoff's clients

### Bonus Number!

- 46** Days that have passed since the wiretapping story broke without President Bush being impeached

# News Briefs



## Vampires over St. Paul

Minnesota, the state that elected wrestler Jesse "The Body" Ventura governor, now has another unique character seeking the state's highest office. Jonathan "The Impaler" Sharkey filed for candidacy on Jan. 13 and will be running on the ticket of the Vampyres, Witches, and Pagans Party. A self-identified vampire and Hecate witch, Sharkey remarked, "Politics is a cut-throat business." Despite his vampirism (he drinks an ounce of his wife's blood each week), Sharkey's views are fairly moderate. He opposes the war in Iraq as immoral and is strongly against abortion. In fact, there is little about his views that would hint that he is unlike any other candidate. Except for the fact that he supports impaling convicted drug dealers in front of the state Capitol building. Seriously.

## Transsexual drug dealer evades caning

On Jan. 22, a Singapore court spared convicted drug dealer Mongkon Pusuwan from caning. Pusuwan's crime, cocaine trafficking, normally carries a sentence that can include up to 15 lashes, but women are exempted from caning. Pusuwan, who underwent a male-to-female sex change a decade ago, was spared the rod after a medical report confirmed her new gender.

## World's smallest fish discovered

Scientists last month discovered the smallest known species of fish, *Paedocypris progenetica*, a type of carp, in a peat swamp in Indonesia. The fish, which grows up to only 7.9 mm in length, has very large muscles relative to its body size and a pair of unusual grasping fins used during copulation. It dwells in dark, extremely acidic water, sharing its murky habitat with Karl Rove and other predators.

## Chirac falls for prank call

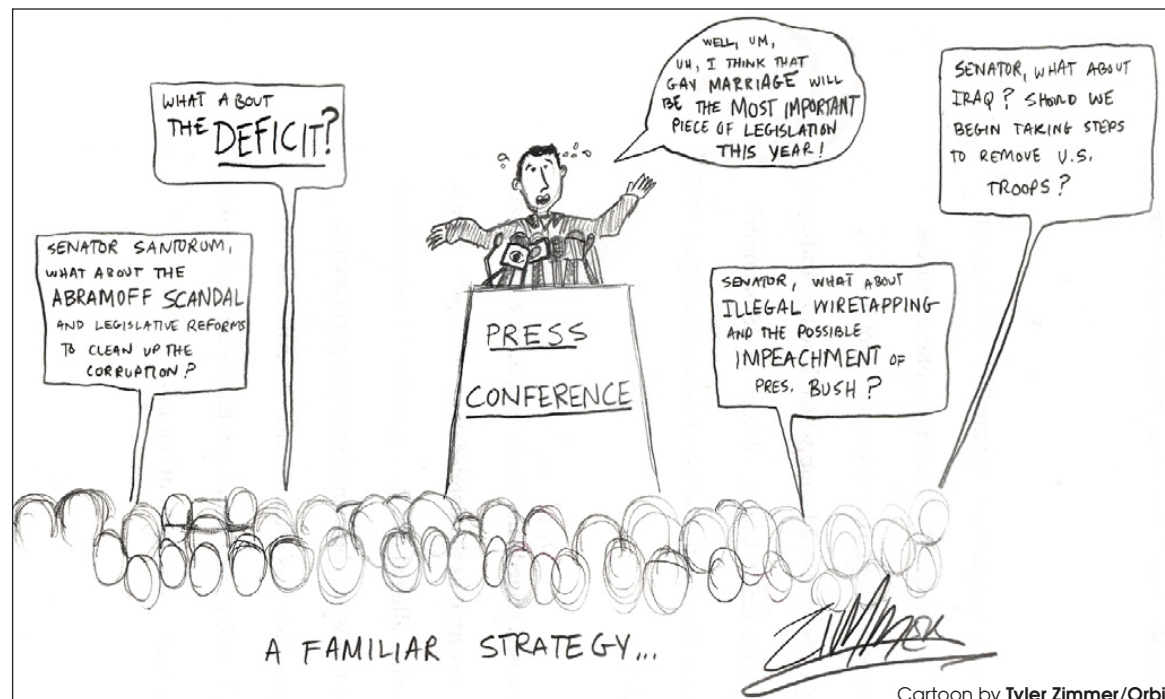
On Jan. 27 French President Jacques Chirac took a phone call from Montreal radio personality Marc-Antoine Audette posing as newly-elected Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The two exchanged pleasantries for several minutes, with Chirac inviting the phony Harper to visit France. Chirac took the prank with good humor, laughing when Audette finally let him in on the joke, surely relieved that he hadn't asked Harper to bring him some fine Canadian buds when he visited.

## Maybe they know Jeff Gannon

At Fort Bragg in North Carolina on Friday, up to seven members of the 82nd Airborne Division, a celebrated division of paratroopers, were being investigated for allegedly appearing on a gay porn web site. Doing so would constitute a violation of the military conduct code, which considers homosexual conduct to be "incompatible with military service," according to a Defense Dept. spokesperson. While defense officials at home focused on the sexual activities of our soldiers, the war in Iraq raged on, as the U.S. suffered its 2,238th casualty earlier this week.

## Kerry the tea-drinking intellectual fairy

Sen. John Kerry drew snickers from conservatives this week when he announced his call for a filibuster of Samuel Alito's nomination via videophone from an economic conference in Davos, Switzerland. CNN anchor Miles O'Brien suggested that Kerry's actions reinforced his reputation among conservatives as an "elitist." He's right. True red-blooded American politicians take trips away from Washington to clear brush and read books about salt, not to attend some high-falutin conference about dilettantish issues like the "world economy."



In January, Senator Rick Santorum (R-Penn.) actually described the Federal Marriage Amendment as "one of the most important pieces of legislation for 2006". He also said such an amendment is "foundational for society". Santorum is infamous for comparisons drawn between homosexuality and bestiality.

# Beyond Abramoff:

## Why the recent talk about lobbying reform falls short

It's sad to see Congress reconvene at a time when there are so many important issues to be addressed, only to focus on lobbying reform in the wake of the Abramoff scandal. While our congressmen and state lawmakers are scrambling to save their own asses, they're leaving the Iraq war, energy independence, and control of domestic intelligence surveillance to sizzle on the back burner. This attack on lobbyists is problematic for several reasons.



Noelle Janka  
ORBIS ALL-STAR

First, while there are currently many problems with the way some lobbyists operate (e.g. showering congressmen with expensive dinners and all-expenses-paid trips to four-star resorts in high season), lobbying is protected by the First Amendment and serves as a vital part of our democratic process by linking people to their leaders.

Second, stricter lobbying regulations and greater consequences for those who break them will

only fuel greater secrecy and corruption, making it even more difficult to catch and punish congressmen that jeopardize the public trust. Moreover, the proposed reforms don't even address the core problem of earmarking, the practice of making late additions to bills that provide millions of dollars to lawmakers' pet projects. Such additions are often only discovered by the whole legislature days or even weeks after the bills have been passed. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz), Washington's long-time corruption ball-buster, was quoted in a recent *New York Times* article as saying, "If we don't fix the earmarking, then I can assure you the corruption will go on."

Third, the root of such cozy relationships between our lawmakers and lobbyists lies not so much in the lobbyists themselves, but in the nature of American election campaigns. They're just too freakin' expensive! Because our

lawmakers are forced to raise millions of dollars each time they seek reelection, any substantial contribution to their campaign can get a lobbyist's pet cause earmarked for exclusive funding in a larger appropriations bill.

The answer to this predicament however is not to cut off the money supply but to decrease the demand by shortening the campaign season. Presently, the first primaries take place in New Hampshire and Iowa in January, and by early March, after Super Tuesday, we essentially know who our candidates are. Yet they must continue raising money to battle each other for another seven months before the elections in November. Moving the primaries back, say to Memorial Day in May, could revolutionize the campaign season for voters, campaign volunteers and candidates alike. After New Hampshire and Iowa, regional primaries could be held in June and July, followed by conventions in August. A shorter, more focused campaign would

Turn to **ABRAMOFF**, Page 12

"I think the major justice issue should be getting living wages for all workers. That issue is a **derivation of slavery**, which said there is an economic institution in the United States and it's all right to have people who work and live on a **subsistence basis, gaining no serious benefits except enough food to stay alive so they can stay working.**"

- James Lawson, Harvard Divinity School, 2001

# Union Rejected

*Vanderbilt's anti-labor actions are hypocritical*

The Vanderbilt administration's superficial public efforts to rectify the embarrassment of Rev. James Lawson's expulsion have been grossly undermined by its private contradictions of Lawson's most fundamental beliefs. It's recent anti-union activity and a refusal to consider a living wage stand in direct opposition to Rev. Lawson's teachings. In this way, the current administration of Vanderbilt is not much different from that of the 1960s.

On Jan. 23, the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) began a membership drive among the 600-person bargaining unit to increase its leverage with the university in preparation for contract re-negotiations in November. The bargaining unit represents some of the lowest paid employees at Vanderbilt, including groundskeepers, housekeepers, food service workers and plant operations employees, many of whom earn well below a Nashville living wage.

Unlike a membership drive in 2004, however, LIUNA organizers will be barred from campus, unable even to distribute information. Charmion Patton, the Human Resources Manager, informed LIUNA officials on Jan. 3 that the "request to have Union representatives visit Vanderbilt University and the Medical Center for informational and educational meetings will not be authorized... Vanderbilt feels this visit would interfere with the normal work day even though the meetings would be scheduled at break times and during lunch."

Vanderbilt is toeing the legal line with this position.

According to the 1992 Supreme Court ruling *Lechmere, Inc v. NLRB*, an employer has the right to block organizers from its property, provided "reasonable alternative forms of access exist." Alternative forms of access include a list of addresses and phone numbers for all employees, provided by the employer. Unsurprisingly, Vanderbilt resisted providing this information, according to LIUNA officials, although they produced a list after pressure.

However, another National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) regulation states that "if an employer permits non-employees other than union organizers to solicit its employees on company property without interference, the employer may not bar professional organizers from soliciting members on its premises."

Rules barring solicitation on campus and in the Medical Center do exist, but as most students have probably noticed, they are weakly enforced. How often have you seen outside companies soliciting students and employees for cell phones, pizza deals, music venues or bars? There have also been reports of outside companies, like insurance agencies, holding information sessions for employees in the medical center.

Yet another NLRB regulation states that "A valid company rule limiting distribution and solicitation may not be enforced discriminatorily..." In other words, Vanderbilt cannot ignore some solicitation while cracking down aggressively on the union.

Vanderbilt has resisted employee organizing since it began in 1968, when the university fired a medical center employee integral to the initial organizing two weeks after it began – an illegal act.

So, has Vanderbilt really changed that much since the 1960s?

I believe not.

The expulsion of Rev. James Lawson from the Divinity School was not illegal, but it was undoubtedly wrong. Vanderbilt's anti-union activities and refusal to address living wage issues are no different. They are not necessarily illegal but they are wrong.

With its resistance to organizing, Vanderbilt has aligned itself with other great purveyors of moral employment, like Wal-Mart and Coca-Cola, whose severe anti-union practices are well-documented. Vanderbilt's actions are not as horrifying as those, but they are also not exemplary of other leaders in higher education, like Harvard, Washington University St. Louis and Georgetown, all of which pay their employees a living wage.

In whose company would you rather be?

The administration is clearly nervous about the increased activity of the union and the growing sentiment among students and faculty that paying Vanderbilt employees a living wage is a moral imperative. Contract negotiations will be held in November and the administration is taking preemptive action.

To the probable dismay of the administration, this membership drive has been extremely successful. Well over 100 additional employees have joined LIUNA, top-



Tim Bowles  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

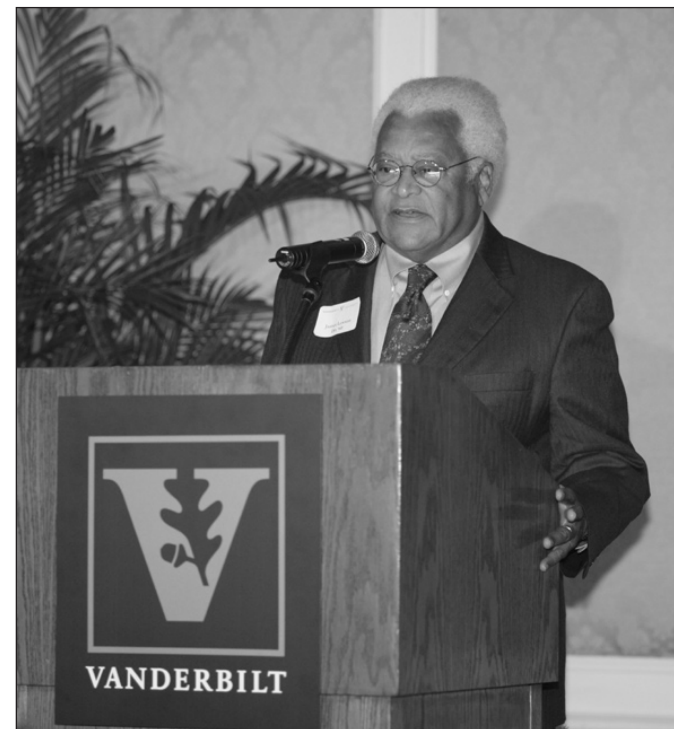


Photo courtesy of Daniel Dubios/Vanderbilt Register

## James Lawson: a champion of nonviolence and social justice

Rev. James Lawson is a leading theoretician and practitioner of nonviolence. He was a seminal figure in the civil rights movement, and remains committed to fighting for social and economic justice.

After enrolling in the Vanderbilt Divinity School, he moved to Nashville in 1958 and began training students in nonviolent tactics for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They organized sit-ins to challenge segregation in downtown Nashville stores in March of 1960, and were soon joined by other activists from elsewhere in the South, forming the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in April 1960. Enraged by his actions, Vanderbilt's Board of Trustees expelled Lawson from the Divinity School.

On Jan. 16, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Rev. Lawson spoke at the Divinity School. In an attempt at reconciliation, he was also offered a professorship for the 2006-2007 academic year.

ping 50 percent of the bargaining unit. These employees are ready for the administration to hear their voices.

So, Chancellor Gee, I challenge you to truly make amends for the expulsion of Rev. James Lawson from the Divinity School. Extending a keynote address and a visiting professorship rectify nothing when your actions are reminiscent of the same Vanderbilt that cast out Rev. Lawson.

Rev. Lawson organized and empowered students and community members for nonviolent direct action; the Board of Trustees fired him because of it. Now, Vanderbilt is impeding its own employees from organizing, empowering themselves and receiving just wages. It's time to remove the barriers for your employees to organize and offer them a living wage!

We are tired of half-initiatives and superficial gestures. It's time for action, Chancellor Gee. Only then will you distinguish Vanderbilt from its past. Only then will you really honor Rev. James Lawson.

# HUGO CHÁVEZ and SOCIALISM in the 21st Century

The tenure of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela has not exactly been met with roaring approval from our country. He has been characterized by the US media as: "a thug", "paranoiac", "dictatorial", a "ruinous and radical leftist demagogue", and "autocratic." The flamboyant leader certainly seems to thrive on some of the name-calling launched at him, given that he often resorts to similar rhetorical tactics (he's publicly called Bush a *pendejo*, Spanish for jerk, among other snide and crass remarks). Yet much of the animosity he faces from our media and government is due to his outspoken criticism of the impulse to global capitalism and United States foreign policy.

He recently criticized the Bush administration's handling of Hurricane Katrina arguing that "the [Bush] government had no evacuation plan. The world's only superpower is so involved in Iraq...but left its own people adrift...and, that cowboy, the king of vacations, stayed at his ranch and said nothing but, 'You have to flee.' It's incredible."

In some of his harshest criticisms of U.S. foreign policy, Chávez has maintained that "The U.S. has bombed entire cities, used chemical weapons and napalm, killed women and children and thousands of soldiers. That's terrorism...the US government is a threat to humanity."

There are certainly legitimate concerns about Chávez's handling of issues such as free-speech and political dissent, but the bulk of the attacks on Chávez stem from his interference with global capitalism (dubbed "neoliberalism" by everyone else in the world) and his embracing of democratic socialism. In other words, the harshest critics of his government in our country aren't speaking on behalf

of free speech or human rights; they most vehemently object to his economic philosophy and refusal to bow to U.S. interests.

A common thread among most advocates of global capitalism is their emphasis on shrinking government involvement to non-economic issues only, ardently pushing privatization and removing all trade barriers. The result, which can be seen in our political system to a lesser degree, is that trivial political debate ensues between parties which essentially push the same pro-

business economic vision. This is precisely the political climate in Venezuela in which Chávez came to power in 1998 in a landslide election which brought him the largest percentage of the popular vote that any Venezuelan has received in more than four decades.

In a country marred with a sharp divide in wealth and a large percentage of the population wallowing in serious poverty and inequality, Chávez mobilized the poor and working class with a platform centered around abolishing the two-party patronage system, ending the far-reaching corruption of public officials with close ties to big business, and working to lift up the poor from the bottom of the social hierarchy. However, the mainstream media in the U.S. universally fail to mention the good he has done for Venezuela,



instead dismissing him perjoratively as a leftist without actually defining what a leftist is. Far from being a put-down, "leftist" in reality connotes a concern for social justice, egalitarianism, and redistribution of wealth and resources to help foster a fair and just society.

In pursuing some of these ends, Chávez has created programs to provide free lessons to help the 1.5 million illiterate adults in his country learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He has enacted laws

to protect the indigenous people and their land as well as the natural environment, he has made free higher education possible, and has challenged an oligarchy (less than three percent of the population) which has a stranglehold over more than three-quarters of all the farm land in the country.

He's taken initiatives to make health care available to everyone in society, especially to the poorest factions of the populace, many of whom have never seen a doctor. Instead of embracing the belief that the main beneficiaries of his nation's natural resources should be foreign investors with no concern for the country's well-being, Chávez halted the further privatization of Venezuela's oil industry (20% had been moved to the private sector) and used the revenue generated to fund social programs.

Even though Chávez has made it perfectly clear through both word and deed that he has no enmity for the American people, he is still relentlessly characterized as anti-American. The crucial distinction to recognize here is that Chávez is vehemently anti-Bush and despises the hegemonic vision of the his administration, not the people of our country.

Venezuela was the first foreign government to offer aid for the devastated Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina and the U.S.'s painfully inept response that followed. Chávez offered tons of food, water, mobile hospital units, power generators and over 1 million barrels of oil in aid to "our North American brothers." Embarrassed by such an ingenious illumination of its incompetence, the Bush administration was quick to refuse the offer.

In a similar move, Chávez also recently arranged for the delivery of 12 million gallons of home-heating oil at a discounted price for charities and low-income families in Massachusetts.

The hatred of Chávez's leftist program by our government is not without substantial precedent. During the 1970s, democratically elected (despite relentless attempts by the CIA to prevent him from being elected) socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende, was murdered during a US-spon-

sored coup which led to a militantly violent and repressive anti-democratic regime which happily obliged to US economic interests. The murderous military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet that followed the coup resulted in thousands missing, tortured and dead over a period of seventeen years.

He's dismissed simply as a **leftist** without actually defining what a leftist is. "Leftist" in reality connotes a concern for **social justice, egalitarianism, and redistribution of wealth and resources** to help foster a **fair and just society**.

Since returning to democracy, Chile has favored a coalition of center-left governments and very recently elected a woman as president, Michele Bachelet, who has an ambitious social program which includes reducing unemployment, achieving social justice, and giving a greater voice to women.

In 2002, a failed coup attempt was staged by some of Chávez's opponents, and the immediate media frenzy surrounding it in our country touted his possible downfall as the demise of an autocratic "would-be dictator" (*New York Times*). Chávez has alleged that the U.S. was involved in the overthrow attempt, and should this turn out to be the case it would be anything but surprising. The U.S. media have frequently overstated and distorted the breadth of popular opposition to the Chávez government. During the attempted coup Chávez's opposition was often unfairly described as pro-West or pro-democracy even though they sought to illegally unseat a democratically elected government through violence and force.

Glorification of Chávez's opposition was similar to President Reagan's comment that the anti-leftist drug-networking Nicaraguan Contras were "the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers." Clearly, given our policy towards legitimately elected governments in Latin America, the U.S. appears to have little if any respect for the integrity of democracy in that region.



Tyler Zimmer  
COMMENTARY EDITOR

# The false virtue of MODERATION

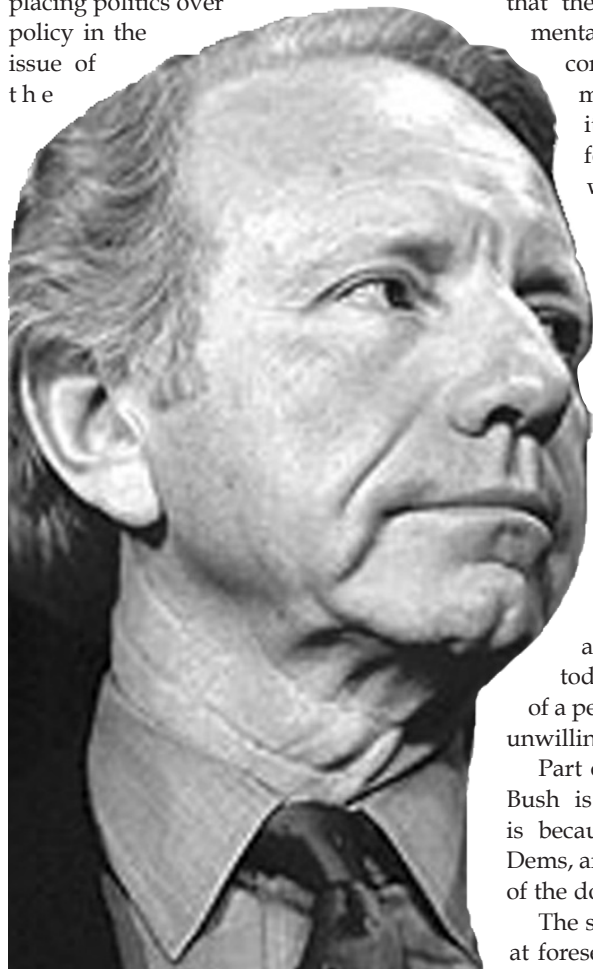
As Dante imagined it, just inside the gate of the hell reside the despairing angels who refused to take a side in Lucifer's rebellion against God but instead simply waited to see who gained the upper hand. For their opportunism, the miserable souls are consigned to a fate of unique ignominy, rejected by both heaven and hell. As Dante's guide, Virgil, explains,

The heavens expelled them,  
not to be less fair;  
Nor them the nethermore  
abyss receives,  
For glory none the damned  
would have from them.



Mike Maio  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Meanwhile, American political culture glorifies moderate politicians who avoid trenchant partisanship. Consider the kid-gloves treatment that the mainstream media give to moderate senators such as Joe Lieberman and John McCain vis-à-vis their almost universal flogging of Howard Dean. Lieberman has recently drawn accolades for reprimanding Democrats for supposedly placing politics over policy in the issue of the



war in Iraq, but few in the media bother to critically analyze his views on the war, which are now in fairly close alignment with President Bush's. At the same time, any controversial statement made by Dean, such as his claim that the war in Iraq is not winnable, is dismissed a priori as the rant of a partisan lunatic.

Under many circumstances there are good reasons to value compromise and cooperation in the political process. For one, very little could have been accomplished historically in the legislature if not for the usual give-and-take between the political parties. Cooperation and deal making have formed an integral part of the culture in Congress, the Senate in particular, since the time of Henry Clay, the senator lauded in American history as "The Great Compromiser."

But now, not only is it not virtuous to cooperate with the Bush administration, it is not even an option for true progressives. In the past few years, it has become apparent that the current administration is fundamentally anti-American, betraying even conservative principles in its efforts to maintain its own power and enrich its cronies. There is no longer room for cooperation, and any Democrat who cedes ground on issues ranging from the Iraq war to domestic spying to tax "reform" deserves to be held culpable for the damages to American values rather than praised for bipartisanship.

I don't intend to imply a moral equivalence between refusing to take sides in Satan's rebellion and, say, blandly denying that President Bush misled us into war, as Sen. Lieberman has. Rather, I am simply trying to illustrate that sometimes the correct path is to take a hard line stance on an issue, and that Democrats who today preach cooperation are enablers of a pernicious administration that itself is unwilling to compromise.

Part of the reason that cooperation with Bush is still widely viewed as virtuous is because many people, even moderate Dems, are too willing to give him the benefit of the doubt on all of his miscalculations.

The salient example of Bush's ineptitude at foreseeing the consequences of his poli-

cies is the Iraq war. We of course found no WMD and were greeted with RPGs rather than daisies. The storyline mostly embraced by the media now deflects responsibility from the president for the Iraq debacle and instead shifts the blame to bad intelligence produced by the CIA. While faulty intelligence certainly played a major role, accounts such as that of former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, who revealed that the administration began planning an invasion of Iraq in the first few weeks after taking office, go ignored.

Then there were the tax cuts. In his 2000 campaign, Bush claimed that his proposed tax cuts would increase the budget surplus by stimulating economic growth. Well, it turns out that the tax cuts resulted in the largest deficit in history in dollar terms. Bush apologists are quick to note that the economic recession and the Sept. 11 attacks caused the deficit, but the data [insert actual data here] bear out the fact that the tax cuts played a greater role in creating the deficit than any other factor.

Bush also undermines his own credibility by making it a habit of using data disingenuously in order to sell his policies to the public. In a town hall meeting during his campaign to privatize Social Security last year, Bush attempted to demonstrate that the program in its current state needs reform because it is inherently racist. How? As he explained, African American men have an average life expectancy that exceeds the retirement age by only two years, while non-blacks have a significantly longer life expectancy. The idea Bush wanted his audience to believe was that African American men work their entire lives, contributing to Social Security for years and years but then only enjoying its benefits for about two. Which is in fact naked dishonesty. The reason is that the life expectancy of African American men is an average; it's not as if all African American men work for years, raise families, and keel over dead at age sixty-

seven. Their relatively low life expectancy is a consequence of the fact that, for various reasons, they tend to have higher mortality rates during their pre-adult years. The low life expectancy, then, does not bear on the fairness of Social Security in any way. Bush of course knew that, but he didn't want you to.

To run through all of the important examples of how the Bush administration has dishonestly manipulated data to disseminate misinformation about his policies

would require me to take a semester off from my course work. The point is that in the past five years, Bush has repeatedly proved to us that the only thing we can trust about him is the fact that he is consistently untrustworthy. Joe Lieberman recently told us that, "we undermine the president at our own peril," when in fact we trust him to do what is right for America at our own peril.

The right-wing table-thumpers in the media accuse the Democrats as being the party of obstruction, but for many progressives that's exactly the point. Opposing Bush at every turn is a meritorious end in itself as long as Republicans dominate the national government and most state governments. We must of course continue to advocate for economic and social justice, as well as a sensible foreign policy, but stopping Bush from doing any more damage than he already has should be the first priority.

Progressives must take Lieberman to task for his war views and reject any effort of his to serve as an accomplice in the disastrous misadventure in Iraq. The same applies to other Democrats who express lukewarm support for the war, particularly those such as Hillary Clinton who harbor presidential aspirations. In 2004, Democrats opposed to the war let John Kerry slide on his ambivalent voting record in order to enter the general election with a consensus candidate, but they cannot in good con-

Joe Lieberman told us, "we undermine the president at our own peril," when in fact **we trust him to do what is right for America at our own peril.**

# Finding **SIMPLICITY** in the **COMPLEX**

## *A Moment with Progressive Printmaker Valerie Leuth*



(detail from) *Rationed Ingestion of Questionable Ingredients*, Etching, 2004

An emerging artist in the Nashville art scene, Valerie Leuth, a former student of University of South Dakota and progressive printmaker, seeks change in the Nashville community with her current artistic endeavors.

Perhaps bored with the rural Dakotan setting in which she grew up, Valerie sought a variety of avenues to entertain her expansive imagination. After she seemed to lose interest in her varying successes with fort building and salamander collecting, at a very young age Valerie quickly found her love for drawing and exploring her natural artistic talents.

Her pre-undergraduate artistic experience began early in first grade with her drawings of unicorns and panda bears dressed lavender sweat-shirts, and climactically concluded with a range of high school art classes.

She began the transition to her undergraduate art program in a "chaotic" atmosphere, as she dabbled in a range of dissatisfying media. Fortunately, Valerie found printmaking, her current medium of choice, with the support and encouragement of her professors and peers.

The appropriately matched line-based etching technique that Valerie currently uses suits both her style of drawing and her attitude concerning art's accessibility – the democratic medium of printmaking allows her artwork to be affordable as well as available in multiple.

Attracted to and interested in surrealist-based imagery, Valerie finds inspiration a very ranging group of artists: from the contemporary drawer Marcel Dzama and the painter and printmaker Amy Cutler, to the late surrealist sculptor and printmaker H.C. Westermann to the historic likes of Mexican printmaker Jose Posada (to name a very abbreviated few).

Perhaps it is the incomprehensibility of the incredible time and labor dedicated to each of her printed pieces or the hypnotic quality of the black and white image, but her strikingly detailed and complex prints provoke a closer examination.

"I think the scale and the mark-making really work . . . I try not to be overly cryptic – I seek simplicity in complexity. I want people to be able to identify with the characters and situations that pop-up in my prints."

Lately concentrating on such environmental themes as pollution, overpopulation and global warming, Valerie often creates "fictional and hypothetical situations that parallel or draw from political issues in round-about ways."

However, unlike many drenched in the often-immature realm of political critique, Valerie refreshingly clarifies her political motifs in her art: "I'm not interested in blame and fault...pointing the finger...taking sides."

In the whirlwind plans for this talent, Valerie hopes to open Tugboat Artist's Press, "a socially responsible, image-based print shop extraordinaire with a mission to foster progressive thinking in the arts and assist other artists and peers in the fine-art editioning of such works" with her soon-to-be husband and last month's progressive artist Paul Roden.

Luckily, this happening artist will be showing with Paul within a few short weeks, as their formal invasion of the Nashville art scene will materialize in their joint show "Handlebars and Pigtails" at the Tag Gallery (located above the Arts Company, between Commerce and Union on 5th Ave). The show will be up for the entire month of February (yes!), with an opening extravaganza from 6-8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 4th.





Up-and-coming artist Valerie Leuth stops the printing shenanigans for a moment in her studio in East Nashville, where she and her fiancé and fellow printmaker Paul Roden create their socially and politically charged prints.



Miss Peepshow Planet, Etching, 2004

tag art gallery presents

**HANDLEBARS**  
and  
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**Artist's Reception: February 4th, 2006 6:00-8:00PM**      215 5th Avenue North  
Show runs February 4th - 25th, 2006      [www.tagartgallery.com](http://www.tagartgallery.com)



Programmable Do-Gooders, Etching, 2004

# Fire on the mountain

*Coal mining method destroys land and lives in ruthless pursuit of cheap energy*

By W. Casey Perry  
STAFF WRITER

## Mountaintop removal: the shame of energy and the curse of Appalachia

Approximately 4-5 percent of the coal energy demands in the US today are met through surface mining techniques including one referred to as mountaintop removal (MTR). MTR, also known as valley fill mining, is used when a coal company finds that a certain seam of coal can be removed by MTR more economically than by traditional underground mining.

The process is simple. Workers first clearcut the land to be "mined." Explosive charges ten to 100 times the power of the bomb used in the Oklahoma City bombing are set. They are then detonated, and up to 800 feet of the peak is blown apart (to put that in perspective, the Bellsouth building here in Nashville, commonly known as the "Batman Building," is almost 620 feet tall.). Massive machines then sift the rubble for coal. Finally, what is left of the mountain - the "overburden" - is unceremoniously dumped into a nearby valley. The slurry of chemicals and harmful metals, including arsenic, mercury, copper, lead, and chromium, including the water used in the processing of the coal are collected in a sludge pond (the word "pond" is actually a misnomer, these "ponds" sometimes hold billions of gallons).

MTR produces myriad direct negative consequences. Numerous citizens have made complaints about MTR blasting, stating that their home's foundations have received damage or their well water has been depleted or made undrinkable. Rock and chemical dust from blasting and departing trucks linger around the communities adjacent to MTR sites, worsening air conditions and causing property values to drop.

"Fly Rock," a term for the debris that the blasts send off the mountain, strikes fear into the hearts of community members. In 2002, the mobile home of Jerry Pinson, a Kentucky resident, was crushed by an 11-foot boulder sent over a hillside as a result of blasting.

Another consequence of MTR is the occasional spill of toxic chemicals. In 1972 heavy

rain caused a sludge pond dam to burst, sending 132 million gallons of wastewater into the valley, killing 125, injuring 1100, and leaving 4000 homeless. Pittston Coal Company, which had been forewarned that the dam was dangerous, called it an "act of God." Blackwater spills choke the life out of streams. In 2000 one spill in Martin County, Ken. of over 300 million gallons of toxic sludge sent pollution 15 feet thick into residents yards and strangled 75 miles of waterways. It was called the southeast's worst environmental disaster.

Blasting and blackwater spills are not the only source of problems, however. The bare land created by MTR dramatically worsens floods associated with summer thunderstorms. The lack of an intact ecosystem in an area sets off mudslides and floods, driving residents from their homes. In 2001 and 2002, flooding in southern West Virginia killed 15 people and damaged or destroyed thousands of homes. The recovery effort for those floods has topped \$150 million. The increased risk of flood damage and personal harm visibly generates significant angst for denizens of coal communities.

The largest social effect MTR triggers is the loss of communities, culture and irreplaceable and unique ways of life. MTR drives people away from their homes by creating a hazardous place to live, lowering the value of their property, poisoning their water and air, and prompting them to run in panic from the mountains for fear of losing their lives. Entire communities such as Blair, West Virginia do not exist anymore. Citizens that stay also are faced with economic issues. As more coal is mined, less and less miners are employed; coal production rose 32 percent between 1987 and 1997, while mining jobs dropped 29 percent. The top 15 coal producing counties in West Virginia produce 15 percent of the nation's coal, but have some of the worst poverty levels in the nation. Obviously, the only ones profiting from MTR are the coal companies.

## The environmental consequences

Mother Earth is taking an equally brutal beating from MTR as the coal communities. In West Virginia alone, over 500 square miles have been completely obliterated forever (that's almost 1000 Vanderbilt campuses). The coal industry has effectively buried 724 miles of Appalachian headwater streams and has negatively impacted over 1200 stream miles. Runoff from valley fills leaks with selenium, aluminum, manganese and a plethora of other pollutants into the watershed, poisoning the land, sometimes irrevocably.

The forests of Appalachia are internationally renowned for their biodiversity. More than half of the flowering plants and ferns in the US are present in the South's hills. The forest also plays host to more tree species than all of Europe. It has been labeled an international biogem by the Natural Resource Defense Fund and a keystone forest by Greenpeace USA. It is home to more endangered aquatic species than the rest of the world and provides vital habitats for endangered species such as black bears and bald eagles. The US Fish and Wildlife service has reported that West Virginia's forests are key nesting grounds for neo-tropical migrant birds, and the destruction of said forests will reduce the migrant bird populations across the northeast. MTR is a growing threat to Appalachia, its people, and its fragile ecosystem.

Coal composes about 23 percent of the nation's energy profile, and since MTR only produces 4-5% of the nation's coal energy, only about 1% of our energy demands are met via MTR coal. Mountain Justice Summer, an activist group out of Knoxville, Tenn., reports that 20 percent of our energy needs today can be met by simply practicing scrupulous conservation. Not burning unnecessary kilowatt-hours in the first place makes much more sense than does the long lasting devastation of MTR. Coal is a dirty business, and has been for a long time. Hopefully politicians and industry leaders will wake up and fix the problem of MTR by shifting the nation to a system utilizing a clean, reliable energy source such as solar energy or nuclear fusion.

## DID YOU KNOW...

- More explosives are used every week in the extraction of coal in Appalachia, than were used in the first Gulf War, and the Afghanistan war combined.
- Close to nine tons of toxic waste, produced by "cleaning" coal before burning it, lies behind an earthen dam just a few hundred yards behind an elementary school in West Virginia.
- Over 1000 miles of streams have been buried and 500 square miles of mountains supporting one of the world's most biodiverse temperate forests have been destroyed by MTR coal mining in West Virginia alone.
- According to the West Virginia Coal Association, a little over 50 years ago, over 100,000 miners were employed in West Virginia. In 2003, that number was fewer than 15,000. Meanwhile, far more coal is being mined.

*Acknowledgments: many thanks to Vivian Stockman of Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Nick Algee of the Southern Clean Energy Alliance, and most especially Hillary Hosta of Coal River Mountain Watch.*

## Chancellor Gordon Gee and his ties to MTR

Our distinguished Chancellor Gee currently holds director or trustee positions in several foundations and companies, one of which is Massey Energy Corporation. Massey currently exploits the South via MTR and has one of the worst histories of compliance and employee injuries on record. Gee has been retained by Massey since 2000 and serves on their Audit Committee, their Governance and Nominating Committee and their Environmental and Public Policy Committee. Chancellor Gee knows exactly what the current state of MTR is. He also knows exactly what is happening right now at Marsh Fork Elementary School in West Virginia.

Marsh Fork Elementary School resides in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia. A short distance behind the school a Massey Energy subsidiary, Goals Coal, operates a coal processing plant, two strip mines and a massive toxic waste storage facility (sludge pond). The "pond" consists of an earthen dam holding back 2.8 billion gallons of toxic sludge, just 400 yards up river from an elementary school. Also, up river from the school is a coal silo that sits just 150 feet from the school grounds. The quality of the air in and around the school is a major community issue, but that is not the worst fear of residents.

According to a Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) inspector, "If the dam failed, fatalities would be expected to occur. It's

reasonably likely an accident would occur if the condition continued to exist." The dam's safety is in question, as evidenced in a series of violations over the years including citations for not properly compacting the dam's fill material. The dam's safety, and the safety of the schools 200-plus children has been called into question, but Massey is doing little about it.

This is just one chapter in Massey's story of sludge and blood. The recent mine disaster at Aracoma mine in Logan County, West Virginia happened under Massey's watch, as did the Martin County, Kentucky spill of over 300 million gallons of sludge.

Massey is notorious for its union-busting crusades of the 1980s against the miners' union and was also an open-handed contributor to President Bush during his election campaign, who then ruthlessly fought for the deregulation of the industry.

Chancellor Gee's association with Massey sullies the name of the great man that he is. His silence on this critical issue condones Massey's practices, and his tenure on Massey's Board tacitly shows his lack of concern for the temperate jungles and people of Appalachia. Chancellor Gee has the unique opportunity to promote change in Massey's policies and to prevent the future dangers that MTR poses.

## Interested in fighting MTR? Here's what you can do!

- Knowledge is power. Educate yourself, your friends, your church members, and your classmates about the issue of MTR. Visit the below Web sites to learn more.
- Contact your politician. Tell your representatives in Washington about your opposition to MTR and encourage them to support the Clean Water Protection Act, HR 2719. But don't stop there! Encourage state and local officials to uphold laws already in effect and to work towards cleaner renewable energy.
- Conserve electricity. Every time you turn off the lights you buy the mountains and people of Appalachia some time. Remember to recycle as well, as it saves vast amounts of energy. By externalizing the social costs of surface mining, coal companies produce coal more cheaply, but if the electricity isn't used and the coal isn't bought, MTR is slowed down.
- Get involved! All of the following groups are working hard to stop MTR. You can join them and stay informed about the current state of Appalachia:
  - Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition: [www.ohvec.org](http://www.ohvec.org)
  - Coal River Mountain Watch: [www.crmw.net](http://www.crmw.net)
  - Coalfield Sustainability Project: [www.coalfieldsustainability.org](http://www.coalfieldsustainability.org)
  - Mountain Justice Summer: [www.mountainjusticesummer.org](http://www.mountainjusticesummer.org)
  - Christians For the Mountains: [www.christiansforthemountains.org](http://www.christiansforthemountains.org)
  - Appalachian Voices: [www.appvoices.org](http://www.appvoices.org)
  - Kentuckians for the Commonwealth: [www.kftc.org](http://www.kftc.org)
  - Southern Clean Energy Alliance: [www.cleanenergyorg](http://www.cleanenergyorg)

## Testimonials from the people most affected by moutaintop removal

*The following comments were compiled by Vivian Stockman of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OHVEC). They were submitted to the EPA as part of a document criticizing an environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by the EPA on the subject of MTR. OHVEC stated that the EIS failed miserably to study the cultural and social effects of MTR. Coal River Mountain Watch and Delbarton Environmental Community Awareness Foundation assisted in collecting information for the document.*

### Blackwater spills, fear for lives

My name is Patsy Carter and I live on the Tug Fork River. As I watch the beautiful green river, it makes me feel so peaceful and relaxed, then all at once the river turns black from a Massey Coal sludge spill. I am not against coal mining, but we need to deep mine coal and mine responsibly. There is no need to destroy these mountains and streams and our children's future to mine coal.

I fear for my life and my family's life when it rains. I think of ways to run for the hills for my life, from the floods caused by strip mining. I plan to keep my family pictures close to me so that I can save them.

The strip mining is taking everything from us and our children. They will have no future and will never be able to live as

true mountaineers as we have and that is part of our children's heritage.

Under this blackened, horrible life we are forced to live with, because of irresponsible mining - this has made our state "Almost Hell" - instead of - "Almost Heaven." The people in Logan and Mingo county need to wake up. Stop Mountaintop Removal and stop valley fill mining - stop filling the headwaters of our streams.

- Patsy Carter

### Brother left homeless by floods, doesn't find wild things in the mountains anymore

My name is Jack Brown, Jr. and I live at 104 Finley Circle in Walhonda Village, which is in the Clear Creek Hollow. I am a lifetime resident of the great state of West Virginia. I was born in 1935 at Edwight, West Virginia and my dad was a retired coal miner. I watched him die of black lung six years ago.

When I was a small boy living in the coal camp at Edwight, Whitesville and the surrounding areas there were thousands of coal miners working in the mines, not like today when only a few work in the mines.

I have seen the streams run black with coal dust. But not the whole tops of mountains leveled. The sludge dams they have

built and the water they have polluted, coal trucks ruining the highways - for only a few real jobs? Believe me, I am not against jobs.

When they polluted in the old days, at least 10's of 1000's of coal miners had good paying jobs. Then the let down happened; the mines shut down and the coal market dried up, people left the state to find work.

But here we go again. Big coal companies have found a cheaper way to get the coal. Not like my dad got it, but by removing 1000's of mountaintop acres, filling in the little hollow streams. I used to catch spring lizards for fish bait. We don't find the wild things in the mountains like that any more.

Big coal has bought and paid for politicians they own and don't give me much of a say so in the matter. They promise me better, but big coal uses their money to change the laws to suit them.

I watched the flood waters wash over my brothers house, killing his animals

and leaving him homeless. I saw what happened to Boger Hollow and Sycamore Hollow when the sludge ponds broke. I watched my friends and neighbors cry wondering what to do next. Now what did big coal do? Not our fault; an act of God; It wasn't our fault the dam busted and you cry-babies lost everything you had.

In finishing this little letter--I'm going

**"The strip mining is taking everything from us and our children. They will have no future and will never be able to live as true mountaineers as we have and that is part of our children's heritage."**

to stay here in my little home and I'm going to fight with the big coal for a decent place to live without a polluted environment like we have now and not one lawmaker to go to bat for me. I guess I'll be fighting for a long time or at least

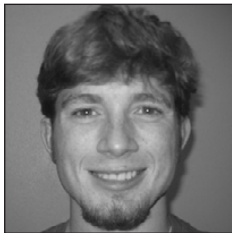
until someone does something to stop this land raping, polluting the water like big coal is doing. Oh yes, before I close, the governor of our state will only be a one-term governor, so if you can stop the raping of my beautiful mountains and stand up to big coal. Please give me your name. I want to stand behind you and support you for governor.

--Jack Brown, Jr.

# OFF BASE

## How the United States embargo with Cuba threatened to endanger America's pastime

George W. Bush, this is the last straw. Sure, we've had our differences in the past, but I've stayed calm and collected through all the nonsense your administration has put out. There was that Orwellian environmental policy early on, but I took a deep breath and let that one slide on by. Then there was the time where no one could quite decipher the meaning of that "Bin Laden determined to attack U.S. using commercial jets" memo, but then again literacy probably isn't your strong point, so you get another pass.



Kelson Bohnet  
STAFF WRITER

You've also been using my tax dollars to pay for a war based on faulty and manipulated intelligence, but I suppose that can be attributed to your admirable if somewhat misguided patriotism. Wiretapping? I figure that despite your disregard for the Constitution, you really thought you had our best interests in mind. Those million more children in poverty since you took office? Hey, at least they can get one of those dead-end minimum wage jobs that you and your administration so fervently brag about creating.

I won't even bring up declines in health care coverage, unfunded education mandates, or cuts to certain veteran benefits, because that's the not the point. The point, Mr. President, is that you finally did the unthinkable and fiddled with that which I and other red-blooded, God-fearing Americans simply won't tolerate.

You decided to meddle with baseball, and that means war.

When they announced the creation of the World Baseball Classic in May of 2005, baseball fans everywhere were giddy with anticipation. Here was a chance to see the best players in the world suit up for their native countries in an attempt to deter-

mine the true champions of the world. The U.S. lineup includes future hall-of-famers Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens, and many international lineups read as a veritable "Who's Who" of major league all-stars.

Yet when Cuba (the 2004 Olympic baseball champions, incidentally) applied for entry to the tourney, the Bush administration staunchly refused to let them play. Citing the Classic as a potential source of profit for Fidel Castro's communist regime, the government denied the Cubans' application in mid-December.

There was immediate uproar from the world community, especially the world baseball community. Governments, fans, and players alike saw it as unconscionable that one of the best teams in the world would be barred from baseball's equivalent of the World Cup simply due to the ideological tilt of their government, especially a government the players had no real control over. Even congressmen decided to weigh in on the issue, including Rep. Jose Serrano, a New York Democrat. "Let's leave the politics out of this," he said. "The World Baseball Classic should not be tainted by our grudge against Cuba's government."

But just when the problem finally seemed to work itself out, it may have actually just gotten worse. With their second application, Cuba was finally admitted to the classic on Jan. 20, but only with the stipulation that any and all Cuban profits gained as a result of the tournament were to be donated to Hurricane Katrina victims rather than return to Cuba.

While I was happy to see more aid earmarked for victims of that tragedy, I was enraged by the Bush administration's arrogance and sheer idiocy. Yes, Cuba had

gained the acceptance it deserved, but it had been through what ultimately amounted to a forced bribing of the United States.

Besides the near-criminal affront to the spirit of athletic competition, the Bush administration's actions in this debacle made two things even more painfully clear than they were before: the embargo on Cuba is a massive policy failure, and our current foreign relations policy is so juvenile that it could have been designed by a belligerent five year old.

Though communism does need to fall in Cuba, the embargo and other antagonistic policies are simply making a bad situation worse. Families with relatives in the U.S. are often kept from contacting each other, innocent Cuban citizens are denied many of the necessities they need to survive, and the Castro regime is not one bit closer to falling. If we are serious about bringing democracy to Cuba, opening their nation to capitalist trade and treating their baseball team with a shred of respect would be a great way to start.

All of this, however, is simply further evidence of our current *modus operandi* in foreign affairs. We demonized France for its opposition to the Iraq war, even going so far as to ask for "freedom fries" with our Big Macs. For Iraq, we assembled what John Kerry called "a coalition of the bribed and coerced." And now, we've succeeded in bullying Cuba over what should be a game all can enjoy free from bribes or political grudges.

Did you know, President Bush, that many Cubans congregate in the streets and spend hours simply talking about baseball? Did you know that for a nation mired in poverty

and uncertainty, baseball represents one of the few joys that many Cubans can cling to? Baseball is perhaps even more important there than it is here, yet policies with your stamp of approval have threatened to rob that nation's team of a truly special opportunity.

In a world rife with violence and division, athletics often represent one of our strongest claims to unity. It is in a thunderous stadium that politics, race, religion and social status are swept away by the roar of the crowd. It is at a ballpark where the enmity between neighbors is set aside for a pure love of the game.

...the embargo on Cuba is a **massive policy failure**, and our current foreign relations policy is so juvenile that it could have been designed by a **belligerent five year old**.

Mr. President, baseball and athletics of all types present the opportunity to peacefully come together and celebrate our unity as members of the human race. Yet when the opportunity arose, your administration tampered with our revered national pastime and ultimately struck out.

What a surprise.

## Beyond Abramoff

Continued from Page Four

not only free candidates from spending so much money on advertisements and campaign consultants but might also assuage the boredom factor amongst the American people.

Such a change would require no new legislation or constitutional amendments, just a bipartisan agreement of Republican and Democratic parties to push all the hoopla back a few months. Like everything, this is easier said than achieved.

Campaigns are run by powerful consultants who aren't likely to give up half a year's salary any time soon. At the same time, we may still be able to revolutionize American

elections in other ways.

We can, for example, begin pushing lawmakers to make Election Day a Monday holiday. This would create a three day weekend—potentially making it easier for Americans to vote because they would not have to juggle work, child-rearing and other responsibilities that often keep people from the polls. Originally voting was done on a Tuesday in early November because this fell between the harvest season and the beginning of winter, a convenient time for everyone.

Now that most Americans are not in the agricultural

sector, these considerations are no longer appropriate. We could even move Election Day to coincide with Veteran's Day, traditionally November 11. What better way to memorialize those who died for our freedom than to exercise the right to vote? Either way, it's high time that we asked our lawmakers to reconsider our election traditions and their relevance in 21st century America.

*Les Janka, Noëlle's father, contributed to the intellectual development of this article. Mr. Janka has served under three presidents and has been a lobbyist himself.*

# The case against CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

## *Why we should rethink the moral concerns of state killing*



Brent Fitzgerald  
STAFF WRITER

The question of the moral implications capital punishment often incite passionate debates between those in favor the practice and those who advocate its abolishment. It is undoubtedly a divisive issue that doesn't necessarily follow party affiliations. According to a 2004 Gallup poll, about 48% of Americans support the death penalty over life without parole. How are people to reach any accord about the merits of state execution?

Perhaps the best path is to begin with an examination of the facts. Qualms about the possible innocence of people sentenced to death, the apparent bias in sentencing, and the sheer brutality and moral apathy of the practice seem to all lay a firm foundation for the case against it.

The death penalty operates on the assumption that it cannot err on judging the worth of a human being. Because the humans that administer this institution are fallible, the death penalty is dangerously prone to misjudge and therefore to kill an innocent human being. Since 1973, when the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the death penalty, the United States has executed just over 1,000 people, while more than 120 have been released from death row. Comparing these two figures makes one wonder how many possible errors could have been committed in those 1,000 executions given that 120 convictions and sentences to death turned out to be erroneous.

It may also be constructive to look at a specific example. Anthony Porter, a poor African American man, was to be executed in the fall of 2002. Illinois Governor George H. Ryan signed the death warrant, signifying that the state was certain beyond all reasonable doubt of Porter's unfit-ness to live. A few days later, evidence indicating Porter's irrefutable innocence and the crime's true culprit was submitted by a freshman journalism class from Northwestern University. Porter was exonerated shortly afterwards and joyfully embraced his family.

Unfortunately for our justice system, all too often groups outside of it, like the college freshmen, are the ones garnering support the acquittal of the unjustly condemned.

To cite another glaring example of the fallibility of sentenc-

ing an innocent man, In 2001 Paul House was sentenced to death for the rape and murder of a woman, despite undisputed DNA evidence proving that he could not have raped the victim. Even more disturbing, two witnesses have now come forward to report that the victim's husband confessed to the crime, and that the key evidence, the blood on the defendant's jeans, had been tampered with by officials. Nonetheless, the United States Supreme Court has ruled that it is too late in the judicial process to present new evidence.

Some advocates of capital punishment dismiss these flaws by citing the social utility of the practice, specifically that it's effective as a deterrent to future murders. However, the concept of deterrence arises from rational decision making as a basis of human behavior. Most people commit murders as crimes of passion, and those who rationally premeditate murder never consider that they will be caught.

Furthermore, the concept of deterrence fails to correlate with statistical data. Over the last 20 years, the homicide rates in states with the death penalty have been 48 to 101 percent higher than in those without the death penalty. In fact, the percentage of violent crimes spikes around the time of a well-publicized execution, which could indicate a twisted perception that violent crimes are permissible because of the state's acceptance of brutalization as potentially just.

Finally, and perhaps most appalling, the institution of state killing, according to a variety of statistical evidence, continually targets racial minorities and the poor.

Although 12 percent of the U.S. population is black, African Americans make up over 80 percent of those on death row. 95 percent of death row inmates across America, and 100 percent of those in Tennessee, could not afford their own attorney. Many of the state-appointed attorneys given the responsibility of rigorously defending their clients have done a far less than satisfactory job. In this respect, the poor are not given equal opportunity under the law and do not receive the most fair and extensive trial that is possible for those who can afford it.

Art by Kyla Achard  
and Noelle Janka

Under the current system, we do not apply the death penalty to the worst of the worst—only to the poor. Still, even if a poor person did commit a crime, are we willing to execute an innocent man for the sake of an "unredeemably evil human?" If so, what will you tell Ms. House when you execute her innocent son?

For further information: Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killing: [www.tcask.org](http://www.tcask.org), 615-463-0070

## Moderates

Continued from Page 7

science compromise next time.

Fortunately, dissatisfaction with the war – and with the state of the country in general – has risen to such an extent that there are now signs that a sizable number of progressives are disavowing the false virtue of moderation that has come to characterize the center-left portion of the Democratic Party.

Jack Murtha, the Pennsylvania Congressman who recently introduced a resolution calling for a speedy withdrawal from Iraq, has struck a chord with the public. Right-wing attempts to defame Murtha, a former Marine, have mostly fallen flat. It is hard to imagine that his remarks on Iraq would have received much attention a year ago, and introducing a resolution calling for troop withdrawal would have been nearly unthinkable politically. Now, 53 percent of Americans believe that Bush misled the country into war, according to a recent poll, and 58 percent favor setting a timetable for bringing the troops home.

Meanwhile, Lieberman faces challenges in his home state. He still boasts a 63 percent approval rating in Connecticut, making him one of the twenty most popular senators. But his seat, which is up for contest in November, is less secure than his approval rating indicates. One reason is that he enjoys significantly higher ratings among Republicans (68-20) than Democrats (55-29). Moreover, rumors that Bush would nominate Lieberman to succeed Donald Rumsfeld as Defense Secretary agitated many Democrats.

If Lieberman cannot hold onto his Democratic base, he could face a serious primary challenge. His numbers are still strong, with 52 percent of Democrats saying they believe he should be the party's nominee this year, but Sen. Arlen Specter enjoyed similar numbers before his primary scare from a staunch conservative in 2004.

A well-targeted primary campaign by Lieberman's potential anti-war challenger, Connecticut businessman Ned Lamont, could give the incumbent a run for his money. MoveOn.org has already threatened to mobilize activists to support a primary campaign against Lieberman, and an organized group of people motivated to vote against Lieberman could have a significant effect on the outcome of the Democratic primary, where voter turnouts are historically low.

To optimists, the discomfiture in Connecticut is a sign that progressives may now be able to push more forcefully and effectively for a stronger voice in Congress. If the battle has truly begun and a progressive resurgence is forthcoming, then being moderate is no longer acceptable. In this epic struggle of good versus bad, those elected officials who refuse to take a side in the conflict will in the end be relegated to the first circle of political hell, rejected by Democrats and Republicans alike. Although with a progressive government in power, the healthcare plan will be better than it was in Dante's hell.

# excursions in Sri Lanka

by Shaiya Baer  
GUEST WRITER

*Shaiya Baer, Program Coordinator at OACS, recently returned from Sri Lanka where he spent seven days organizing Vanderbilt's four-week service program (May 17 through June 18). The following article is adapted from his travelogue.*

The Sri Lankan Airlines Airbus made a slow descent over the Indian Ocean minutes prior to my first sighting of the legendary island of Sri Lanka, also known in history as Ceylon and Serendib, the origin of the word serendipity. I arrived in Sri Lanka dazed and groggy after approximately 27 hours spent on an assortment of passenger jets and in airports and a twelve-hour time difference. My host, Anil Fernando, an alumnus of the Moratu Maha Vidyalaya school in Moratuwa, met me in the Colombo airport. The journey to Anil's house in Moratuwa was nothing short of chaotic, if not fascinating. A topsy-turvy world unfolded before me as we sped out of the airport, driving on the opposite side of the road. The hybrid Afro-Portuguese sounds of Lankan music played on the radio. Outside, buses and cars wildly crisscrossed the lanes in seemingly total abandon. Swarms of small colorful three-wheel vehicles imported from India attempted to compete with their larger cousins. Pedestrians, dogs and the occasional cow precariously straddled the edge of the road. The environment was replete with willowy coconut palms, banana

plants, storefronts, glass-encased Buddhas and billboards printed in the curvaceous Sinhala alphabet. Anil attempted to hold a conversation with me as I wavered between apprehension at the traffic pattern and my semi-somnambulist state. Anil pointed out an assortment of historical sites, including the stately Presidential Residence, as we headed south on Galle Road, the western coastal artery on the island. After about one hour, we pulled into Anil's driveway. The house was a pleasant two-story stucco villa. Anil informed me that his place would be one of the residences for some of the Vanderbilt students in mid-May. I was shown the way to my sleeping quarters which contained a large bed with mosquito netting and a private bath.

Once I had organized my belongings, Anil and I departed for the Moratu Maha Vidyalaya school, which was a little over five minutes away by car. The venerable 70-year-old school was located on a sizeable campus in the city center. Many of the more than 400 students who attended the school came from lower income families. Principal De Silva informed me it was the goal of the school to teach

English in a minimum of four subjects: Sri Lankan history, geography math and science. The principal said the Vanderbilt students will assist teachers in each of the four subjects and will have the opportunity to hold creative English sessions using drama, discussion, video and other media. After I met with the principal, I toured the campus. I noticed that some of the male students were engaged in a rigorous game of cricket. I then visited the campus Buddhist shrine. I respectfully removed my shoes and entered the sacred space. The Buddha was a large white statue set beneath a massive bodhi tree whose ancient origins are found in India. According to Buddhist tradition, approximately 2,500 years ago, Buddha, himself, attained enlightenment shaded by a bodhi tree. Here in Moratuwa, a woman sat deep in meditation near the Buddha accompanied by a sleeping stray dog.

Anil and I returned to his house, where I finally met his genial wife Vindya and three delightful young daughters, Athrima, Malithya and Pavithma. Soon I was feted with a delectable meal, featuring the local cuisine.

After some conversation with



Photo courtesy of Shaiya Baer

**Human and animal alike find peace at this Buddhist shrine in Sri Lanka, the site of a four-week Vanderbilt summer volunteer trip.**

Anil and his family, I retired to my room. I reviewed some of the additional contacts I would make in Sri Lanka over the next six days in preparation for the summer program. The top end of the list included meetings with the controversial peace activist Jehan Perera of The National Peace Council. Champika Liyanaarachchi, Sri Lankan representative for Reporters without Borders and the noted historian and director of the International Centre for Ethnic

Studies, Professor Kingsley M de Silva. I suddenly felt myself overcome with exhaustion. Jetlag. As the words in my journal started to blur, I returned in my mind's eye to the Buddhist shrine where both a woman and wandering canine could find a moment's sanctuary far removed from the hustle of the Sri Lankan road.

Applications for the 2006 Summer Program in Sri Lanka are available online: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/srilanka\\_application.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/srilanka_application.pdf)

## Amnesty to hold forum on Guantánamo torture

By Robin Arnett  
DISTRIBUTION DIRECTOR

On February 15 from 5-7 p.m., Amnesty International will hold in Buttrick 101 a forum on torture. The purpose of the forum is education and discussion about the situation in Guantánamo Bay, where the United States is responsible for force-feeding prisoners and keeping human beings in tiny cages. The prisoners, who have not been charged with any specific crimes, are subject to severe psychological distress, leading to numerous

suicide attempts. Amnesty International advocates that Guantánamo detainees be charged with recognizable criminal offenses and tried within a reasonable time or released, but not returned to any country where they would be at risk of torture, execution or other serious human rights abuses.

The panel includes two Vanderbilt scholars and Jen Cartwright from Nashville Peace and Justice Coalition. Participating scholars are Dr. Robert Barsky, the director of graduate studies in French and Italian as well as a professor of English and French, and Fabrice Picon, a Ph.D. candidate in the depart-

ment of French and Italian. Picon and Barsky are both working on a project for the Center for the Americas focusing on issues concerning intercultural relations among inmates held for immigration concerns. The panelists will be asked questions about their opinions on the philosophical, political and constitutional issues of United States participation in torture. Question and answer time will be an important aspect of the forum, as well as debate, should it happen to arise.

Anyone with interest in these issues or a desire to support Amnesty International is strongly encouraged to attend.

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# Does the Vanderbilt community benefit from Title IX?

## *Our community improves when Title IX creates opportunities*

By Haley Swenson  
ISSUES EDITOR

Amid the anger and sadness expressed by the Vanderbilt community in response to the administration's sudden decision to discontinue the men's varsity soccer team, rumblings from the student body and explanations from administrators continue to place at least partial blame for the decision on the Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act.

Passed in 1972, Title IX forbids that any person be "excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," on the basis of sex.

Nationally, the benefits of Title IX have been astonishing. Beyond creating new and vast opportunities for women to pursue higher education, through equity in admissions, financial aid, and scholarships, Title IX has given young women across the country access to the athletic experience that had been denied them for years prior. Before 1972, women accounted for merely 15 percent of intercollegiate athletes. By 2001, that number had risen to almost 42 percent.

When Chancellor Gee eliminated the athletics department, he felt compelled to point out the "first principles of why we started playing games at universities in the first place -- for a confluence of mind and body and spirit." And Title IX shares much of the glory for making the benefits of this "confluence" available to both men and women here at Vandy. In 1999, Title IX worked to keep Vanderbilt administrators honest when the women's track team filed a lawsuit against Vanderbilt for neglecting the team financially and refusing to provide adequate facilities.

Despite the amazing strides Title IX has brought forth for potential female athletes and scholars across the country, hostility has always surrounded the implications the amendment has on athletic programs, and has kept Title IX in the headlines, as it has here at Vandy, when it was used as an excuse to eliminate the men's soccer program.

The common habit of equating Title IX with the institutionalized favoring of women's teams over men's is misleading. Title IX works to broaden opportunities in education for all Americans. Undoubtedly, that the writers of Title IX felt it necessary to eliminate discrimination from determining who gets to participate in all educational activities illustrates just how valuable they felt the benefits of being student athletes are to young men and women alike.

The administration's decision to end the men's soccer program has hurt the Vanderbilt community in several ways, including the abandonment of the dedicated members of the team, who were let down with little compassion or justification. And their decision to restrict access to athletics rather than expand it abandons the priorities of athletics that were set forth by Chancellor Gee himself. Therefore, Title IX has not hurt our community. For years it has improved it. The administration's decision to eliminate the soccer program was in fact a betrayal of the very values promoted by Title IX. Instead of giving greater access to the many benefits of "the confluence of body and mind and spirit," the administration chose to continue limiting that access to as few students as possible. As a student body, rather than questioning the efficacy of Title IX, we ought to be questioning our own administration's dedication to athletics as a fundamental supplement to our university experience.

## *Title IX's implementation hurts the Vandy community*

By Kelson Bohnet  
STAFF WRITER

As Vanderbilt's campus began to simmer in anger over the dissolution of the men's soccer team, it was inevitable that the focus of the controversy would settle on Title IX, the government statute that mandates gender equality in student athletics.

Allow me first to confidently say that the ideals Title IX was born from constitute the epitome of progressive thought and societal equality. Title IX represents a noble effort to correct abuses and stem the tide of prejudice that has so often swept away the opportunities of an entire gender. The athletic world, viewed by many as patently male in nature, is an area where equity of opportunity is of the utmost importance. Athletics represent not only simple games and mere physical exertion, but also an embodiment of the human competitive spirit. Title IX is an attempt to give both men and women an equal chance at pursuing something that is so quintessentially human.

One would think that with such progressive ideals and noble aims being brought to campus, the statute would assuredly be of great benefit to our university. Yet closer examination reveals that Title IX's praiseworthy goals are ultimately betrayed by the backwards way in which it is often implemented.

Title IX mandates that universities must provide equal opportunities in athletic participation for each gender. Thus, the number of varsity teams for each gender must reflect that gender's representation in the overall student body. In effect, the gender ratio of student-athletes must closely mirror that of university as a whole. This numerical equity itself can be debated, but the true debate should take place in regards to how this numerical balance is achieved.

To comply with Title IX's regulations, schools often have to cut a varsity sport for one gender and add a sport for the other. Cutting sports and dissolving teams, ultimately denying them the opportunity to participate, obviously hurts Vanderbilt students.

Indeed, it is almost an Orwellian principle to presume we are extending opportunity to some while at the same time restricting it for others. If the essence of Title IX rests in the idea of opening things like athletics for all, then should not our approach to the matter be one that keeps opening doors rather than opening and shutting simultaneously?

There are at least a few alternatives to the current methods of complying with Title IX. Can more sports not be created rather than eliminated? Is there any way to increase the size of some of the existing teams? I realize there are costs and complicated logistics associated with all of these ideas, but the basic idea would be to avoid having programs cut.

If Vanderbilt persists in adhering to Title IX through restrictive measures, the university community will be deeply and perhaps irreparably hurt. Let's keep Title IX but enforce it in a way that truly represents what the statute was originally designed to do.



Art by Kyla Achard/Orbis

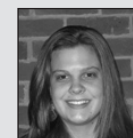
## Orbis Asks

*Does the Vanderbilt community benefit from Title IX?*



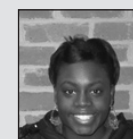
**Aaron Crist**  
*Junior*

"No. Its intentions are good, but it needs to be retooled in order to keep it from needlessly shutting down sports programs."



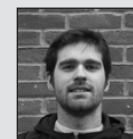
**Jenna Rogers**  
*Sophomore*

"Yes. I believe we benefit from Title IX, but not in the way that it is being handled by the university. There is a negative attitude being brought to Title IX as important and well-respected men's sports are being replaced. Title IX can benefit Vanderbilt by giving women more opportunities, but not if the student body isn't supporting it."



**Kortne Edogun**  
*Junior*

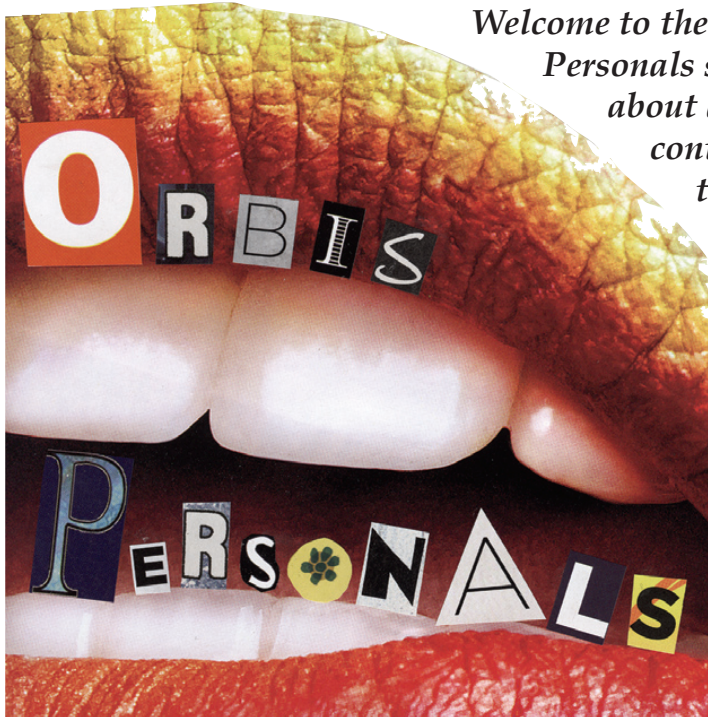
"Not really. The administration is favoring new sports over successful, growing, thriving sports that were already here. It's unfair to the students who are here, depending on scholarships, to replace them with students who don't even go here yet."



**Robert Proudfoot**  
*Senior*

"Yes. It's essential to have equal opportunities for men and women at universities. It's more than just about sports, it's about equal opportunity for everyone. However, we shouldn't have to penalize men's sports for women to be treated fairly."

— Compiled by Haley Swenson



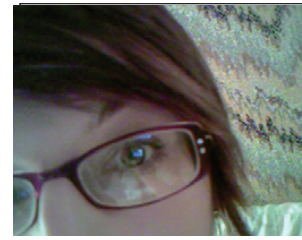
Welcome to the very first Orbis Personals section! To inquire about an ad, please send your contact information and the number of the ad that interests you to [orbispersonals@gmail.com](mailto:orbispersonals@gmail.com). Your information will then be sent to the individual who placed the ad.

Send your own ads to [orbispersonals@gmail.com](mailto:orbispersonals@gmail.com) by February 14th. Please keep them under 30 words.

- 1 Bowie-loving girl seeks bookish liberal boy for whiskey drinking and Pulp Fiction dancing. Eyeliner-wearers preferred.
- 2 Almost twenty, very 4.20 friendly female seeks anyone interested in talking about 9-11 inconsistencies, a plan of action for when the Constitution is outlawed, etc.
- 3 Romantic 19 / 5' 8" / Slim / Straight / Freshman / Virgo  
Looking for outgoing, attractive, American, non-Republican that loves live music. Must be able to party and also chill and watch movies.
- 4 Don't have SUV, likes cooking n advertising, speaks French, likes soccer n salsa, wishes to drive BMW, loves classical music n humor n yeah, is single straight liberal male.
- 5 Adorable music snob with cute new haircut and avant-garde fashion sense seeks tall tight-jean-wearing lankster (lanky-hipster) for mix tape making, sushi eating, and affectionate canoodling. Vegetarians are a bonus.
- 6 18-year-old male metalhead looking for a special lady to watch Harvey Birdman episodes (and do other romantic stuff) with.  
Radical anthropologist seeks adventurous and financially plenteous companion for accompaniment on various tricontinental expeditions, including trips to India, Sri Lanka, West Africa and throughout Latin America. Hindi speakers and Marxists preferred; piloting skills highly preferred.
- 7 19-year-old male Democrat seeks progressive female to watch silly movies and play racquetball. Strong passion for sports is a plus.
- 8 Angry young man seeks fellow revolutionaries for pen pals while studying abroad in Germany. Appreciators of non sequiturs desired.
- 9 Progressive male seeks left-leaning female. Must be a fan of News Briefs, Eye on Obama, and Mike Maio's columns. Send resume and cover letter.
- 10 Liberal girl seeks free-thinking Vanderbilt male who enjoys international cuisine, hiking, Broadway shows, kissing, and old rock and roll. (Not necessarily in that order.) An interest in archaeology and an appreciation for quality bourbon both pluses.
- 11 Nashville's most awesome radio station ever seeks fun-loving, booty-shaking music lovers to fill DJ slots. No experience necessary. Come prepared to rock your socks off! To begin training contact [wrvutd@gmail.com](mailto:wrvutd@gmail.com).

## Screw Love Makin'!

*fight back Valentine's blues with unabashed Booty Shakin'*



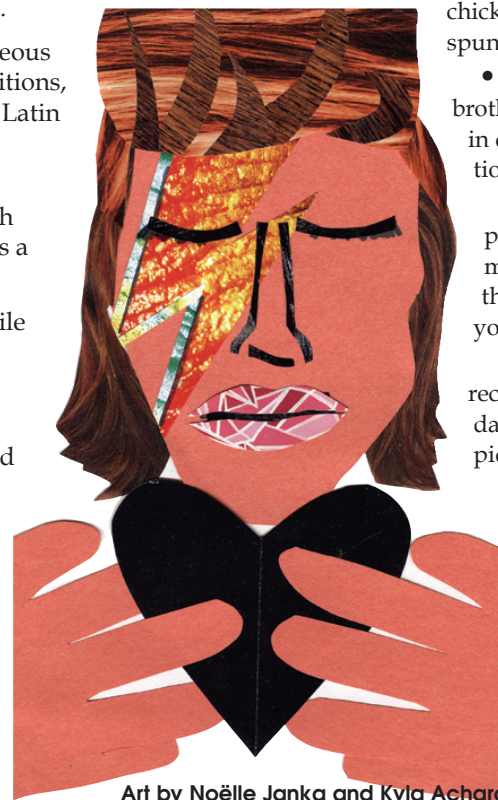
Melanie Kowalski  
STAFF WRITER

Valentine's Day. . . ugh. . . no one likes this holiday. Those that say they do are either lying to themselves or on lithium. Single people feel lonely, couples feel pressured, and ranting liberals feel bitter for being subjected to yet another corporate-based holiday that promotes unnecessary consumerism. For something meant to bring out "love" and compassion in an otherwise cynical society, Valentine's Day seems to be sucking it up big time in the success department. The one thing more irritating than any other is the onslaught

of cheesy love songs that somehow seep into your subconscious and attack you. I say fuck that. Let's fight back! My weapon of choice: guerilla dance parties. You can make a dance mix, take your boombox down to the local CVS, start a kick ass guerilla dance party in that sea of pink and red crap, and remember that there's no experience more joyful than a pure unadulterated good ole fashioned booty shakin'. Bring Your Own Strobe Light of course. So here's a few choice dance tracks for all you embittered Saint Valentine loathers out there that you may wish to include in your guerilla dance party!

### Dance Tune-age Suggestions:

- The Faint, "Worked Up So Sexual": Dark, perverse, and wonderfully catchy, it's hard not to rock out to this electro-clash classic. But I suggest you put on tight jeans and eyeliner to make yourself appear super hipster beforehand because this song means business.
- Le Tigre, "Deceptacon": Feeling like you need a little post-punkish chick dance pop in your life? Well, this pretty much delivers that with a spunky gusto and some "bomp from the bompalompalomp."
- The Go! Team, "The Power is On": In the words of my older brother, "This band is motivational". So if you want to defeat Godzilla in dance-off in Japan in order to save the world from nuclear destruction, I suggested you opt for this jam.
- The Murder City Devils, "Rum to Whiskey": If your MySpace preferences include tattoos, whiskey, red, black, piercings, overt masculine aggression or heavy heavy drug usage, then you need this song in your life. It'll help you pace out your mosh moves so you don't crash half-way and get trampled.
- The Dismemberment Plan, "A Life of Possibilities": I really only recommend this song for those with highly advanced spastic twitchy dance skills; dancing to math rock in public *will* make you look stupid if you lack the proper training.
- The Sounds, "Hit Me!": This one's for the kids that love Blondie but think she didn't age well. It's got a great little snared up backbeat and some saxophonage; you just can't resist the urge to throw your arms in the air and shake your hips side to side.
- Queen, "Fat Bottom Girls": For those of you who prefer the oldies to contemporary dance tunes, this one is an oldie but not a dud. Queen manages to take Americana truck stop music and fuse it with glam rock to give you a song that makes you wanna head bang and grind at the same time. Talk about ambivalence.



Art by Noëlle Janka and Kyla Achard