

THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

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THE BEST OF 2014-2015



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS OF THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

In the Progressive's first issue of the year, we condemned what we saw as the dominant campus culture, claiming that "the prevailing perception that our campus is apathetic or conservative still exists." At the time, that sentiment was widespread. The prospect of anything happening to change it seemed unlikely. Seven months later, after the People's Climate March and #blacklivesmatter march, after the die-in and divestment, we can begin to speak about a campus where apathy is giving way to awareness. Awareness is not yet action, but it is a start. The gravest mistake that we could make now would be to content ourselves with the progress that has been made—to pat each other on the back and walk off the field.

It is a sign of genuine progress that there are now several movements that aim to awaken intersectional consciousness and seek to understand and oppose the oppression of others. But as Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us, "love without power is sentimental and anemic." None of these movements have power yet; we must not let them lapse into sentimentality. If we want the current moment to become a pivot instead of an anomaly, these movements need to establish roots that will outlast the waning of outrage or the graduation of individual members. The supporters of the status quo

have an institutional structure and flow of monetary support that student groups will never match. Nevertheless, these groups have an ability to leverage the passions of the moment into solidarity capable of achieving real change.

In this issue, we highlight both theoretical and practical ways of engaging with power. Members of student activist groups—some that formed this year, others that existed for years before—describe the ways in which they have challenged existing discourses and policies this year. Their methods are as disparate as their concerns, but taken together they represent a rediscovered conception of how to be a socially conscious and politically active Princetonian. These groups increasingly influence the school's public sphere. In doing so, they offer opportunities for collective engagement with serious issues.

It is important to note that not one of the movements that seek to change university policy has succeeded yet. But these movements have succeeded identifying oppression and its sources, especially when those sources exist on campus. Now is the time to move from asking "what is power and how is it abused" to asking "how do we build power, how do we take power, and how do we use our power to fight injustice."

Activism and Form

By JOEL SIMWINGA '15

1

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

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

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

Most people who are close to the issue of institutional violence against black Americans understand that the deaths of Martin, Brown and Garner

are merely some of the most visible symptoms of a racial prejudice that runs far deeper than what most left-leaning individuals—let alone powerful Democrats—are generally willing to admit. Perhaps the primary reason for what I view as our rather shallow understanding of oppression is that we have spent so long fighting shallow battles. We have groveled for low-hanging fruit while the conservative establishment simultaneously discredits us as extremists and vilifies us as domineering snobs. The left has been intensely reactive since the Reagan administration, and as a result, our identity and the values for which we fight have been framed to the American public not positively, but in contradistinction to ultraconservatism. (The terms ‘equality’, ‘justice’, and ‘freedom’, for instance, have been seriously abused by the Democratic Party.) Fighting shallow, uphill battles, has conditioned us both to be shallow and to fight uphill.

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

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



just ourselves. I say let’s cultivate that which makes us strong, that which is attractive, that which makes us good allies in daily life.

Form: the way that our desires connect to our actions

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

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

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

In addition to—and perhaps even beyond—empathy, a good ally must ground her activism in self-interest. A good ally ought to understand her stake in an issue, and limit her involvement in that issue accordingly. To abstract one’s empathy and stretch it beyond what one can feel is a dangerous thing. To stand beside an individual who stands up for herself is potentially helpful in some immediate sense, but also oppressive and degrading when one has no emotional stake in helping. To engage in political activities towards which one

does not feel compelled is to assert one’s intellectual or moral superiority (at the very least, the superiority of one’s reasons for becoming involved). When one supports another’s ‘selfish’ activity with their own ‘selfless’ actions for the sake of being selfless...what does that say about how one views the moral status of those who one seeks to support—to say nothing of their competency?

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

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framework of ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’; if we are unwilling to recognize the moral significance of words like justice, honor, shame, valor and loyalty—perhaps we should at least try to do a better job of understanding what these words might mean to those who lack status and privilege. At this point, I would like to share from my own experience with racial oppression, and to express how I feel that it has been severely misunderstood.

2

‘Racism’ is intensely unpopular. Owing to this unpopularity, the word “racist” has been all but reduced to an empty vehicle for ad hominem attacks in the public sphere. “Racism” is so abused and confused that most of the arguments in which it is deployed would gain clarity if every utterance of “racist” were replaced by an utterance of “bad”. In the painful and embarrassing public discourse on race in America, with Republicans, Democrats, and sociologists all speaking mangled gobbledegook over one another, there is at least one thing that seems to be common: Americans of all sorts talk about racism as if it is the type of thing that obtains primarily in acts (e.g. slurs, profiling, violence,

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Dispatch from Tehran

By SARAH SAKHA '18

"I'M A GIRL. BUT I DECIDED IT WAS EASIER to be a guy."

I met her at a hair salon in Tehran, one summer when I was visiting family in Iran. She was a client of our family friend. But peculiarly enough, she walked in without a hijab.

But then again, ostensibly she didn't even need one. Rather, he didn't need one – with short, closely trimmed hair, a cap, a military-green jacket, jeans, and sneakers, she passed for a he. In fact, she had been passing for a he out of her own volition for the past couple of months. It was only a façade, but it was nonetheless tenable.

It wasn't the fact that she chose this pretense that appalled me – although former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad may assert that the only kind of sexuality to exist in Iran is heterosexuality, I do not

agree. Rather, it was the reason behind her volition that appalled me. Twice before, she'd been caught and detained by Iran's basij, or the infamous "morality police" – the omnipresent force in charge of enforcing Islamic dress code among women. Having not provided many details beyond that about her run-ins with the morality police, much was left to conjecture.

But one can only imagine the worst, considering those two incidents compelled her to superficially switch genders and forego her identity—all so that she could avoid conformity to an austere dress code, and evade more encounters with the police. Ultimately, she left the oppressive environment of Tehran and moved to Armenia.

This isn't a singular example of the still-deplorable conditions for women in Iran today, despite

President Hassan Rouhani's myriad promises, reformist ideology, and pressing desire to reform. He audaciously opposed gender segregation and promised mitigation of the morality police's authority.

But that has remained a utopian misconception. Over the past year, conditions for women have worsened in terms of higher education and employment. Furthermore, the application of the law continues to be unjust in the arenas of self defense, rape, marriage, and domestic violence.

U.N. investigator Ahmed Shaheed has turned in seven reports to the United Nations General Assembly underscoring the repression and unjust treatment of women in Iran. According to the New York Times, "girls as young as 9 can be married, so long as a court gives its blessings," "nonconsensual sexual

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relations" in a marriage are permissible, and a woman trying to divorce her husband on the grounds of domestic abuse must prove the treatment to be "intolerable." He points to brand-new quotas that reduce opportunities in higher education for women and to new laws that impose employment restrictions on single unmarried women.

Such criticisms of deteriorating women's rights in Iran were prompted by the recent execution of Reyhaneh Jabbari. The 26-year old was given the death penalty for killing a man she accused of raping her. In reality, she did not even commit the crime, and instead, another another member of the Iranian intelligence was responsible. Indubitably, in an effort to not tarnish the repute of the Iranian regime, Jabbari was tortured and coerced into confession.

This execution engendered vehement international opposition. According to the Daily Beast, "Jabbari's execution Saturday was widely condemned by human-rights groups on the grounds that it illustrates how Iran's own legal system is prejudiced against women." And while Rouhani did try to rescind the decision, he lacks jurisdiction over the judiciary, ultimately rendering his efforts futile.

However, this is a matter greater than women's rights – it concerns basic human rights, or rather, the lack thereof. In the past year, the number of executions in Iran has increased drastically, according to Amnesty International. According to the Economist, Iran stages more

executions than any other country, except for China. 852 executions have taken place, even more concerning is that no universal standards exist concerning humane methods of and justifiable warrants for capital punishment. Iran continues to practice virtual "killing sprees" and public executions – not to mention throwing guilty people off cliffs. Also, most of the executions carried out by Iran are for anti-state and/or political offenses – petty in comparison to rape or murder.

These egregious violations of human rights – state-sponsored killings – need to be actively censured beyond written documentation from the UN, both in the international community and within Iran. And everyone, regardless of sex, status, or rank, needs to be held accountable. Members of Iran's intelligence and security are ostensibly above the law, employing a perverted interpretation of Jean Bodin's theory of absolute sovereigns being above the law. The Constitution may be too rigid for change, but why can't we even incriminate the right people – those who are truly guilty?

Perhaps it's attributable to the fact that all countries' eyes remain irrevocably fixated upon the U.S. and Iran reaching a nuclear deal. According to Al Jazeera, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iran Foreign Minister Mohammed Zarif have met in private talks, but even so, an agreement may not be imminent. "At issue is the number of uranium-enriching centrifuges Iran should be allowed to keep spinning in exchange for sanctions relief and rigorous inspections at its nuclear sites...The West is unconvinced by Tehran's denials that it has never sought a nuclear weapon and wants curbs that would put an atomic bomb forever beyond reach."

Western powers, particularly the P5+1 powers countries, seem to

champion human rights and publicly castigate those countries that infringe upon the most basic human rights, especially the right to life. But it seems that everyone conveniently turns a blind eye to the inconceivable wrongs occurring in Iran, preferring to futilely debate whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons for belligerent purposes, or whether Iran is going to blow us, or Israel, up. But with a substantially larger and more potent army in both Israel and the United States, ready to deter or combat a nuclear threat at any moment, the answer remains a glaring no. Iran simply does not possess this faculty.

It's time to impel Western powers to act, to address these human rights violations, to ameliorate the condition of women in Iran. Sure, local media is now covering cases in which the victims' families can pardon the suspects in the eleventh hour, and many believe the Iranian government is trying to get more people, including loyalists, to pardon transgressors. But the West must decry these glaring human rights abuses and exhort the United Nations to standardize the warrants and means for capital punishment, to limit its use, and to collect more comprehensive data to establish more humane methods. Ultimately, these efforts may result in abolition of the death penalty.

As a first-generation Iranian-American living in the United States, the atrocities occurring in Iran horrify me, particularly because of the president that put forth so many auspicious plans for the country. I remain dumbfounded by the West's inability to act, and by how ineffectual and inefficient international bodies, like the UN, have become. The United States, along with multitudes of other countries, is capable of encouraging change, and it must now step into that role. ■

The Constitution may be too rigid for change, but why can't we even incriminate the right people—those who are truly guilty?





A Return to the Local

By JOSHUA LEIFER '17

BEFORE IT BECAME AN OVERUSED BANALITY, “Act Locally, Think Globally” was radical statement of possibility and responsibility. It was an expression of the hope that fundamental, systemic political change could be enacted on an international level. And it was an acknowledgment of the West’s culpability for the violence, exploitation, and suffering of colonialism, capitalism, and environmental degradation. Though the phrase did not originate with the student protests of 1968, groups like the Situationists that were active during the uprising made it ubiquitous.

Cultural critic and historian Greil Marcus, in his book *Lipstick Traces*, wrote of Situationist Raoul Vaneigem and the changed meaning of the phrase:

“He was contriving a prophecy of May ’68, when so many of the lines in his book would be copied onto the walls of Paris, then across France, and then, as the years went on and the words floated free of their source, when the book had been lost in the vagaries of publishing and fashion, around the world. ‘ACT LOCALLY, THINK GLOBALLY,’ I can read today on a bumper sticker in my hometown; Vaneigem wrote the words, though the person will never know it.”

“Act locally, think globally” endured as an activist slogan for decades. The environmental movement embraced it, human rights groups embraced it, and anti-sweatshop groups embraced it.

Then, as Marcus hints at, something changed. The phrase has become just another marketing strategy in the playbook of multinational corporations. From McDonalds to BP, companies with dubious environmental and workers’ rights records have adopted the phrase as a means of making consumers feel good about their consumption. The practice of flattering consumers’ sense of virtue is fully part of today’s economic climate, where “local” foods and “global responsibility” are ideas promoted by companies that show little regard for them in practice.

The idea that was once behind the phrase “Act Locally, Think Globally” has disappeared. It has been replaced with the market-oriented idea that changes in individual consumption habits can result in systemic changes. Theories of change that use the logic of the system they intend to alter are rarely

Climate change, income inequality, and institutional racism cannot be fought in the realm of personal consumption. Only collective action—politics—can address these crucial issues of justice.

successful. For all their popularity, movements like those for locally sourced food and socially responsible investing cannot bring down the vast economic apparatus that creates the problems they try to address. Eating tomatoes grown within 100 miles of one’s home and divesting from weapons manufacturing companies can only do so much.

The greatest political challenges of our time require political solutions. Climate change, income inequality, and institutional racism cannot be fought in the realm of personal consumption. Only collective action—politics—can address these crucial issues of justice.

And yet, left-wing activists, for the most part, have not found an idea to replace the one that corporate advertisers so skillfully co-opted. In many instances, when it comes to issues of climate, economic, and racial justice, we remain focused on the global when both our actions and our thoughts should aim at the local.

If there is any enduring lesson to learn from the disastrous 2014 mid-term elections, it is that what happens on the local level matters more than we think. The Republicans kept control of the House of Representatives and took control of the Senate, not because the United States is an overwhelmingly conservative country where the majority agrees with the Republicans’ moral and ethical positions, but because the Republicans were better organized, better funded, and more effective in state and local elections that, at face value, seemed to matter very little. It is hard to care about a boring congressional race in a district where both Republican and Democratic candidates’ ideologies appear nearly indistinguishable. But whether we like it or not, those kinds of races are where import-

ant political decisions are made.

The elections for city council, county sheriff, or local school board, might seem inconsequential. But there are countless examples where those elections’ ramifications become matters of life and death—literally. In Ferguson, Missouri, where the white police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, the mayor, police chief, and five of the six council members are white. Around 70 percent of the city’s population is black. The political inequities that turned Ferguson into the ground zero of America’s race-relations crisis could have been lessened if the city had represented its residents better.

To be sure, a return to local politics will not be easy. The left’s power is dwarfed by the incredible sums of money that right wing groups can muster up. And many municipalities, like Ferguson, are plagued by such severe structural inequalities that it would take more than a “get-out-the-vote campaign” to change the political landscape. The American political system is rigged—this is not something new. Wealthy individuals and corporations almost always get their way. And tangled up with this system that perpetuates income inequality are the continued, systematic oppression that people of color face. But this does not mean that we can abandon the local political battles that are so important in shaping citizens’ every day lives. To the contrary, for the left that so often appeals to “the politics of the impossible” and insists on fighting injustice even if victory seems distant if not unforeseeable, the struggles that people face in places like Ferguson, Oakland, and the Bronx should be more than enough to light the flames of the righteous indignation that can lead to broader political action.

This does not mean ignoring the more distant struggles in places like Palestine; it means focusing on the local political processes as the roots of global injustice—what “Act locally, think globally” really used to mean. It means working

to remove from power the local politicians who provide economic support for human rights abuses or environmental destruction.

Social media, technology, and globalized communication have made it easy to forget the inequities that occur close to home; we are incessantly inundated with images of violence and oppression from around the world. But the injustices we see are no more important than the ones we do not see. It is one of the perversities of contemporary society that it is far easier to get a sense of what is happening halfway across the world than it is to get a sense of what is happening twenty miles away. I have no doubt that a Princeton student could say far more about the civil war in Syria than he or she could about the food crisis in Trenton.

On the left, there is a kind of suspicion of the possibilities of electoral politics. And given the current moment, there is no shortage of reasons to be skeptical about the possibility of any kind of emancipatory political change, in the U.S. or abroad. But the alternatives, from prefigurative politics to “changing the discourse,”

“Thinking local” means being willing to put our bodies on the line to fight not only against injustices that take place overseas, but also against injustices that take place in our own backyards.

have not yielded the desired results. The Occupy movement managed to create an egalitarian encampment in the middle of the capital of global capitalism, and while it changed the way Americans speak about income inequality, it did not result in any systemic political change. The left needs something more.

For many, a focus on the local seems reactionary, or perhaps provincial—that it is too particularistic of an idea for those who are universally inclined to get behind. And it is true that from the early days of the republic, white supremacy and economic domination have been couched in the lan-

**THE
CONSERVATIVES
HAVE
SUPER PACS
BUT WE HAVE
YOU!**

**DONATE
TO THE
PROGRESSIVE
AND HELP US
KEEP FIGHTING
THE GOOD FIGHT.**

guage of states’ rights and decentralization that “local” often seems to recall. But there does not have to be anything inherently reactionary about a return to local politics.

“Thinking local” means being willing to put our bodies on the line to

fight, not only against injustices that take place overseas, but also against injustices that take place in our own backyards. It means demanding representation not only the macro-political level, but also on the most basic, municipal level. It means remembering the decision-making processes that effect our everyday lives should not be out of reach.

On the left, the overwhelming feeling is one of despair. Perhaps, by returning to local struggles, even the most depressing ones, we might find a few reasons for hope. ■



YANIS THE MAN-IS

By ARARAT GOCMEN '17

FOR MOST OF HIS ADULT LIFE, YANIS Varoufakis was merely a disgruntled academic: a mathematically trained economist with an expertise in game theory, but also an intellectual disdain for traditional economics. After the global economic meltdown in 2008, he emerged as a second-tier public intellectual, actively participating in the debate regarding the European financial crisis via his online blog, Twitter, and published works.

Then, just a few months ago, Yanis added politician to his list of assumed careers, running as a parliamentary candidate in Athens as a member of Syriza, a left-wing Greek political party. Finally, with Syriza's victory in the Greek general elections this January, he put on his policymaker's hat, as Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras officially appointed him Greece's new Finance Minister.

The elaborate arc that Yanis' career has followed is certainly a unique one, especially in that he declares himself an "unapologetic Marxist." Radical academics rarely double as parliamentarians or technocratic

policymakers (not to mention as apparent fashion icons). Compared to some of the politically impotent ivory-tower intellectuals who represent the most prominent voices of the modern left, Yanis makes you wonder why those of today's students with radical sympathies tend to take that radicalism to the academy instead of to public policy circles.

Indeed, in its embodiment of the experience of the radicalized academic-turned-policymaker, Yanis's career exemplifies the ideal path through which young, aspiring American and European intellectuals of the left can gain real political authority: by leveraging scholarly success in some policy-relevant field to ascend to positions of direct political power. If you're a college student with radical sympathies trying to figure out which path in life will help you effect the most substantive change in the world, Yanis' story has some lessons to offer you.

Varoufakyou, Eurogroup

The inner circles of the European

policymaking community aren't where you would normally expect to find someone who lists Marx as one of his foremost inspirations, despite what the nominally Socialist parties that represent the European center-left want you to think. Even when parties of the "far-left" are in power, as the Western media has largely portrayed Syriza since its parliamentary victory in January, Marx-inspired academics are scarce at all levels of European and American government. What differentiates Yanis in this respect is the particular field in which he pursued his academic career: not philosophy or literary criticism, nor any kind of [insert name of historically marginalized group here] studies. Instead, Yanis is an economist, making him the rare kind of modern leftist that pursues an academic career in a discipline with direct implications for public policy.

Yanis entered economic academia in the 1980s, choosing to specialize in the highly mathematical and tremendously technical subject of game theory. In doing this, he entered a field in which no kind of radical

political sympathies have any direct relevance. This lack of emphasis on his own ideological views seems to be a general theme in Yanis' professional narrative. He has also consistently abstained from making any references to his radicalism in his discussions of the European financial crisis since 2008. However, Yanis has clearly remained in touch with his Marxist roots throughout his professional career. From the title of his 1987 doctoral thesis in economics, "Optimization and Strikes," to his lecture at the 2013 Subversive Festival in Zagreb in which he detailed his lifelong intellectual development as a libertarian Marxist, Yanis has consistently made subtle hints to his leftist politics throughout his time as an academic and public intellectual.

Capitalizing on his legitimacy in the academy, Yanis got his first taste of the public policy world from 2004 to 2006 as an economic adviser to the Greek center-left politician George Papandreou, who headed the PASOK party. By the time Papandreou became the country's finance minister in 2009, when the Greek financial crisis was first starting to grow in severity, Yanis had turned against PASOK and emerged as one of its foremost critics. He took a strong public position against the neoliberal, austere policies of the Papandreou government and the center-right ones that followed it. He leveraged the credibility that his academic background had afforded him as an expert in all matters economic in order to censure multiple Greek governments' approach to resolving Greece's macroeconomic and financial malaise.

After getting more involved in Syriza and the Greek left more generally in recent years, Yanis is now both a prominent figure within the party and the new Greek Finance Minister. He has started letting his true radical colors show and has begun to assert himself against the Eurogroup, the joint meeting of Eurozone finance ministers that represents Greece's European creditors in the country's debt negotiations. Mind you, he has undoubtedly stayed within the bounds of what is considered

respectable technocratic deal-making: he promises that Syriza's Greece will "not ask [its] partners for a way out of repaying [its] debts, while assuring his critics that he "is [not] motivated by some radical-left agenda." Nevertheless, he has also gone on the record to say that he is "determined to clash with mighty vested interests in order to reboot Greece," and declared that he will not allow the country "to be treated as a debt colony."

Though his first achievement as a radical policymaker was a mixed success—securing a four-month extension on Greece's debt repayments, but without any longer-term concessions from the country's creditors—Yanis will likely serve as a menace to the Eurogroup throughout his time as the Greek Finance Minister. His legitimacy as an academic economist having got him into office in the first place, he can now assert himself in his newfound position of real political power. This is the role of the radical when conferred with true political authority, which is why Yanis' career represents the optimal path that any aspiring, young student of the left should follow if they crave the opportunity to make substantive change in the world. His experiences demonstrate the viability of the academy as a potential instrument of radicalism, particularly as a practical and otherwise unavailable means through which radicals could enter the realm of public policy.

Embrace Your Inner Yanis

Despite the current rarity of the radicalized academic-turned-policymaker, the revolving door-like phenomenon between academic and public policy circles is quite common. This is especially true in economics, as the institutional links between central banks, finance ministries, and economics departments in Europe and the United States are generally very strong. Yanis' emergence as a radical policymaker exemplifies this fact.

However, radical academic-turned-policymakers are low in numbers in most Western

governments. This absence of radicals in positions of political and technocratic authority is partially explained by the fact that most leftist university students are generally turned off by economics and other public policy-related fields. (Of course, neoliberal governments tend to avoid appointing radicals to public policy positions in the first place, but that's a separate issue.)

The problem is that the material studied in classes that have any relevance to public policy oftentimes lacks the necessary characteristics to attract students with a radical bent. Courses in economics and public policy, for example, suffer from an ignorance of the humanity of the human subjects they claim to study. They discuss issues like unemployment and healthcare, which are directly relevant to the lives of most people, in terms of efficiency and cost-benefit analysis rather than morality and justice. This undoubtedly frustrates those few politically radicalized students that take these courses. Moreover, the kinds of implications that are drawn in such policy-relevant fields are usually incongruent with the aims and aspirations of student radicals. For example, when Economics and Woodrow Wilson School professors ask their students how they would resolve this or that problem of public policy, they normally won't take "redistribution," let alone "revolution," as a viable answer.

Radicalized students with plans to enter academia must endure through these courses if they seek to make real, substantive change in the world. They must learn to temper their intellectual frustrations and be like Yanis, who, as an academic economist, stomachs 30 years of studying traditional economics and all its pro-market implications to one day have sufficient academic legitimacy to become a technocratic official. They must thoroughly reorient their scholarly priorities, moving away from fields, particularly cultural studies, that fail as pragmatic means of gaining political power and instead into economics,

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Students engage with President Eisgruber at the SPEAR Abolish the Box teach-in on May 7, 2015.



Pictures taken by students at the #BlackLivesMatter protest in December.



Yanis the Man-is

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game theory, and other disciplines related to public policy. They must then for years and years moderate and, if necessary, even suppress their radicalism within their own academic work. And they must do so until the point when they possess sufficient credibility as an expert in some policy-relevant field to have even the semblance of an opportunity to be offered a position of political power. And, once they eventually earn such real political authority, once Syriza or some other up-and-coming party of the uncompromising left appoints them as the Minister of Health, the Labor Secretary, or, maybe even like Yanis, the all-powerful Finance Minister, they can then finally unleash their inner radical and implement policies that will bring forth progressive reform, if not revolutionary change to society.

If this sounds like a fairytale situation that some naive, radical youth came up with in his free time, you're probably right. Nevertheless, even though it's highly improbable that this narrative—Yanis' narrative—ever plays out in full again, the potential societal benefits from it occurring just once are high enough to merit a call-to-arms for young, aspiring radicals to pursue academic careers in economics and other public-policy fields. Though the phenomenon of the radical economist-turned-policymaker is undoubtedly a rare one, Yanis' experience has shown that it is at least a possible one, whereas the ivory-tower philosopher or critical theorist's appointment to a position of real political power has proven impossible.

Yanis is currently the Greek Finance Minister, and, if Podemos continues its political rise in Spain, there may soon also be an incarnation of Varoufakis in Madrid. But there are no Zizeks in positions of political authority anywhere in the Western world, nor will there ever be. If you're a student with radical sympathies at some American or European university, take note of that.

■



Secular Stagnation and Inequality

By ASHESH RAMBACHAN

SHOCKED BY THE DEPTH AND duration of the economic hardship wrought by the Great Depression, economist Alvin Hansen, in his presidential address to the American Economic Association in 1938, grimly wondered whether the United States had entered a new economic era; one characterized by permanent depression and mass unemployment. He labeled this prediction “secular stagnation,” and with elegant rhetoric that academic economists rarely exhibit, he warned:

“This is the essence of secular stagnation—sick recoveries which die in their infancy and depressions which feed upon themselves and leave a hard and seemingly immovable core of unemployment.”

Specifically, Hansen worried that an aging population, a shortage of productive investment opportunities and a shortfall of demand would be the driving forces of future stagnation. Looking back now, Alvin Hansen may appear to be needlessly pessimistic. Mobilization for World War II, the largest federal spending program in U.S. economic history, led to massive investment in America's productive capacity. The subsequent Baby Boom stemmed fears about an aging population. Together, these two shocks laid

the foundation of the rapid growth in the 1950s and 1960s. There is no reason for Hansen to have predicted these two enormous, positive shocks to demand. More importantly, he deserves our praise for his willingness to direct his colleagues towards studying the causes of, and possible solutions to, prolonged depression and mass unemployment, which Hansen called the “most obstinate problems of our time.”

The Julis-Rabinowitz Center for Public Policy and Finance's (JRCPFF) Fourth Annual Conference, like Alvin Hansen, sought to highlight recent research and inspire future discussions on one of the most obstinate problems of our time: inequality and its diverse effects on the economy. Held on Princeton's campus in February, the conference focused on the topic of “Finance, Inequality and Long-Run Growth.” Presenters discussed the latest economic research on a variety of topics, ranging from the effects of globalization on employment and financial stability to mathematical models of financial bubbles. The discussions among academics, economists, and policymakers at the JRCPFF Fourth Annual Conference are just a small sample, but they demonstrate that, even though most economists were blindsided by the Great Recession and

many ignored the importance of rising inequality during the 2000s, the field is beginning to internalize the lessons of the last decade. In particular, the conference shows that economists have begun to seriously study the causes and consequences of inequality, an issue that is rightfully important to progressives on campus.

The conference began with presentations on the trend of inequality and its causes in the United States. Since the 1970s, income and wealth inequality have skyrocketed. Much of what we know about this startling phenomenon is due to the empirical work conducted by the conference's first presenter, Gabriel Zucman of the London School of Economics, and his colleagues, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez. Using extensive tax records, Zucman constructed a yearly snapshot of wealth inequality in the United States since 1913. He found that the share of wealth going to the top 0.1 percent was nearly 25 percent in 2012, its highest level since the eve of the Great Depression. The sharp increase in wealth inequality was driven in part by a rise in tax evasion on the part of the super-rich who utilized offshore tax havens. For

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Rethinking Power in the Face of Inequality

By GEORGE KUNKEL '17

A VERTICAL LINE VISUALLY separates two phrases: on one side, “the world as it is” and on the other, “the world as it should be.” The description of “the world as it is” details a world run by power. This view of the world sees bodies of self-interested individuals forming pluralities. On the other side is a world fueled by love. “The world as it should be” is filled with selfless individuals acting not for themselves but for others in society. This love is closer to a genuine form of altruism that takes the pluralities of “the world as it is”—aggregations of individual interest—and unifies them around the goal of pursuing the common good.

The two sides of this line, one embodying self-interest and the other selflessness, at first glance diametrically opposed to one another, make up a paradigm used by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). Although the two visions of the world described are abstractions, they offer a simple

way to see that, as we view them, power and love may be constantly in tension.

Created by Saul Alinsky in 1940, the IAF is a network of community organizations aimed at community organizing. Alinsky’s efforts began in Chicago, where he worked to bring together citizens on a local level around their common interests, and have now spread nationwide to over 65 cities. The network works with thousands of religious congregations and civic associations. IAF organizers work with the individuals in these already-existing institutions to push for substantive changes in community life: housing reform, better health-care, access to utilities, school standards—the list goes on.

This work, often with the disadvantaged sectors of society, is complicated by an America today where wealth inequality is on the rise. As the rich continue to grow richer, the average citizen is losing efficacy in the political environment. Princeton professor Martin Gilens and Northwestern

professor Benjamin Page note the implications of this trend in their 2014 study, *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizen*:

“Economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence.”

The broader import of such a finding resides in a cycle of consolidating control; those without political power grow apathetic in the face of a dominant elite, thereby allowing those same elites to exert more, unchecked influence. In this environment, the tangible changes that the IAF pursues are only part of its mission. Its member organizations represent the active, quantifiable piece of what is a broader goal: to rebuild the community on a local level, helping average citizens rediscover their own political and social agency.

One way in which the IAF and other

similar organizations begin to counteract the apathy-fueled narrative is by using the above paradigm to spark a discussion on expanding our view of power. We think about power as the capacity to have an effect on one’s environment. In today’s imbalanced political environment, similar to the abstract “world as it is,” many view power as unilateral.

This notion of power can be thought of as power over others in one’s environment. The economic elite of today’s society wield power due to their ability to monetarily influence policy and elections. Their interests are the controlling forces, while the interests of the average citizen, despite our nominally representative system, are subordinate. In his essay “Two Conceptions of Power,” professor and theologian Bernard Loomer explains how unilateral power works to use others as a means—as “a function of one’s own ends”—thereby separating the relationship between two or more parties into the actors and receivers. It does so by taking into account only the interests of the actor. Even if I act in what I think to be the interest of others, I am still acting unilaterally when I fail to take into account the actual interests of others.

Loomer sees this view of power as the traditional conception, pervading the consciousness of contemporary society. Because unilateral power prioritizes the interests of those in a position to exert their imbalanced influence, it works to “alienate the possessor of power” from his or her environment. In doing so, value is found in the ability to successfully accrue power on one’s own, whereas “dependency on others, as well as passivity, are symptoms of weakness or insufficiency.” If we view power as unilateral, allowing another person to act with us or do something for us, even if the effect is a positive one, means allowing one’s own interests to be subordinated. Allowing someone else to act on us, even help us, is a sign of weakness. Although Loomer does not directly draw the connection, it is easy to see how this view of power contributes to the classic

When citizens are inactive, there are few, if any checks on the powers that be and the few, the elites, the one percent can take even greater control. Democratic resignation is the foundation of oligarchy.

American myths of the “American Dream” and the “self-made man.” Independent success is valued, while cooperation takes a back seat. Welfare programs are shunned in favor of individual responsibility. Those who cannot achieve success on their own are powerless.

The IAF works mostly with the disadvantaged in society who face an uphill battle in the presence of institutionalized forms of unilateral power. When the citizen facing a slew of constraints—commitments, lack of money, recently passed voter ID laws, etc.—on his means to political participation sees the political capital wielded by corporations and the financial industry of today’s society, a feeling of ineffectuality or even helplessness can develop. It is no exaggeration that there is a strong sentiment today that “my individual vote doesn’t matter.” Coupling these harsh realities with the strong ideological undercurrent that hard work will always lead to success helps to shape a society in which citizens may feel they are unable to affect the environment around them—a feeling that they are unable to shape their future and the circumstances in which they live. When citizens are inactive, there are few, if any checks on the powers that be and the few, the elites, the one percent can take even greater control. Democratic resignation is the foundation of oligarchy.

What may be hard to realize in these situations is that the average citizen, despite what may be an imbalance of wealth, political capital, or even social influence, does have power. It is a form of power that lies not in bank accounts or job description, but in the people around us—in community. Unlike the view of power as unilateral power over another person, the IAF offers a view of power as relational power with others. Where unilateral power was the ability to

act on another person, relational power combines this with the ability to also be affected. We can have an effect on our environment, on our relationships with others, by both giving and receiving influence. The IAF attempts to teach communities how to harness relational power in order to reclaim their agency and begin to reshape the world around them as they see fit.

For Loomer, the ideal form of relational power is represented by “the capacity to sustain a mutually internal relationship.” Instead of pursuing one’s interests by treating relationships only as a means to personal interest, exercising relational power means treating the relationship as an end in itself. Inequality within relationships may still exist, but “one must trust in the relationship” in spite of imbalances since “the good is an emergent from the relationship.” When all parties commit mutually to a relationship, that relationship will grow and its subsequent strength may facilitate the pursuit of the interests of all parties involved as opposed to only the interests of the unilaterally stronger. Whereas unilateral power had different effects on the acting and the affected party, relational power provides a mutual benefit to all members of the relationship.

IAF organizing provides some concrete examples of this more abstract notion of power, beginning with its relational meetings that focus on sharing personal stories. Community members meet in a public place, whether a church or a recreation center, where each individual is accepted and encouraged to bring their own concerns to the table. In this way, meetings focus on hearing and understanding the interests of everyone in the community, but the purpose of these stories moves beyond simply sharing experiences. The ultimate

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goal of these meetings is to tease out the issues raised in different stories, analyze them, and find where they overlap. Setting out the concerns of the community in this way then allows those same community members to create a plan to address those concerns.

In his book *Blessed are the Organized*, Jeffrey Stout describes just these types of meetings in New Orleans at Wicker Elementary School. Parents and teachers generally had concerns about continuous school absences and through the relational meeting were able to narrow down their focus to the cleanliness of the school's bathrooms. The movement from general concerns to more specific issues allows organizers to pinpoint realistically fixable issues to be addressed. As they move from the general to the specific, a plan of action is formulated. Community members engage in deliberative discussion based on the assumption that each individual has the ability to come to reason-based judgments on what actions should or should not be taken by the group. The meetings recognize each individual's ability to contribute to the plan and the discussion, offering a forum in which community members can act. They can feel once more that they are having some effect. IAF organizing does not empower individuals, but instead shows them where their power already lies. The community members themselves come together. They select the issues, and they act to change their own circumstances.

This is not to say that the abstract moral gains of agency are the only piece of the puzzle. Another important step that organizing must take is pushing for public recognition and substantive change. In public assemblies and what the IAF calls accountability sessions, the concerns targeted in relational meetings are brought to

the forefront by the entire community. Public officials are invited to community gatherings in which concerns are raised. Politicians are allotted limited time to speak, while the focus shifts to acknowledging the importance of community interests. Other methods include demonstrations, strikes, or public shaming of officials. Just as a strike will not succeed if all members are not fully committed, all of these techniques rely on the strength of the bonds between the participants. The power exists in the way they relate to one another.

We saw a similar development here at Princeton following the Ferguson riots earlier this year. After town halls and community-wide protests, students packed in to the Council of the Princeton University Community (CPUC) meeting to force administrators to hear their concerns. These meetings establish a direct relation between community members and those in positions of power. Local public officials, more so than University administrators, are held directly accountable to community members and their concerns. Continuous pressure in these public forums creates a relationship in which officials must recognize the concerns of those present.

The community organizing in which the IAF engages deals mostly with the disadvantaged in society and aims at allowing those people to harness a form of relational power to target existing forms of oppression. The paradigm offers a way to think about striving to create a society closer to "the world as it should be," while acknowledging the realities of power and self-interest in "the world as it is." While this is all immediately relevant to those living in some of the, needless to say, less-than-ideal urban centers of America, it is also an important perspective for the Princeton student. For the most part, living at Princeton is an easy life. Our basic needs are met. Workloads aside, our lives are relatively comfortable. This, however, does not mean that there aren't pieces of campus life that cannot be tweaked. The administration may hold sway over decision-making,

but the formation of a number of task forces on diversity following the Ferguson protests are the most visible examples of campaigns currently being pushed for by organized students armed with specific plans of action.

Potentially more important than changes to campus life though, is the way in which we relate to the outside world. Whether we like it or not, Princeton is a campus housing and nourishing the budding elite of society. Princeton's alumni network already boasts an astounding array of influential individuals, and our classmates will go on to be politicians and corporate executives. Before going out into the real world, we should make an effort to understand the way in which we relate to each other and that our successes need not come at the expense of others. Instead these same successes can be seen as arising directly from the relationships with those around us.

But if such a change in traditional institutional ethos is too idealistic, more may need to be done to question existing authority. The idea of the Orange Bubble is a manifestation of an environment in which the outside world stays out of Princeton life and is easy to ignore. I can certainly imagine going through four years here without acknowledging any problems past Nassau Street. The massive commitments that we make in terms of schoolwork, part-time jobs, and extracurriculars may even allow us to ignore the problems that Princeton could help to solve. This ignorance may not be apathy, but it is close to passive acceptance of the status quo. Pushing for change necessitates, first, an ability to actively point out what needs to be changed in our lives and, second, the recognition that each and every one of us can do something in pursuit of that change. The hard part is that such recognition is often dependent on a realization that change can come from below; it does not need to come from Nassau Hall, or Washington, D.C, but instead can begin from the united voice of a group of committed individuals. ■

Secular Stagnation

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example, Zucman highlighted that the taxable investment income of the top 0.1 percent doubled since the early 1990s, while at the same time, the proportion of these investments that are stashed abroad in tax havens such as Cayman Islands, Monaco and Switzerland increased from 2 percent to 10 percent. Taken together, this suggests that the amount of wealth that dodges taxation in foreign tax havens has skyrocketed over the last two decades. The conference proceeded with a presentation by Princeton professor Benjamin Moll on a new working paper that attempts to provide an explanation for the sharp rise in inequality documented by Zucman and his colleagues. Moll argued that the rise in income inequality could be explained by the soaring wages of "superstars" such as financial managers and investment bankers. Moreover, the rise in wealth inequality could be explained by the high returns the super-wealthy earn on their investments. Moll went on to note that this could be due to extensive tax loopholes that the super-wealthy largely exploit.

Zucman and Moll's opening presentations highlighted the newfound emphasis placed on the study of inequality by academic economists. The papers and presentations suggest that economists are willing to let go of old canons that ignore questions about the distribution of income and wealth. For example, many basic economics courses downplay studies of the distribution of income and wealth, as idealized free markets are pareto-efficient. This means that, because it is impossible to improve the welfare of one individual without hurting another, a society ought not to worry about how income and wealth are distributed amongst its citizens. But of course, ideal free markets exist only in textbooks. As a result, Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the 21st Century* criticized academic economists for neglecting the distribution of wealth for far too long and argued, "it is long since past the time when [economists] should put the question of inequality

back at the center of economic analysis." The vibrant discussion among Princeton economics professors, academics from other universities and policymakers at the conference suggests that economics has, to some degree, responded to these criticisms. Inequality is no longer off-limits within economics, and economists are now willing to tackle the questions about inequality that may prove to be important to more progressive agendas.

Later that day, the conference shifted back to Alvin Hansen and his secular stagnation hypothesis. Larry Summers, the conference's keynote speaker, had revived secular stagnation in a speech at the International Monetary Fund in 2013. In that speech, he worried that Hansen's secular stagnation "may be not without relevance to America's experience" and is "profoundly important in understanding Japan's experience [since the 1990s]." Summers continued his analysis of secular stagnation at the JRCPPF conference. Citing anemic growth even during the height of the housing bubble in the mid-2000s, he argued that it has been decades since the American economy has produced strong, yet financially sustainable growth.

He said, "If one asks the question, 'How long has it been since the American economy enjoyed reasonable growth, from a reasonable unemployment rate, in a financially sustainable way?' The answer is that it has been really quite a long time, certainly more than half a generation."

Summers continued by explaining that it is possible that the United States, along with the Eurozone and Japan, have entered an extended period in which the natural rate of interest or the interest rate that is consistent with full employment is persistently negative. As a result, conventional monetary policy is unable to restore growth by itself. As a result, Summers concluded that, in the absence of

major policy action, the United States may be facing an era of economic stagnation with no end in sight. While it is surprising that a prominent, public figure in the economics and policymaking community like Larry Summers is willing to make such unconventional predictions, it may not be representative of any meaningful changes within the broader economics community. In particular, Summers escaped the cutthroat competition among young academics and is no longer operating under the imperative to "publish or perish." As a result, he is freer to publicly contradict established orthodoxies. It would be more meaningful if younger academics were willing to entertain these ideas.

The JRCPPF conference provided a striking example of the newfound willingness of academic economists to engage with the unconventional ideas such as secular stagnation. Gauti Eggertsson, a professor at Brown University, presented a paper entitled, "A Model of Secular Stagnation," that lays out a mathematical model of Alvin Hansen and Larry Summers' formulation of secular stagnation. Eggertsson noted in his presentation that certain conventions of macroeconomics must be dropped in order to tell this story of an economy caught in a persistent depression with elevated unemployment. Specifically, he explained that standard models of recessions assume that the causes of depressions are temporary. If enough time passes, the models predict that economies would return to normal. He argued that standard macroeconomic models precluded the very idea of secular stagnation by "baking its assumptions into the cake," so to speak. In the paper, Eggertsson departs from this conventional wisdom by altering his assumptions. He realistically assumes that individuals make different savings decisions as

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Inequality is no longer off-limits within economics, and economists are now willing to tackle the questions about inequality that may prove to be important to more progressive agendas.

discrimination). What a terrible misunderstanding! Racism isn't so much an individual decision as it is a state of the world. Racism is (among other things) a historical phenomenon grounded in facts about geography and human psychology that permeates economic, sociological and political structures. How can people think that something like that might obtain in mere instances? Racism obtains in my existence. Racism is my shadow that grows and shrinks and changes in relationship to me throughout the day, but only disappears in very dark rooms and when I close my eyes.

That certain "liberals" insist on maintaining the devastating facade that racism is somehow grounded in infrequent acts committed by "bad people" irks me to no end. Few things anger me more quickly or wound me more critically than the "gotcha!" game in which people who quietly harbor deeply racist sentiments try to 'out' other people who obviously harbor deeply racist sentiments as...racists! The hyena-like eagerness with which our "centrists" pounce on any racist sentiment that is verbalized by a conservative indicates, 'at best', their daft insistence on playing Whack-a-Mole indefinitely; 'at worst', it indicates their willingness to exploit my existence for easy catharsis, and cheap social capital. Frankly, I find the MSNBC-esque 'outrage' over Donald Sterling's comments, or Rick Santorum's comments, or comments made by the Grand Wizard of the Klan, to be as hopelessly stupid as Tal Fortgang's article about privilege. Worse: these fits are immeasurably more harmful. What have our "liberals" done here? other than to further verify that their own racism is acceptable? Such insipid treatment of racism from my friends exasperates me.

Some of the loneliest and most alienating experiences that I have consist in friends complaining to me about naked racism with the expectation that I might be appreciative and view them more positively. Can

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

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

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

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

parasites and confused antibodies. There is no honor in this.

What I hate more than being followed around in a store or hearing car doors lock when I walk past them on the sidewalk (and especially more than being called a nigger) is this sort of long pain that I can best describe as a sense of shame. This shame comes from being taught nothing about the history of my ancestors in grade school apart from that they were enslaved and colonized; it comes from constantly having to prove that I am not dangerous; it comes from never knowing how to dress—because it's just as bad to come off as an Uncle Tom as it is to come off as a nigger, and what else might I come off as, really? My shame comes from watching my sisters use appliances and products to try to make their hair look like the kind of hair that white people have. My shame comes from the fact that I live in the same deeply racist society that you do with the same news programs and movies and textbooks that are rooted in and continue to reinforce white supremacy. I am ashamed to have had at least as many—really, many more—nasty thoughts as you have about how black people aren't as smart, aren't as pretty, aren't as emotionally complex, aren't as moral, aren't as human. When I walk into a nice store, I feel like a thief; when I walk behind a white woman up the stairs in my hall, I feel like a rapist.

I don't pretend to speak for anyone other than myself; and surely, many black people would disagree with much of what I have just said—but this is no objection. In fact, it quite clearly demonstrates what I

am trying to get across: namely, that racism obtains in individual lives, in unique and particular experiences. Black America is not an integrated whole; it is a socially constructed group, the membership conditions of which are both constantly changing and impossible to define at any given moment. The fundamental unit in this group of people, as in any group of people, is the individual. There is a serious asymmetry between the needs of individual black people and the way that many on the left go about attempting (ostensibly) to meet those needs. What does the individual need? If I were to reduce and generalize the proper answer of this question to a single word, that word would be "respect." What is liberal "idealism" to the individual, other than condescension? What is a "universal human right" to the individual, other than an insult.

3

What I have said up to this point is a problem for activists. Large-scale political activity inevitably involves abstracting the experiences of individuals to that which is typical, which itself is further distilled into specific action-demands. This may go without saying, but it is politically—and perhaps even metaphysically—impossible to effectively advocate for group interests in a way that comprehensively incorporates the interests of each individual. Nevertheless, we might do a much better job of accurately representing the general interests of those who are oppressed (not to mention that we will be able to stand alongside them in good faith) if we find the motivation for our activism in the actual lived experiences of individuals—experiences that we can understand and with which we can empathize—than if we, from the outset, place our faith in clumsy, ultra-general moral-political frameworks that we do not really take the time to understand like "human rights," or even—and here you will surely disagree with me—"equality."

I would like now to offer a single,

substantive example of how poor form and improper motivation for political activism have directly impacted me, to personalize what I said at the outset about the importance of form.

4

I have been charmed and encouraged by the solidarity expressed by my peers in response to recent police violence against black people. This is not to say that I feel gratitude—"appreciation" even is too strong of a word—but I am thankful in the sort of way that one is thankful when one contemplates the presence of a friend. Being at the Millions March on December 13th in New York City among a large and diverse crowd of people protesting racism gave me levity. I came to the protest as an advocate for—among others—myself, and there I found much love and hopefulness. It's hard to see your

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

own shadow in a crowd; it's hard to feel lonely when you are among friends. Of course, neither one is impossible. I found many good things at the march, but I also found much confusion and misunderstanding; I found many clumsy phrases and many awkward, uncomfortable feelings.

I began to feel ill at ease early in the march walking alongside a dear friend who, with the best of intentions, began to chant, "black lives matter," along with the crowd. I

didn't know what to do! A deeply loving person—she didn't coin the phrase and probably never would have come up with it herself. I was, at the time, and still am, deeply dissatisfied with the slogan. "Matters" is a paltry word with no lower bound. From whence comes the conviction and resolve to declare that my life contains some minimal unit of value? Not, certainly, from a place of love; not from a place of empathy. What did Eric Garner say while he was in the process of dying: "I can't breathe!" That his life mattered was understood. Who would ever shout, "my life matters!" with conviction, with gusto? Perhaps somebody who needs to convince herself? Otherwise, such a statement as "my life matters" could only conceivably be said involuntarily, out of utter desperation—a doomed argument, surfaced by immediate shock and horror. "My life matters" is the sort of thing one would expect to hear in a concentration camp. "Black lives matter" in 2014—in New York City—is an expression of severely misplaced self-righteousness. That we are using this as a rallying point!—this humble and diluted reiteration of the 200 year-old liberal thesis that has failed to keep with the times: 'every human is a human'... How long have we fought uphill? How long have we been picking low-hanging fruit? And when did we start picking fruit up from the ground?

About halfway through the march I found a close friend who is also black and I stole away with him. My non-black friends' reaching down to me—well, in their minds, probably not to me—had become too uncomfortable for me to not seize the opportunity. He and I talked casually about that with which we were dissatisfied in the protest: namely, its form. The lack of intensity! That it was sanctioned by the police! Not least of all, the way that many of the protesters chose to express themselves. There were white fists in the air! There was an all white brass band playing some fucked-up rendition of "Follow

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The Drinking Gourd!” How inconsiderate! How tasteless. All too often, one ‘misses the forest for the trees’, but here was incredible foolishness: missing the forest for one tree, attempting to fell it with a kitchen knife, dancing around its trunk, and tossing about new seeds.

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

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

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

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

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



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

Secular Stagnation and Inequality

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they age and with this small change, he is able to describe an economy that can get caught in a trap of secular stagnation. Most importantly, Eggertsson’s findings relate directly to the inequality. He argued that, in his model, a sharp rise in inequality—such as in the United States—could lead to mass unemployment and prolonged, anemic growth. As a result, Eggertsson’s work bolsters the progressive argument that inequality is a significant economic issue, even if one completely ignores arguments about fairness. The conference’s discussion of secular stagnation is another example in which academic economists pivoted away from traditional modes of economic analysis and found that inequality, an issue important to progressives, can have significant macroeconomic consequences.

The presentations at the Julis-Rabinowitz Center for Public Policy and Finance’s Fourth Annual Conference did not have rhetorical flourish and were not aimed to rally progressive activists. They were filled to the brim with academic jargon and PowerPoint slides containing charts, graphs and equations that hurt my eyes. However, after paring through it all, the research presented at the conference should be a source of optimism for progressives. Like Alvin Hansen, the JRCPPF conference urged economists to focus on the obstinate economic problems of our time, which are the interconnected challenges of inequality, anemic growth and underemployment. The research presentation at the conference were filled with data and proposed policy solutions that would be familiar to any progressive interested in economic policy. It is an admittedly small sample. But, even though economics is still stereotyped by images of Milton Friedman slamming liberal economic policies, if the JRCPPF conference is any indication, it may not be an accurate description of economic research for much longer. ■



Students protest the CPUC decision to reject the sustainable investment initiative proposal.

This year’s resurgence in student activism would not have been possible without the generous support from Princeton Progressives (PPRo).



Abdulbaset Abdullah, from Palestine, speaks to students at a rally to support the referendum to divest from the Israeli occupation.



Princeton students join the People’s Climate March in September 2014.

First time reading the Princeton Progressive? Here's a little bit of history.

In 1968, Princeton students participated in the March on Washington to protest the Vietnam War. They carried a sign that read “Even Princeton,” making a statement that, despite the dominance of conservative politics on campus, Princeton students were still willing to take a principled stance against an unjust war. Today, the prevailing perception that our campus is apathetic or conservative still exists. But we choose to stand with those students who, risking arrest and abuse in 1968, asserted a different Princeton narrative. That is the historical legacy that motivates us at The Princeton Progressive. In the early 1980s, a group of students formed The Princeton Progressive Review, a magazine inspired by an earlier publication that had Socialist leanings. In 2001, the Idealistic Nation, a competitor to the Progressive Review was formed. Ideologically, the two publications were very similar, except that the Idealistic Nation was printed in newspaper rather than magazine format. In 2005, The Progressive Review and the Idealistic Nation merged to form The Princeton Progressive Nation (PPN) as “one big liberal media conglomerate.” The PPN not only produced several print issues per year, but also engaged in activities around campus aimed at furthering political awareness. For the 2008 election, PPN staffers staged a protest that came to be recognized nationally: “I Could Be John McCain’s Econ 101 Teacher.” The skit, conducted outside Frist Campus Center, included one student acting as “the teacher,” lecturing another student (“John McCain”) with elementary supply and demand curves on a whiteboard. In 2009, the PPN published an opinion piece advocating gender-neutral housing, finally bringing this issue to the attention of University administration.

In 2011, the PPN brought the national progressive Occupy movement to Princeton, with “mic checks” at J.P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs recruiting sessions on campus. PPN staffers and other students dressed in business attire and infiltrated the sessions to “protest the campus culture that whitewashes the crooked dealings of Wall Street as a

prestigious career path.” As a result of the economic recession, the print version of the PPN became defunct in 2011. We spent our limited funds on organizing and rebranding our publication as The Princeton Progressive, and generating content and discussion on our website. Two years later, we are re-financed and re-energized, ready to step in as the progressive voice on campus.

We believe in a broad progressivism that is less of a distinct party platform and more of an approach to dealing with politics. Our progressivism is about introducing new voices and perspectives from disparate ideologies. We are committed to challenging dominant discourses on both sides of the political spectrum. There is no shortage of progressive students on campus, but until now, there has been no dedicated platform to share their voices. This publication has a unique role on campus: bringing those voices together. We want to promote a culture of progressive dialogue on a campus where strong political convictions are largely absent.

How do we do that? By printing a magazine in the digital age. We want to bring progressivism into the physical spaces of our dorms and campus areas, not just add to the background noise of online commentary. Campus politics is about visibility—it is nearly impossible to participate in the political discussion on campus without something physical to read, and it is hard to ignore a pristine and well-crafted political journal. We believe in the old-fashioned power of having a tangible to hold in one’s hands.

We’re here to present several viewpoints to you. If you don’t agree, that’s fine. As our previous editor-in-chief, Jessica Mulligan ’14, once said, “disagreement creates progress, and creating progress is our goal.” We invite you to join us. Help us diversify our Table of Contents. Help us show that even Princeton has progressive voices that are ready to be heard.

THE PRINCETON PROGRESSIVE

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