

# Northeastern University Political Review

## What's Eating U.S.?

Michelle Obama's War on  
Childhood Obesity

## Iraq's Huddled Masses

Iraqi Refugees and the Special  
Immigrant Visa Program

## The Politics of Sound



# Labour Party

2010 Prospects

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vol. I, No. 2 - April 2010

		<b>DOMESTIC</b>
<i>Paul Hanley</i>	4	<b>REAL ID Considered:</b> Is the REAL ID a Real Solution?
<i>Laura Mueller-Soppart</i>	6	<b>What's Eating U.S.?</b> Michelle Obama's on Childhood Obesity
<i>Gwendolyn Connors</i>	8	<b>Public Security in Private Hands:</b> American Intelligence Goes Corporate
		<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>
<i>Nick Martin</i>	10	<b>Labor 2010:</b> Not So Rosy
<i>Brendan Rigby</i>	12	<b>Iraq's Huddled Masses:</b> Iraqi Refugees and the Special Immigrant Visa
<i>Desmond Beramendi</i>	15	<b>America and Cuba Today:</b> The Coming of Age of the Cuba Embargo under the Obama Administration
		<b>OPINION</b>
<i>Windsor Lien</i>	16	<b>Politics of Sound</b>
<i>Matthew Cournoyer</i>	18	<b>A Little More Conversation:</b> Reshaping the Abortion Debate on Campus
		<b>REVIEW</b>
<i>Iliana Foutsitzis</i>	20	<b>The Voice of the Dolphins, and Other Stories</b>
<i>Erin Conrad</i>	21	<b>Un Prophète</b>
<i>William Joyce</i>	23	<b>The Cleanest Race</b>

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## **Mission Statement of the Northeastern University Political Review**

The Northeastern University Political Review seeks to be a nonpartisan platform for students to publish essays and articles of the highest possible caliber on contemporary domestic and international politics, as well as critical reviews of political media. The Political Review aspires to foster a culture of intelligent political discourse among interested individuals while promoting awareness of political issues in the campus community. The organization envisions itself as a place where students with a common interest in politics and world affairs may come together to discuss and develop their views and refine their opinions. The Political Review hopes to reflect the diversity of thought and spirit at Northeastern, including the dual ethic of academic and experiential education our school embodies.

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From the Editor:

The spring semester of 2010 was eventful indeed. Our campus was caught in the midst a fascinating Senate race to fill Ted Kennedy's seat, student publications – like this one and others – appeared feverishly, right-to-lifers and pro-choicers duked it out over campus speakers and the Student Government Association's presidential election drew resignation, criticism and gusto like never before. President Obama came stumping for former Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakly, signaling Democratic desperation in what some call the bluest of blue states. Northeastern students waited in line from the crack of dawn to see our president, Barack Obama, speak about the importance of health care reform. Huskies were honored by a pro-life, pot-bellied eight year-old who was dragged out of Cabot Arena after accosting the Commander-in-Chief. College Democrats got to watch it all from center stage, some of them giggling, others stone-faced. Here were the foot-soldiers of Hope and Glory. Or so they thought.

Many of our classmates laughed or scoffed at the College Republicans, who picketed the visit with placards in support of a pro-torture, pickup truck driving state senator who, much to Martha Coakly's surprise, turned out to be a winner. Scott Brown bothered to stoop to the level of shaking voters' hands at the ball park, impressing the Yeomen and astounding his Democratic foes. Six months prior this would have been unthinkable, proof that hard work and cunning that change history. Practically everyone learned a lesson in politics this semester.

Brief ruckus rose up when NU Right to Life held a week-long bash, appropriately dubbed "Respect Life Week," co-hosted by the Catholic Center of Northeastern. Pro-choice students and the Huntington News smelt something sour here, questioning the project's educational value. How could our Student Activities Fee (SAF) be used for "biased purposes"? The debate was valuable, though one might wonder why there is so little student outrage over our money being used to subsidize the soft-core porno mag put out each year during "Sex Week". Maybe next year. Additional excitement came from the arrival of three tremendous Palestinian hip-hop strugglers -- DAM, the first Palestinian Arab MCs. Packing up AfterHours and speaking with Professor Shakir Mustafa's Arab Culture class, DAM made certain that Arabs and Palestine are not synonymous with "terrorism" or "violence". Brought to campus by Students for Palestine, DAM highlighted the artistic and political struggle of the Palestinian people, both in the Occupied Territories and inside Israel, for national independence and for human rights. Socially conscious rhymes in Arabic and English, hip beats and sonic melodies filled the Curry Student Center till the wee hours. The legitimate struggle of the Palestinian and other oppressed peoples is increasingly prominent in students' minds at Northeastern.

All this made for an exciting opening to 2010. Some students consider Northeastern students politically apathetic, and with good reason. Political events and clubs on campus attract limited attention and few people care for student government. That perception is inaccurate. Student-run advocacy groups flourish on campus. The student center is constantly booked with groups hoping to "raise awareness" about this or that cause. Disinterest in campus politics is not disinterest in politics at large. On-campus rallies or events should not overshadow the hundreds (if not thousands) of students working for state senators, congressmen and non-profits, training for public service and gunning for power.

*--Khalid Lum, Political Science & International Affairs '11  
Editor-in-Chief, Northeastern University Political Review*

## REAL ID Considered: Is the REAL ID a Real Solution?

The United States Federal Government has considered the concept of a national identification program for several years and the interest has only increased since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The current system, with information of varying quality collected, stored, and utilized by the individual states, is inefficient at best and a significant hindrance at worst. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposed standardizing the system of information-collecting within the states. This proposal, known as REAL ID, has polarized the country and caused a rift between the federal government and the states.

The United States Congress passed the REAL ID Act of 2005 in response to Homeland Security’s proposal. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, this piece of legislation repealed a prior law establishing a cooperative effort between the federal government and state governments and mandated certain requirements for state-issued identification cards. The new standards required driver’s licenses to contain at a minimum such information as a person’s full legal name, date of birth, legal address, among other characteristics.

Currently, states already adhere to most of these standards, but an additional requirement that state identification cards receive federal certification is also included in the Real ID Act. In the bill is language that prohibits a non-certified identification card from being used for any purpose that deals with the federal government, such as obtaining entry to federal government buildings or obtaining a passport. REAL ID also mandates that states must create a central database for such information as

listed above, and that those databases must be accessible to other states, essentially creating a national registry. It does not, however, directly provide funding for this purpose to reimburse states for the costs of creating the database, nor does it give the states much of a say in implementing changes. In addition, the program would take the form of an unfunded mandate, a device used by Congress

**“REAL ID also mandates that states must create a central database for such information as listed above, and that those databases must be accessible to other states, essentially creating a national registry.”**

to force a state to implement their will without providing funding to do so .

A major complication

in these efforts has been the reluctance of states to implement the reforms. In 2007, Maine passed a state bill refusing to implement any provision of REAL ID. This demoral was based on both financial and legal grounds. In the bill it was noted that the cost of implementation would be upwards of \$185 million, a price that taxpayers would be hard-pressed to afford. In addition, the government of Maine believed that it would constitute an invasion of privacy

as well as incite an increase in identity theft while providing no discernable benefits.

Following Maine’s lead were the states of Montana, South Carolina, and New Hampshire. Montana, in particular, passed legislation outright rejecting the Act, saying the following in the bill:



*“The legislature finds that the enactment into law by the U.S. congress of the REAL ID Act of 2005, as part of Public Law 109-13, is inimical to the security and well-being of the people of Montana, will cause unneeded expense and inconvenience to those people, and was adopted by the U.S. congress in violation of the principles of federalism contained in the 10th amendment to the U.S. constitution.”*

Since then, 33 out of 50 states have either introduced or

passed some sort of legislation denouncing the REAL ID program, although most have also filed for extensions regarding implementation in the hopes that a compromise can be reached. There are some states, however, that have embraced REAL ID, including California and New Jersey.

Denise Blair, Assistant Deputy Director for the California Department of Motor Vehicles, said in a statement to Wired Magazine that it could allow their DMV to offer more online services beyond their current capability. Representatives for the New Jersey state government gave a similar reasoning when questioned.

Privacy advocacy groups have also waded into the fray over the REAL ID protocols. These groups, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), cite privacy concerns in greater detail than the states, which emphasize the economic issues involved in implementation. For example, the EFF states on its website that the presence of “common machine-readable technology” (e.g. barcodes, RFID technology) makes it easy for the federal government to read the information on it. The problem with this is that if it is easy for the government, it is just as easy for people looking to commit the crime of identity theft. The ACLU, in turn, fears that the communal database mandated by the REAL ID Act will

expand to include information unrelated to national security. The Department of Homeland Security is on record as saying REAL ID could

be mandatory for purchasing certain types of medication, such as that containing pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in cold medicines and methamphetamine. Expansion of the database could also mean weaker security overall, as more data collection points mean more points of failure to keep track of.

The DHS, for its part, has stated that REAL ID will in fact be more secure than the current system. The new identification cards would ostensibly contain security features to make it more difficult to counterfeit and make false

documentation. Because criminals actively seek out these forged materials, the chance of making it harder to attain such credentials is worth the price. The problem with this, as stated by the ACLU and other organizations, it does not prevent legitimate identification from simply being

purchased from corrupt public officials. DHS also has gone on record as saying that it will improve privacy rather than undermine it by making the government responsible for safeguarding personal information, as well as provide a central repository for everything from driving records to medical information. Unfortunately for DHS, private organizations and the states have soundly rejected this argument.

There is some hope for a reworking of the REAL ID concept, however. In 2009, congressional lawmakers put forth an idea for

a document known as PASS ID. PASS ID would keep several major tenets of REAL ID while scaling back some of the more controversial aspects of the previous program. The ideas that would be kept would be the information requirements as well as the machine-readable features, but the creation of a national information database would be dropped under the proposed system. Unfortunately, critics on both sides of the debate have panned this new idea, with opinions ranging from it not being strong enough to

having many of the same privacy and economic concerns of REAL ID.

The idea of a national ID system such as REAL ID or PASS

ID is well intentioned, but currently a losing proposition. Because many states have passed legislation against such a program, the chance that one will come to fruition is very slim at best. Until the federal government shows that it is willing to compromise with the states on matters such as privacy and economic support, the REAL ID program and its subsequent evolutions will fail every time.

- Paul Hanley, *Political Science '12*



**“Expansion of the database would mean weaker security overall, as more data collection points mean more points of failure to keep track of.”**

## What's Eating U.S.?

### Michelle Obama's War on Childhood Obesity



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, USDAgov*

**F**irst Lady Michelle Obama introduced a new ambitious national goal to her agenda this past February. Childhood obesity rates have steadily risen in the United States and Obama plans to solve the alarming increase of the disease within the next generation so that today's children will be able to live adulthood at a healthy weight. In order to facilitate this effort, Obama unveiled Let's Move, a national campaign that plans to coordinate public and private efforts in partnership for a healthier America.

The United States government established a consolidated effort to battle obesity at the beginning of the millennium. Healthy People 2010 is a federal program that takes state and local efforts promote a healthy America accountable. This program focuses on increasing the quality and years of healthy life through narrowing in on eliminating

healthy disparities such as care for the disable and reducing food borne illnesses. While no state fulfilled its goals for the decade, Healthy People has been renewed for 2020; Let's Move attempts to take on a complementary and more direct approach to the battle.

The White House is determined to reintroduce traditional vegetables and fruits into the American diet. Currently French fries are the most popular vegetable and account for 25% of children's vegetable intake. Also, 40% of children's fruit intake comes from juice. This Ohio State University research shows that if French fries and juice were removed from the survey data, America's children would be considered malnourished according to the Food and Drug Administration's nutritional standards.

Nearly one-third of American children are overweight or

obese. This rate has tripled in adolescents and more than doubled in younger children since 1980. Weight related diseases such as type-2 diabetes, were nearly non-existent in America's youth a few decades ago, however more than 75% of obese children have been diagnosed with the threatening and complicated disease.

Let's Move is committed to including

all demographics into the initiative. The FY2011 Budget allocated \$1.5 million towards preventing and treating childhood obesity in American Indian and Alaska Natives, where the childhood obesity rate is reaching 50%. The White House wants to support localized effort on a federal level. The Special Diabetes Program for Indians has proven successful is the fight against childhood obesity and type-2 diabetes, and they will receive \$150 million from the Budget.

Combating food deserts is at the crust of the White House's campaign. There are 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million are children, that live in low income rural and urban areas over one mile away from a super-market. These food deserts contribute to the lack of nutrition in the average American's diet because produce has become not only expensive, but difficult to attain.

The President has allocated \$400 million in the FY2011 Budget towards the U.S.

Treasury and Agriculture and Health and Human Services to fund a joint effort to bring healthier food options to local shops and bodegas. The engagement of the private sector in these efforts is a cornerstone to the First Lady's proposal.

The First Lady honored Jeffrey Brown, a local hero in Philadelphia, during the President's State of the Union. Brown is dedicated to the Fresh Food Financing Initiative

(FFFI), a Pennsylvania program that provides grants and loans for grocery-store development. His chain, Brown's Super Markets, has been adopted as the ultimate model for grocer innovation. Brown's markets have been hailed as the heart of local neighborhoods through providing jobs

and exemplifying the important role of healthy nutrition in families.

However, there are

many critics of the realism in transforming America's food industry into a Brown Super-Market model.

"If the first lady thinks this is our No. 1 objective for children and government is going to give us half an apple, there is a gap," said Ann Cooper, founder of lunchbox.org, a healthy eating website. "We really need to allocate more money."

In the next decade, Mrs. Obama's goal is to spend an extra \$1 billion per year to bolster lunch programs in schools. However, critics note that there are about 5.4 billion school lunches served annually throughout the U.S. In the end, there would only be an additional \$0.15 spent on lunches, not enough to consistently purchase more fresh produce for students; an apple for lunch in Colorado costs the meal provider \$0.25. Regardless, school food manufacturers have signed up for the effort and have pledged to

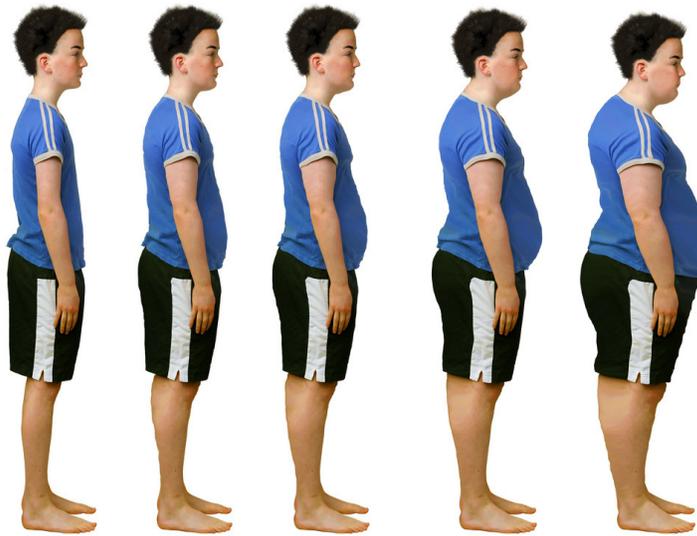
double the portion of fruits and vegetables in school lunches with these funds.

**"This Ohio State University research shows that if French fries and juice were removed from the survey data, America's children would be considered malnourished according to the Food and Drug Administration's nutritional standards."**

**"While Mrs. Obama does not plan to testify, her involvement in drafting the legislation is crucial; cooperation with Let's Move brings about a unique opportunity for Washington to truly learn about school food issues."**

Additionally, Mrs. Obama's plan seeks to reform the way doctors prevent and diagnose obesity. Currently, it is not a norm that doctors regularly measure a child's BMI, Body Mass Index. This measures height and weight to compute a number that indicates body fat percentage and categorizes BMI into underweight, normal, overweight, and obese. These categorizations are most reliable for adults; children's weight fluctuates on a monthly basis and is not the same for both males and females. Because Let's Move

is focused on childhood obesity and its prevention, critics recommend not enforcing BMI calculations as a foolproof mechanism to determine obesity. Rather, some would prefer to see doctor's use skin fold thickness measurements and physical activity assessments to best diagnose obesity. Beyond tackling the financial hurdles combating childhood obesity entails, the First Lady is engaging legislation. On February 9th, President Obama signed a memorandum establishing a childhood obesity task force. In three months, the task should be set into place to execute Let's Move's objectives.



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, Combined Media*

policy that determines school food policy and resources. While Mrs. Obama does not plan to testify, her involvement in drafting the legislation is crucial; cooperation with Let's Move brings about a unique opportunity for Washington to truly learn about school food issues.

The goal of ending childhood obesity in America in the next generation is ambitious. Mrs. Obama and her team have big dreams for big America. There are many facets of today's society, from produce access to school lunch funding, that will require major overhaul. While law and money will be able to facilitate a diet, America must finally, will-

With the Task Force under way, Congress is preparing its 2010 reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. This Act is only reauthorized every five years and is essentially the

ingly step on the scale.

- Laura Mueller-Soppart, *Political Science/Economics '14*

## Public Security in Private Hands: American Intelligence Goes Corporate

In 2006, under considerable pressure from the public to provide information about the use of tax dollars in matters of national security, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) conducted the first comprehensive study of the use of private intelligence contractors since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Alarming, it found that "confronted with... uncertain funding, components (of the U.S. government intelligence community) are left with no choice but to use contractors for work that may be borderline 'inherently governmental'." In fact, it is estimated that around 70% of the budget for national security is spent on private contractors, and the government is more reliant on corporations for executing matters of national security and intelligence than ever before. Interrogating prisoners of war, flying spy aircraft,

**"It is difficult to imagine where the line is being drawn when the President receives most of his daily security information from private corporations."**

and tracking terrorist threats are now some of the many tasks performed by private corporations.

In the aftermath of budget cuts to the US intelligence apparatus in the 1990s, many skilled workers that had previously been employed in the public sector moved to private companies. After 9/11, however, Congress and the Bush Administration authorized the CIA and other agencies to

hire thousands of intelligence analysts to support their efforts. Since the '90s, the "industrial-intelligence

complex" has exploded in terms of profitability; business in that sector has doubled in the past ten years.

Blurring the lines between government and the private sector to create a "blended" workforce has raised concerns

in the intelligence industry, and many observers believe the extent to which contractors are being used is inappropriate. In 2007, when the General Services Administration needed help organizing an investigation into the incompetent behavior and fraud demonstrated by private contractors, they hired another contractor, CIAC International, to do the work. Despite the seemingly obvious conflict of interest, and the exorbitant cost (\$104 of taxpayer money

their pockets with money from a public, to whose will they are not accountable.

Even more unsettling, the U.S. intelligence budget is shrouded in secrecy and it is impossible to know how much money the government spends on private companies annually. In addition, it is unclear what constitutes an “inherently governmental” function; it is difficult to imagine where the line is being drawn when the Presi-



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, Marko Milošević*

per employee, per hour), and the fact that CIAC itself had been under investigation for similar issues in the past, they were hired anyway.

Ironically, the competition in the market which is supposed to streamline the nation’s cost is nonexistent, since less than half of the contracts handed out by the government were subject to open bidding.

Furthermore, despite the fact that no solid data exists demonstrating that private contractors are more efficient than government run agencies, Congress has continued to allow previously governmental jobs to be sent to the private sector, which is not accountable to the public and not always required to disclose the tasks they are performing. Many intelligence companies now rely almost exclusively on government business, creating an intelligence industry subsidized by the government, where executives can line

dent receives most of his daily security information from private corporations.

On February 25, the House heard arguments pertaining to the FY2010 intelligence authorization act, which would require the Director of National Intelligence to disclose to Congress the extent to which private contractors were being used. With an increasingly calamitous war on terror looming over the nation, it is remarkable how trusting Congress is in companies who admit to having no motivation other than profit. Without the Intelligence Authorization Act, as well as other clear legislation outlining what the role of private contractors should be in the intelligence industry, it is unlikely that there will be any meaningful oversight in our bought-and-paid-for national security sector.

*- Gwendolyn Connors, International Affairs '12*

## Labour 2010: Not So Rosy

In May 1997, after a surprising election victory, a young, charismatic man named Tony Blair settled into his new office at 10 Downing Street in London as the United Kingdom's Prime Minister. This signaled the beginning of the Labour Party's hold on the Premiership. However, after nearly thirteen years in power, Labour's grasp on Downing Street seems to be slipping as the general election approaches.

Labour's waning popularity has been long coming. From the time Blair took office, Labour has seen its seats in the House of Commons decline from 419 in 1997 to 413 in 2001 to 356 in 2005 (BBC). As it stands, Labour, now led by Gordon Brown who succeeded Blair in 2007, is running behind in the polls. A recent poll conducted at the end of January placed the Conservative Party, or Tories for short, with 40 percent of the vote and Labour with 29 percent.

However, polling data is not something to rely on when predicting the outcome of the general election. In 2001, many polls predicted that the Conservatives would win the election, only to be beaten by nine points after the votes were counted. A similar incident occurred in 1987 when Labour had strong poll numbers going into the election after running what they considered a successful campaign only to be defeated by the Tories led by Margaret Thatcher.

Even with the outlook seeming grim for Labour, many Labour Members of Parliament (MPs) are not conceding the election to the Conservatives. The Tories main jousting point with Labour, its management of the slowly recovering economy, is starting to hold less weight with the general public. The recession in the United Kingdom is officially over by definition with the economy growing for the first time since the beginning of 2008. The fourth quarter of 2009 showed an increase of .01% in the economy.

David Cameron, the Conservative Party's leader and the potential successor to Brown, argues that the current Labour government has not fixed the problems that led to the recession. However, voters are typically more concerned with which candidate holds the greatest prospects for recovery than with what caused the recession. This makes both Brown and Cameron very reliant on the economic data that comes out in the next few months leading up to

the election in order to provide backing for their claims. Estimates from the first quarter of 2010 were released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in early April and estimated that the UK economy grew by two percent in the first quarter and is slated to gain by three percent in the second. Brown called the election very soon after for May 6, the definitive date of the local elections which Brown was easily able to get the general election onto. MPs had been preparing for months for this date.

Though the economy remains the number one issue with voters, the war in Afghanistan is also a top priority. The war has always been a sensitive topic in Britain since it began in 2002, but in 2009 when troop casualties reached their highest levels since the Falkland War, the public outcry against the war increased dramatically. In response, Brown hosted a meeting with world leaders in January to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and the future role of the United Kingdom in the war. He also held a parallel meeting the same day to discuss the growing threat of terrorist activity in Yemen. Cameron and the Tories have consistently argued that Brown has mismanaged the war and sent troops into the battlefield without the adequate equipment and supplies.

Brown does not only have to deal with headaches from the Tories but also from fellow Labour Party members. Some Labour Party members are quietly calling for Brown to step down before the election and others are challenging him more directly. In early January, two former cabinet ministers, Patricia Hewitt and Geoff Hoon, called for a vote to unseat Brown as Labour's leader saying that they did not have confidence in him going into the election. The attempted coup, the third since Brown took office, failed but showed deep party divides that are more personal than political.

"If part of the answer to Labour's problems is a new leader, we need an analysis of what is wrong in order to look for the kind of leader who might be able to put things right," said Clare Short, a former Labour MP turned independent in 2003 in an interview with *New Statesman*. "Underneath this is a pro-Blair versus pro-Brown division...They created New Labour together. Brown was the brains, Blair the front man. The clashes were of egos, ambitions and hangers-on, not of principle or strategy."

When attempting to unseat Brown, neither Hewitt nor Hoon pointed out a specific policy or decision that they disagreed with him on. Their reasons for trying to topple Brown were mostly personal and they did not seek any changes in policy, only in leadership. To make matters more awkward, the names within Labour's ranks to replace Brown if the election is lost, or possibly even if it is won, are some who are closest to Brown.

Among those widely considered to be front runners for Labour's top position following the election are Ed Balls,

Children, Schools and Families Secretary; David Milliband, Foreign Secretary; his brother Ed Miliband, Energy and Climate Change Secretary; Harriet Harman, Labour's deputy leader.

Yet they all must continue to show support for Brown, at least until the election is over, if Labour is to have a chance of winning.

If Brown wants to keep Labour in control of the Premiership he needs to take three decisive moves. First, he needs to keep a careful eye on the sluggishly recovering economy and jump-start it as much as possible. Unfortunately, this is his most difficult task because most likely any action he currently takes will not have a drastic affect on the economy before the election. The economic report issued by OECD was good news for Brown especially because it forecasts notable economic growth to come but was not the dramatic jolt he would have liked. Nevertheless, he needs to continue to try and persuade voters that his party is more capable of stewarding the economy by increasing

spending than the Tories would be by cutting it.

Secondly, he needs to make a strong effort to begin to decrease the number of British troops in Afghanistan. Though this may hurt relations with the United States because the United Kingdom has the second largest number of troops in the war (9,000) after the United States (68,000), it is vital that troops start to return home to appease the public's distaste for the war claiming a large number of lives. If that cannot be done quickly enough, Brown needs to make an effort to limit the number of soldier casualties even if that does involve conceding

to Cameron's argument that the troops need to be better equipped.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Brown needs to unite his party. The three separate attempts to unseat Brown have been highly published and voters are clearly aware of the dissention amongst the Labour ranks. Voters are asking themselves whether they trust a party that

cannot hold itself together to govern a nation. The Tories clearly see this fissure and will most likely try and exploit that fact as the election approaches. The good news for Brown in this case is that unifying the party, at least for the election, could be simple. As mentioned before, there are few ideological differences between the main factions within the Labour Party, the Brownites and the Blairites, and mostly the conflict stems from egos and personal loyalties. Brown needs to get all of Labour to stand behind him to convince the public that his party is better suited to govern Britain than the Conservatives or else face certain defeat.

- Nick Martin, *International Affairs '11*



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, August Jackson*

## Iraq's Huddled Masses: Iraqi Refugees and the Special Immigrant Visa Program

**M**any Iraqis face certain danger from armed militias and terrorist groups if they work for the American military or contractors. These groups threaten, hunt down, torture and kill Iraqis whom they know or suspect have worked for Americans. Realizing this heinous trend, the US made it easier for Iraqis to come to America. In 2007 Congress passed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act (“Kennedy Act”), which was signed into law in January of 2008. The goal of the Act was to pay our moral debt to the Iraqis who worked for Americans at great risk to their personal safety. The Act expanded which Iraqis are eligible for Priority 2 (P2) visas, allows for in-country processing for these visas, and also created 5,000 Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) each year for five years including 2008. Unfortunately, the SIV program has yet to become a viable route for imperiled Iraqis to access safety. The SIVs created by the act are rarely used, and neither the SIV nor P2 process offer Iraqis a quick route to safety. Certainly, the US has made admirable progress in admitting Iraqis as refugees—the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration admitted 18,838 Iraqi refugees in FY2009 alone. But in the same period, the US issued only 1,416 of the 10,000 SIVs available—just 14% of the assistance it planned to offer. The Kennedy Act has fallen far short of its goal of granting 5,000 Iraqi SIVs per year—but why?

There are two primary reasons. First, the application process is confusing, arduous, and nearly impossible to discover unless one has prior knowledge of it. Second, the entire application hinges on whether or not the applicant's former supervisor responds to an employment verification e-mail. Both of these problems are symptoms of the lack of American preparation in designing and implementing the act—the Bush Administration had no idea how many Iraqis would qualify or apply for the SIV. At a 2008 briefing, the US Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues—the American responsible for knowing all the answers to questions about American policy with Iraqi Refugees—told reporters that the US Government “can't gauge what the demand is going to be for Special Immigrant Visas”; when pressed for a figure he quipped that the number he gave was “a real guesstimate.” The low utilization of the SIV is not because few people qualify for it; some estimate that there are 150,000 Iraqis who qualify for an SIV.

The most significant problem of the SIV program is that

it is not accessible. Quite simply, Iraqis rarely know about the SIV program even if they qualify for it. In the labyrinthine process of US immigration visas, the description of the SIV is difficult to locate—even for an English-speaking, internet-savvy American who knew the exact search terms for the “Special Immigrant Visa.” The process becomes less muddled once the correct document is located—there are tens of pages on various government websites describing the process, not all of which make it clear whether they are describing the P2 or SIV process. But that assumes the person searching can read enough English to locate the website; Arabic translations of the relevant documents are hidden behind a small English-language link. At least one page on the US State Department website says that the SIV program is not yet implemented, when in fact implementation took place two years ago. Furthermore, the Act's internet-centered approach—an applicant must e-mail a State Department e-mail address to apply—makes specious assumptions about access to the internet in Iraq. According to one 2008 survey, only 1 in 100 Iraqis have internet. The SIV could plausibly be written “Savvy Internet-user Visa.”

Then there is the problem of the actual SIV application. Application is a deceptive term for the disaggregated series of document-gathering, form-filling, and correspondence via e-mail and mail that an SIV petition entails. Whereas the paperwork for the P2 refugee application is largely assembled and completed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the SIV applicant shoulders the brunt of navigating the complex English-language process. One attorney remarked that it seems as though each SIV application “goes into a black hole” rather than to the National Visa Center for processing. The application requires the assembly of countless specific documents sent to various locations at different times, all of which require certified translations and information that many Iraqis lost when they fled their homes. Many cannot risk their lives or their refugee status and return to Iraq to gather documents for an SIV application—especially because returning to the country one fled from can void a P2 resettlement application.

A second problem with the Kennedy Act is procedural: the process requires the applicant's former supervisor to voluntarily cooperate with the US or its contracting partners to determine an applicant's eligibility. Normally, a refu-

gee registers with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and gets a referral to the US to be resettled. But the drafters of the Kennedy streamlined the procedure—an SIV applicant need not apply through UNHCR or even be a refugee at all.

But it is the first step of applying for an SIV can permanently delay the petition. A petitioning Iraqi must produce a “positive recommendation” from their supervisor, and the IOM must be able to verify the employment via e-mail. When this system works, it works well: a supervisor promptly responds to the employment verification request and the application proceeds. But sometimes e-mails go unanswered. Sometimes, a supervisor, due to a personal grudge, refuses to recommend an Iraqi. Or perhaps a company operating in Iraq did not keep accurate records of who it employed, and simply cannot verify the employment. In practice, wagering an entire visa application on one person’s ability to respond to an e-mail introduces an unacceptable variability into the process. An Iraqi who may be killed for working with Americans should not have his visa processing indefinitely delayed or denied because an e-mail ended up in a spam folder.

Furthermore, the organization charged with verifying employment—the IOM—has, in at least one case, assumed that an initial lack of response justified closing an SIV case file. This writer prepared the case of an Iraqi who the IOM rejected when attempts to verify his employment via e-mail went unanswered. Four months and ten e-mails later, this writer was able to verify his employment, so he reopened his SIV petition. It is far too easy to send off an e-mail, not receive a timely response, and conclude

that an SIV application cannot proceed. There must be an established, public set of procedures to resort to when employment verification stagnates. It is regrettable that an Iraqi’s petition can permanently fail—with no process to appeal—simply because one supervisor failed to respond to an e-mail requesting employment verification.

Fortunately, these major issues—accessibility, employment verification, lengthy security checks, and convoluted application process—can be corrected. The lack

of accessibility can be addressed by circulating Arabic-language documents to increase awareness of the SIV program and establishing procedures other than e-mail through which to apply. Employment verification would be easier if the US Government required its contractors to respond to SIV petitions, and notified supervisors that only gross violations of the “faithful and valuable service” test can exempt an Iraqi from the visa. There ought to be a centralized administrator who ensures that SIV security checks do not linger in interagency limbo, rather than the current decentralized process that can take months, during which an Iraqi is not informed of the status of his application—having a common name shared by an

undesirable might add months of unnecessary waiting. The most difficult to correct is the application process, the complexity of which is both a blessing and a curse: its staggered nature allows an Iraq to file a petition without certain documents, knowing that he or she can gather them later, but its numerous steps make it intimidating and difficult to navigate without fluent English. But the documentary requirements are a strong disincentive to apply—especially because some Iraqis cannot return to retrieve documents required for an SIV petition.



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

The Kennedy Act is an important, if imperfect, step forward. The P2 program has been widely successful, and Iraqis are resettling to the United States through refugee programs in record numbers—the US admitted 18,838 Iraqi refugees from P2 and other referrals in FY2009 alone.

The Kennedy Act moves away from the traditional idea that crossing an international border is an essential part of becoming a refugee and qualifying for international humanitarian aid. The P2 process, by circumventing the UNHCR requirement that one must first leave their country, acknowledges what international refugee policy does not: internally displaced persons (IDPs) do not deserve less protection simply because they did not cross a line in the sand. That refugees can only exist after crossing a border is an idea becoming outmoded by the proliferation of intrastate conflicts where millions of people, for reasons as varied as the terrors they endure, do not leave their country but otherwise qualify as refugees in need of international protection. The P2 process is unique for

offering resettlement, a privilege typically reserved for refugees, to IDPs.

But the failures of the SIV program overshadow the successes and threaten to undermine the American mission in Iraq. If we do not protect our own, we cast doubt on our moral convictions—not a great way to win hearts and minds. If we cannot implement a visa regime properly, we will not be expected to fare any better at regime change. If we do not give Iraqis an incentive to work for and with American forces, we risk undermining the tenuous security in Iraq—which cannot succeed without Iraqis working alongside Americans. By offering a largely unworkable visa, we simultaneously renege on our debt to Iraqi allies and offend a central component of the American promise: hard work will be rewarded.

- Brendan Rigby, *IAF/Political Science '10*

## **America and Cuba Today: The Coming of Age of the Cuba Embargo under the Obama Administration**

In retrospect, the Cuban embargo was presumably logical. World order was essentially polarized into two distinct categories: Capitalism vs. Communism. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, this approach seems worthless in terms of achieving peaceful, stable relations with Cuba in contemporary international relations. In short, the Cuban embargo is a product of the Cold War which went into effect shortly after the success of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Cold War tensions, the proximity of Cuba to the United States, and nationalization of U.S. business interests in Cuba led to a partial embargo and eventually a full embargo by the mid-1960's.



From the Eisenhower Administration to the Obama Administration, the embargo has shifted in intensity. Before

taking office, President Obama has shown an inclination toward a more forward approach in engaging Cuba and less intense restrictions. In contrast, many past administrations have perpetuated the embargo to the same degree as if it were 1968; President Obama has chosen a new path toward diplomatic and economic inclusion, which

represents a shift from a stagnant Cold War mentality to a more forward, progressive approach. To be specific, President Obama's administration has created initiatives, outlined in an omnibus bill, which would relax travel restrictions in Cuban family members.

A Gallup poll suggests that since 2000, many Americans favor ending the trade embargo with Cuba, with 51% favoring and 38% opposing it. The trend in the poll shows the opposing group steadily decreasing while the former

holding steady. While this may not translate into meaningful change in regards to the embargo, it does create a favorable atmosphere in which President Obama can harness and mold the embargo to reflect popular expectance.

President Obama is at a crossroads in which direction to take the

United State's relationship with Cuba.. The affirmation of the Cuban embargo may prove to be less politicized as opposed to developing ties with Cuba. Nonetheless, the advantages of engaging Cuba is significant from businesses perspective and diplomatic ties are beneficial, especially with a country so close to our borders. Reversing the outdated, Cold War paradigm is also in line with American public opinion. In the past, methods of exclusion have produced tense and rigid structures that require even more energy to maintain, such as the arms race between the United States and Russia. In other words, the old context for the Cuban embargo should not affect President Obama's decision to develop economic and diplomatic ties with Cuba.

Historically, American foreign policy towards Cuba has been a process of negotiating with financial incentives in return for political reform and, as the Cuban embargo demonstrates, Cuba has been resistant in conceding to these demands. Instead, the United States' foreign policy on Cuba has partitioned relations and created a "West versus the Rest" mentality. However there seems to be a divergence from the past with the emergence of Castro's younger brother, Raul Castro, as the provincial leader, and a more diplomatically inclined President Obama, the prospects of bilateral agreements on economic sanctions being lifted seems plausible. At the very least, a small but important step will have been developed for future leaders to shape and mold to their preferences.

## "From the Eisenhower Administration to the Obama Administration, the embargo has shifted in intensity."

The consequences of the Cuban embargo were felt almost immediately by all Cuban business owners, ranging from small to big, as well as the many investing companies from abroad. Cuban reliance on sugar export to the United States further affected the Cuban economic structure.

President Obama should not take this area for granted.

This economic area serves as a conduit for future diplomatic exchanges. Also, this area could potentially lift the burden that the United States has placed on the Cuban economy. Economic sanctions will only continue to promote slow development of revenue earning sectors in Cuba and restrict access to both Cubans and Americans to markets of labor and manufactured products. Such sanctions, as history has shown, will reluctantly force

Cuba turn to other nations who can provide access to their markets – as Canadian companies have done so in the 1990's.

The benefits of the Cuban embargo may have been relevant during the Cold War. Today, however, it seems to be more of an impediment to Cuban-American families and companies who seek entry into Cuban markets. The consequences during the onset of the Cuban embargo and Cuban Missile Crisis may have proven to be detrimental to our national safety.

President Obama has engendered a more diplomatic and forward-thinking approach in integrating states that have been on the fringe of international relations, such as Cuba. The Cuban embargo is undoubtedly a symbol of the Cold War era. It is time for a new chapter in Cuban-America relations to begin and President Obama has written the

first page. The rest will depend on Congress and future administrations.



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, Calidonia Hibernia*

- Desmond Beramendi, *International Affairs '11*

## The Politics of Sound

Words have never been enough. While the brain can process thousands of feelings and sensations every minute, spoken language will forever be a bottleneck that retards the sharing or expression of sensations from one person to the next. Think about it - how often are you left struggling to relay a thought to a colleague or friend? Our ancestors responded to this impass by developing ways to squeeze through the barriers of communication. For as long as humankind has roamed the earth, the arts have existed as a prominent feature in human relations. Painting, literature, theater, and music were created as ways to get around the limits of language. Though seemingly extraneous to survival, the arts represent an evolutionary step that separated the struggle to survive from the struggle to understand. Music, from its time as rudimentary grunting and stick-banging and onto its contemporary mass produced, auto-tuned form, has been a way of relaying the full spectrum of emotions. Helping us to connect, understand, and express, music's role in our lives serves a much deeper purpose than purely entertainment.

The presence of music in modern politics cannot go unacknowledged. Politics frequently intersects with music. As politics boils down to the determination of who gets what, many artists take to the airways to state their societal aspirations, either enthusiastically or subtly. What better way to express your idea of a utopian society than to sing about it for the masses to hear? Why waste an audience? It may also provide solution for artists with legitimacy crises who, wanting to shed the persona of a pop prince or princess, take up a message to provide a foundation for their artistry.

Dissect most songs and you will surely find a political statement. Do you like John Lennon? Listen to his song "Imagine." Prefer more recent tunes? Download Green Day's 2005 "American Idiot," which had Generation X-ers rocking to the lyrics "Don't wanna be part of a redneck's agenda." Anyone want to guess who they are referencing? Rap, which many contend is a smattering of misogynistic hate speech that glorifies violence and breaking the law, has its share of political statements. The eighties

rap group N.W.A. helped expose what they perceived as deeply imbedded racism within the greater Los Angeles community. Their lyrics reflected the angst of young Americans who not only believed that the needs of their communities were being passed over, but were troubled by experiences of police brutality, racial profiling, and a lack of economic opportunities. With their enormous success, these pioneers of the "Gangsta Rap" music genre would surely argue that their music ultimately led to steps to eliminate such inequities. Without music as a forum, these young men would have likely been dismissed by the masses as troubled "gangbangers," who's complaints were illegitimate. The unlikelihood of Dr. Dre and Ice Cube rolling up to a selectman's meeting, meant that the public would not receive their message in a traditional way- music interceded.

Hip hop artist Lil' Wayne, on his way to Grammy stardom, sang passionately against what he perceived as the government's neglect of his home town, New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina. Upon the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the U.S., at least one rapper had lyrics which included "my president is black." All of these statements are inherently political in nature. They are points of view on society and government that to some are acceptable, while at the same time unacceptable to others. They span many frontiers from foreign wars down to municipal policies, religion, and even sometimes education. And who, after listening to enough rap would argue that a preponderance of these men and women are against the promotion and legalization of marijuana as



*Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, [Nati]*

well as other banned substances? Tales of drug use are seemingly an integral part of this genre.

In terms of the social structure of the United States, many artists orient their content toward celebrating diverse lifestyles and castigating those who oppose or attempt to stand in the way. Pink, The Black Eyed Peas, as well as many more artists take up this sort of role. Artists present to the public music videos where homosexual or interracial couples are celebrated. While these tend to be less prevalent among mainstream artists, Christina Aguilera is one noteworthy example with her record "Beautiful." Additionally more and more music incorporates scenes depicting what the producers consider to be the hurtful nature of some of society's tendencies, particularly those associated with superficial standards of appearance and gender roles.

It soon becomes clear that most songs tend to have a liberal bent, but Toby Keith went against the grain with his own message. In one of his anthems for American pride, he sang, "We'll stick a boot up their ass, it's the American way!" He and other country music stars often incorporate what are considered pro-America, pro-military statements, with emphasis on maintaining the traditional American culture. Music is becoming less art and more controversy.

The fact is that music is now being utilized as the means for social advocacy and change, perhaps more than ever before. Whether or not this is needed or valuable social change is irrelevant to this conversation. What might appear as innocent songs can carry unspeakable power. People do not realize that the music they listen to casually on the radio or their iPods while exercising, walking to class, or lying in bed, amounts to the incursion of someone's beliefs and point of view on the listener's own mind. While you are concentrating on completing the last set of leg lifts at the gym, playing in your ears could be strong political statements that can and do affect the way you think. Those seeking entertainment are unwittingly exposed to biased and persuasive material, what some might categorize as industry-sponsored propaganda. While not wholly subliminal, these messages can crawl

imperceptibly through our ears and plant themselves into the decision making portion of our minds.

Who sponsors the musical content that we hear every day? Given the innerworkings of the nation's corporate recording industries, it is not conspiracy theory to say that massive record labels wield great power in determining which songs, and therefore which messages, filter into our ears. Talent alone won't get you on the Billboard charts. Dozens of people play a role in crafting and shaping popular music, long before it finally enters your ears. Keep in mind that what you hear has been censored.

Be warned about the subconscious power that constant repetition of music will have on the formation of our own beliefs. Songs celebrate individuality, something that sits in contrast from community life. They speak of the wonders of cities, which promotes urbanization. Again, this isn't about whether the message is relatively good or bad for the listener. They speak about the degradation of

**"People do not realize that the music they listen to casually on the radio or their iPods while exercising, walking to class, or lying in bed, amounts to the incursion of someone's beliefs and point of view on the listener's own mind."**

the environment, which promotes conservation. Are you sure that Toby Keith is

well read in Middle Eastern affairs? Are his statements oversimplifications and unrealistic? This issue is about music lovers being shaped by their music, which they likely hadn't planned on, as they may just listening to the song because it was in the top ten on iTunes. I'm all for music that promotes a discussion. It's only when there is an awareness of the situation that such discussion can occur. Otherwise it's Bono making a statement and you listening unabashedly. To say that these lyrics do not truly affect people is to underestimate the power of persuasion. Songs are hardly ever two sided. We need to distinguish between an artists' narcissistic need to be edgy from genuine expression about a fundamentally political or societal matter. We can't let the ethos of a celebrity overcome our intellect.

We constantly scrutinize news anchors and reporters who tell us what is going on in the world, newspaper editorialists who tell us what to think, or parents who advise us on all of life's matters. We don't, however, scrutinize our music. Music slips through as art and entertainment, when a large portion of the lyrics are politically influen-

tial. Music is frequently a forum to unleash one's angst. We should be sure to evaluate the purveyors of political messages in song lyrics as well as the sources or motivations of their angst before they are accepted as reputable sources.

These issues are not anecdotal or harmless. They are so pervasive that we should learn to filter ourselves, so as not to unknowingly infect ourselves with whatever comes with a catchy tune. We must be wary of artists who attempt to use their fame to perpetuate a certain message, like we would anyone else in media. We must realize that although we may like the song, we should not necessarily equate the same liking to its politically driven content.

For clarifications sake, I'm all for artists who stand for a cause. We all get sick of cookie-cutter artists singing manufactured songs to a bubble gum beat. In fact I tend to be against artists who do not take personal ownership over their works, or who say that their content it's for the people's interpretation, thereby lacking an intended message. If they are going to support a message they should stand by it, and if an interpretation of a song is not what they intended they should at least say as much.

Sorry current and aspiring musicians, but you are not who I turn to for my political opinions. These people are free to use music to make a political statement -- and why

shouldn't they, especially if it sells? As a public we must recognize that this is not the best place to get information. We should not confuse recreation and fun with a class on civics. When songs blow up the charts and become iconic, we take the gained legitimacy of the song and apply it to its political message, which may or may not be valid. We let our investment in musical fare taint a whole different and unrelated aspect of our lives. If political activism impels you, Kanye, a recent participant in We Are the

World 25 for Haiti, why not separate it from you music and speak about issues for longer than a chorus?

The solution is not to ban political music or to stop listening to it; their politics may very well be your own politics. The solution is to be critically aware of what you are listening to, its potential effect on you and how you get to know the facts. People should resist allowing

the cult of celebrity to determine how they feel on issues. Lastly, music should stay more toward the entertainment end of the spectrum, and less toward the political manifesto end, where Locke, Montesquieu and Marx occupy space. Some of us like music that has a message and rails against sappy love songs or sexually explicit rock and roll. I challenge you to remain cognizant of the music you hear and how it is intended to persuade you. Then after that, I urge you to just enjoy it!

-Windsor Lien, *Political Science* '12



Photo Courtesy of Creative Commons, chiarashine

## A Little More Conversation: Reshaping the Abortion Debate on Campus

This March, NU Right to Life faced a series of hostile attacks after hosting the University's first "Respect Life Week". The organization, seeking to promote a culture of life amongst the student population, found itself under fire from students who felt that Student Activities Fee (SAF) money should not be spent on what they considered to be biased political events. The Hun-

tington News, for example, editorialized that the use of SAF funding on pro-life events was a "misuse of power," and that it did not meet the criteria found in the SAF Manual that political or religious events be "educational." A Letter to the Editor a week or so later came from a student who declared that she tore down the Respect Life Week flyers she happened upon around campus. Other students

were more straightforward: a piece of notebook paper tacked to a flyer on my dorm's bulletin board read, "I have the right to choose. Stop using my Activities Fee to fund your personal agenda." It is unfortunate these kinds of emotional and irrational responses were so prominent, especially in reaction to a series of events intended both to promote the value of human life, as well as examine the issue of abortion in a serious discussion-based forum.

The events sponsored by NU Right to Life were neither rallies nor protests. Rather, they were reasonable, academic discussions exploring challenging aspects of the abortion debate – a debate worth having given the significant personal impact of the choice to abort and the long-term societal implications of legalized abortion. These events included a Pro-Life, Pro-Choice Debate, a luncheon to discuss the effects of genetic testing, a "Memorial of the Innocents" on Centennial Commons, a presentation by a former abortion doctor-turned pro-life advocate, and a comedy show to support the American Cancer Society. Even the one event that could be seen as more political than the others, the "Memorial of the Innocents", included a table that offered brochures and other educational information about abortion and alternatives for pregnant women.

Additionally, while it is true that the abortion issue cannot be fully separated from its political and religious context, it would

be ignorant to dismiss the personal moral components as-

sociated with the issue. Certainly, some religious groups, including the NU Catholics, are ardent champions of the pro-life movement; however, there was nothing inherently religious (or Catholic) about the events hosted by NU Right to Life. Support for a culture of life can also be viewed as a humanitarian issue that should transcend political and religious differences.

Simply because the pro-life movement is a minority viewpoint on campus should not disqualify it from receiving SAF funding. While "Student Appeal" is one of the characteristics of fundable activities in the SAF Manual, it does not follow that only those events that appeal to the entire student body, or even a majority, should be permitted. Indeed, another characteristic of fundable activities is

that they have "Experiential Value (e.g. educational, cultural, awareness)." The types of events that were featured during "Respect Life Week" offered such educational information about the medical implications of abortion and other related issues such as genetic testing.

Events supported by the SAF cannot always -- and do not have to -- please everyone. This semester, the SAF supported "Sex Week," which glorified casual hook-ups through its events and associated publication. Indeed, while some of the events offered educational information, such as recommendations about safe sex practices, the implicit promotion of a licentious lifestyle by other events during Sex Week was undeniable. There are many students on campus, albeit perhaps a minority, who disapprove of such a culture. Yet they receive no say, nor should they, on the use of funds for this purpose. As long as an event is well organized and offers the student body a valuable experience, whether its purpose is for entertainment or education, it should have the opportunity to receive funding from the SAF.

Abortion is a major issue nationwide with significant support on both sides of the debate. As such, pro-life advocates should not be dismissed as some fringe element. Rather than attacking NU Right to Life in a fit of anti-intellectual rage, those who disagree should take the time to examine their own viewpoints and listen to what the other

side has to say. Abortion is a complex issue that involves difficult choices

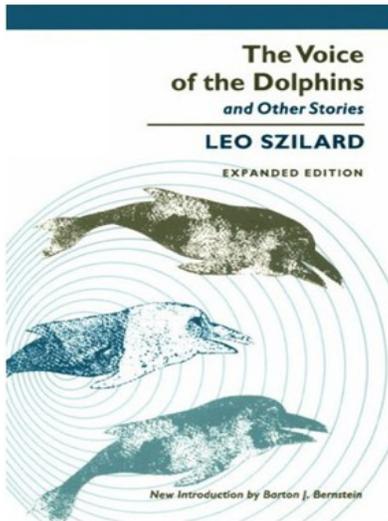
**"Rather than attacking NU Right to Life in a fit of anti-intellectual rage, those who disagree should take the time to examine their own viewpoints and listen to what the other side has to say."**

for individuals and policymakers. The pro-life group on campus was willing to invite discussion on this topic, and do so in a reasoned and rational manner. Supporters of abortion rights only inflame the debate by dismissing the pro-life movement and ignoring the moral gravity of the issue. As students at an institution of higher learning, we can, and should, do better. Regardless of my personal point-of-view, I see it as my obligation to seek to understand the other side's perspective. Events supported by the SAF can support the type of dialogue needed to achieve greater mutual understanding, and both minority and majority opinions should find time to reap its benefits.

- Matthew Cournoyer, Political Science '12

## The Voice of the Dolphins, and other stories

By: Leo Szilard - New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961



**T**he Voice of the Dolphins, by Leo Szilard, brings into question the many sociopolitical paradigms exposed at the height of the Cold War, since shuffled behind a red curtain stained with shapes of hammers and sickles. The hardheaded diplomacy of the 1960s clouds the vital questions which the ideological struggle was essentially based on: the

nature of man and the consequential social structure that best be-seats him. The fanatical, rogue communist leaders manipulated otherwise decent questions regarding political foundations for an optimal society. Regardless, the socialist idea and its representation remain one in the same to historians and political scholars of the 20th century.

Szilard pens a satirical fiction which is set in the backdrop of secret collaboration between top Soviet and American scientists who have miraculously discovered a way to decipher the dialect of dolphins, the most intelligent species on earth. Naming each dolphin after letters of the ancient Greek alphabet, the scientists decide to utilize the dolphins' vast knowledge and engage politically based philosophical discussions with them. This experimental scientific institution functions for over a decade, enthusiastically funded by a break through discovery by the dolphins of an algae-produced ingredient, which serves as an ingredient for natural birth control. Szilard emphasizes this ingenious solution and foreshadows a population problem that is plaguing much of the politics of the globalized world today.

Published in 1961, Szilard recreates an imaginary space for objective discussion while quietly revealing a tone of contempt towards the tensely molded shape of Cold War politics. However, the most important observation by Szilard is the ideological pursuits of humanity and the insufficient capacity of society, not the individual, to transform the heartfelt social ideal into reality by shedding light on the push and pull between freedom and submission. He also questions the superb ability for scientific exploration by comparing it to the escalation of human

ideology as the fundamental enemy of political thought. Written in a time during of pivotal social experimentation, Szilard alludes to the fabrication a neo-politick that now sought to extract its legitimacy via the transformation of the mind, soul and spirit into supreme, highly-moral, political agents. However, the development of socially destructive and craze-producing characterizations is a direct result of our Utopian political imaginations. The problem, Szilard argues, is in the social embrace of politics at the expense of scientific rationale. In the face of economically failing right-wing politics, and the loss of individual dignity to left-wing radicals, the world is left amongst chaos that resembles the most far-flung original purpose of political culture. The approach of politicians is deemed inconclusive regarding its means of attaining justice, whereas the collective conclusions made by the dolphins - the voice of science, the voice of reason - makes a new understanding of political tension. Szilard writes, "When a scientist says something, his colleagues must ask themselves only whether it is true. When a politician says something, his colleagues must first of all ask, 'Why does he say it?'; later on they may or may not get around to asking whether it happens to be true." That core problem is as true today as it was half a century ago; politicians continue to create legislation and format political regimes in accordance with statistically decorated assumptions that we live in a world full of rational agents. The truth of politics reveals a means to create peace amongst people who are naturally inclined to war, in the broadest sense of the word. Social movements are a highly static phenomenon and the demand for a 'right' and 'fair' state of existence serves more to conceal reality than make amends with it. So much of our legal system depends on a human characteristic to be rational, when it does not even exist. In administering justice we require evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, in preventing war we assume the individual voter to act as a rational agent etc. Notably, it is the very same qualities that make us human which impede our ability to be rational. The interception of different realizations throughout the growth of an idea, an individual, of a citizen, of a state only hint towards an appropriate policy being one that is open to the changeability of political culture and more importantly, of human growth. Our civil society today is made up of politically inclined people who foster an incompatibility to change.

Szilard argues the false conception that we are free, by asking all the right questions, including, "Would it be correct to assume that Americans were free to say that they

think, because they did not think what they were not free to say?" Szilard also poses the following scenario, "For the sake of argument, [say] that one third of the trustees [of a given political institution] are men endowed with imagination and two thirds of them are not so endowed. Does not the majority vote then automatically bar any imaginative project? And even if we accept, as the basic tenet of true democracy, that one moron is as good as one genius, is it necessary to go one step farther and hold that two morons are better than one genius?" The structure of our democratic institutions should continue to be questioned and observed critically for further development. Progress should not be hindered by history's ideological manipulation and propaganda schemes that emerged during the Second World War.

It has been the ultimate sociopolitical conflict for a self-denying vanity that emerged from the dreams of great leaders to believe in the ultimate good of humanity to fully understand the limit of our capacity for true and impartial rationality that our modern-day politics is based upon.

- Iliana Foutsitzis, *Political Science '12*



## Un Prophète

2009 French Film - Directed By: Jacques Audiard



The romantic allure of Paris often obscures American perceptions of French film. French cinema can be as gritty and moody as that of any other country. In recent years, critical favorites, such as Marion Cotillard's Oscar-winning performance in *La Vie en Rose* (140min, 2007) and the cult hit *Amélie* (122min, 2001), have allowed French movies to make the jump

into American mainstream culture. *Un Prophète* (155min, 2009), France's submission to the 82nd Academy Awards, is one work that has the potential to join the ranks of the aforementioned films thanks to the many accolades it has received on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

*Un Prophète* follows the narrative of Malik el Djebena, an Arab prisoner in a French prison sentenced to six years for an undetermined crime. Malik is portrayed by new-

comer Tahar Rahim, a young man with both the looks and emotional control of a Zachary Quinto (*Star Trek*, 2009)/ Josh Brolin (*No Country for Old Men*, 2007) hybrid. At the beginning of the film, Malik is young, weak, and illiterate. Despite this he is chosen by the kingpin of a feared subunit of the gang known as *Unione Corse*, which runs the inner-workings of the prison, to murder a fellow prisoner. The *Unione Corse*'s members hail from the island of Corsica, off of France's Mediterranean coast. This brutal gang is known for its unyielding love of violence and autonomy. Some conspiracy theorists have even linked the *Unione Corse* to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Malik finds himself at odds with the gang's Corsican members because of his North African heritage. They label him an "Arab Rat" and reduce him the role of housewife, forcing him to clean jail cells and make coffee.

Malik, at first wary of killing a prisoner, agrees to commit the act only after the gang teaches him proper technique and guarantees protection from any consequences. Malik slices the throat of the convict Reyebe, granting him the position of lieutenant within the Corsican gang but leaving him with haunting visions of the grizzly crime scene

for the rest of the film. Malik, with the help of his friend Ryad, learns how to read and masters the Corsican language, partly to help clear his mind of the murder. Ryad is released shortly after and remains a close ally to Malik from beyond the prison walls. Malik learns that Ryad is dying of cancer and swears to take care of Ryad's family once he is released from prison.

The kingpin assigns Malik more daunting tasks involving drug trading and illegal gambling. Through good behavior and the kingpin's omnipresent influence, Malik is granted day passes to leave the prison in twelve-hour shifts. While on the outside, Malik completes tasks for the kingpin and sets up his own small-scale drug trade with the help of

Ryad. The titular moment comes when Malik, while on leave, foresees and then survives a horrific car crash. While the rest of criminal community is left is awe of his ability, Malik secretly believes that his prophesying draws from Reyeb's unearthly influence over his life. Though

he continues to gain influence within the gangs of the prison, Malik finds himself increasingly unsatisfied with his choices in life. Malik comes to an ultimatum: continue in the life of crime from which he has derived a sense of purpose, or leave the underground crime rings in search of something more meaningful.

Jacques Audiard, the director of *Un Prophète*, has stated that this film has nothing to do with his vision of society but nevertheless, this film does represent a usually repressed vision of French society. While following a young prisoner who comes to learn about mortality, this film deals with several social issues currently plaguing France. Though France claims equality for all its citizens, many members of its North African community feel that French

society does not live up to the slogan *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Of the 65 million people who currently reside in France, nearly 5 million of them are Arab. In 2004, France banned the use of veils and other Islamic dress in state schools. French Parliament is currently debating proposed legislation that would ban the burqa, a head-to-toe garment occasionally worn by Muslim women, from many public places in France. (French Muslim women rarely wear burqas.) Much like Mexican immigrants in the United States, Arab immigrants in France are often accused of failing (or refusing) to assimilate. Some American politicians, such as Tom Tancredo of Colorado and Jim Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin, both members of the GOP, see the influence of Mexican culture and Spanish language as



*Photo Courtesy of IMDB*

a threat to the national American identity. A similar theme exists in French politics. Muslims occupy 3 of the 577 seats in France's National Assembly. Some members of the ruling Union pour un Mouvement Populaire party in France believe that building mosques

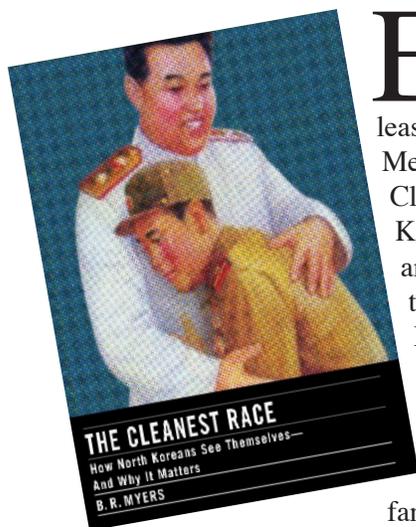
near churches or allowing women to wear garments as restrictive as the burqa or even a headscarf undermine French nationalism. In *Un Prophète*, the prejudice that Malik encounters due to his North African roots and the struggle that he endures to rise above this prejudice acts as a metaphor for the struggle of Muslims across France. It is this incorporation of modern French social issues with a gripping story of a boy becoming a man that makes *Un Prophète* worth watching when it makes its limited state-side debut on February 12, 2010.

- Erin Conrad, *Cultural Anthropology* '14

## The Cleanest Race:

*How North Koreans View Themselves and Why It Matters*

By: B.R. Myers - Melville House, 2010



Everything you think you know about North Korea is wrong, at least according to B. R. Meyer's latest book *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*. Shattering stereotypes that North Korea is the last communist bastion of the Cold War, Meyer's book looks at the regime's true character, which is far more sinister than com-

monly believed. Through his study of North Korean internal propaganda, Meyers reveals the racial narrative that underpins Kim Jong-II's regime, and shows how it descended from Imperial Japan, through its various twists and turns. The ideology depicts Koreans as a race who is morally pure, but not physically superior. As Meyers puts it: "To be uniquely virtuous in an evil world but not uniquely cunning or strong is to be as vulnerable as a child, and indeed, history books convey the image of a perennial child-nation on the world stage, wanting only to be left in peace yet subjected to endless abuse and contamination from outsiders."

The book, clocking in at a mere 169 pages, is a concise and interesting journey into the internal narrative of one of the world's most repressive and secretive regimes. Starting with a brief history of the state and its two famous leaders, Kim Il-Sung and his son Kim Jong-II, Meyer's quickly moves onto the central focus of the book: the incredibly bizarre, shockingly hagiographic, and sinisterly racist history propagated by the North Korean regime. A story packed both with the hilarious foibles of an administration trying to exalt its leaders to a pseudo-sainthood while keeping its conflicting stores straight, and of horrifying portents of the possibility of future conflict. In dealing with the conflicting nature of the roles Kim Il-Sung portrayed for himself, Meyer's remarks, "One may ask how a leader can pose as the embodiment of naivety on the one hand and a brilliant strategist on the other. In the 1940s and 1950s writers made ludicrous efforts to explain away this contradiction, claiming, among other things, that Kim's best ideas came to him in his sleep."

This serves as a perfect example of the farce inherent in the story the regime propagates to its people. However, the bizarre nature of the story makes all the more horrific a truly terrifying facet of North Korea, as Meyer's points out, "Many in the West, of course, continue to doubt that the North Koreans really believe in their personality quote. This skepticism derives in part from recollections of the double lives lead in the old East Bloc, where the average educated citizen feigned fervent support for his country's leader in formal settings only to joke about him behind closed doors. But this only goes to show how little the East Bloc and North Korea ever had in common, for the masses' adoration of Kim Il Sung has always been very real."

Although Meyer's book should provoke a major discussion on US and international policy regarding North Korea, and the future for diplomatic action in the region, *The Cleanest Race* falls somewhat short. After demolishing the basis for the current policy of sanctions, multi-lateral talks, and aid to the people themselves, Meyer's does not really provide any recommendations for dealing with the reality of this dangerous racist regime, which is even more problematic as most literature regarding strategies for peace with North Korea still operate from the flawed belief that North Korea is the last bastion of communism. Meyer's forces the reader to face the prospect that peace with North Korea might be impossible, "To the North Koreans the other is not just America, as so many foreigners believe, but the entire outside world, for if the child race is uniquely pure, it follows that no non-Koreans are to be regarded as equals."

*The Cleanest Race* is both an entertaining and important read. Alternating between hilarious absurdity, and the frightening depth of sometimes Naziesque rhetoric of one of the world's new nuclear power, Meyers is admirably able to keep the reader's attention with the tragicomic nature of North Korea. It should also help dispel the current misperceptions that underlie US policy regarding the state, and provoke a much needed discussion of methods to deal with the true nature of North Korea that are currently in to short of supply.

-Will Joyce, *Political Science* '12

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