Masthead
Letter from the Editor by Sona Wink
Bwecommendations by the Blue and White Staff

Blue Notes
A Strange Society by Sagar Castleman
Pomander Walk by Anna Patchefsky
To the Max by Will Lyman and Henry Astor

Anywhere but Here
Find the Kiss by Amogh Dimri

Feature
The Powers That Be by Iris Chen

The Shortcut
Autobiography of Pink by Aliza Abusch-Magder

Measure for Measure
Towards One Place, From Another by Miriam Lewis Mason

Features
Beta Males by Adrienne de Faria
Historical Markers by Muni Suleiman

Campus Characters
Vielka Ebedan by Briani Netzahuatl

ATSL
Is it Core? by Stephen Dames and Anna Patchefsky

The Conversation
Olive Nwosu by Victor Omojola

Postcard
Crossword by Sona Wink
Front Cover

BLUE NOTES

A Strange Society

Investigating campus's most ideologically diverse club.

By Sagar Castleman

Amidst the smattering of tutoring and soup kitchen tables manned by tired-looking upperclassmen, the John Jay Society's table at the New Student Orientation Program volunteering fair stood out like a sore thumb. Four enthusiastic young men dressed in formal wear sat behind it. They spoke to different people, amassing a bigger crowd than any of their neighbors. (It was unclear why exactly the Society was at a volunteering fair.) With an awed disbelief, my fellow freshmen asked the club leaders questions like "Are you conservative?" and received replies ranging from "Culturally, but not necessarily politically," to "We're the most ideologically diverse club on campus," (a claim echoed on the Society's website) to "Yes."

Just a week prior, we had been in our separate homes, scattered across the globe. Most of us knew only a few people at Columbia, and none very well. College still felt like a short vacation from which we'd soon return to our regular lives. We marched from one mandatory orientation event to the next and ate meals with students who were little more than strangers. Then we stumbled upon the John Jay Society: "Columbia's premier undergraduate debate organization." Who were we, next to this whirlwind of enthusiastic intellect?

I chatted with one of the leaders, who seemed delighted to learn that I was a prospective English major with a love for Dostoevsky. Looking back, I'm not sure why I gave him my name and email. I'm certainly not conservative. But there was an appealing air of friendliness and community that surrounded the leadership. Later, I would understand that this aura existed in most clubs. But I was new and had seen no other clubs yet, and the John Jay Society knew that.

A couple hours later, I received an email from "The Right Honorable Chief Whip" of the Society. He invited me to two debates that would happen that week and informed me that the dress code was "a jacket and tie, or the equivalent for ladies."

On Thursday night, I was just leaving when one of my suitemates—confident, Texan, and very progressive—asked me where I was going. After answering him, he decided to come along. He knew about the Society because all freshmen knew about the Society: their fliers were everywhere.

We arrived at a crowded classroom in Hamilton, where men in suits and women in dresses bustled about, chattering and laughing. I had some flashbacks to high school model UN, but these swiftly dissipated with the appearance of an enormous man with an enormous sword, the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in unison, and the distribution of a fancy alcoholic drink accompanied by a speech on its origins and contents.

Eventually the debate began, and a girl started telling us why we shouldn't judge the past with our present values. She declared that the Founders were "men of their times," castigated the 1619 project, and quoted a Hillsdale professor. The speech was mostly mainstream Republican rhetoric, and I had to admit it was a little disappointing: the suits, the drinks, the Latin, the sword, all for something that could have been daytime Fox News. My suitemate, though, seemed stunned and started discreetly recording the speech on his phone.

I looked forward to hearing the opposing speaker, who was referred to by all as "the Classicist," but he began his speech by saying that he mostly agreed with the previous speaker and then belabored the fact that the words "evaluate" and "value" come from the same root. He went on too long; people soon started

to exit the space and go to “the back room.” My suitemate and I joined them, learning that this was the place where society members drank and chatted informally. We met a girl from Hungary who extolled Viktor Orban for a few minutes, at which point we decided it was time to leave.

But our way to the elevator was blocked by three of the four friendly leadership members, who suddenly didn’t seem so friendly. They asked my suitemate if he had gotten an invitation. “No,” he said. “I just came along. Not a problem, right?”

“Actually, it is,” replied The Right Honorable Chief Whip, who stood in the middle.

“Ah well, my bad,” responded my suitemate. “It won’t happen again.”

“Well, there’s one other thing,” said one of the other men. “Did you record anything you heard tonight?”

“I did,” said my suitemate, with his typical Texan confidence.

“Then we ask that you delete it immediately,” said the Society member gravely.

My suitemate complied, also deleting it from his Recently Deleted folder. He then elbowed past them, got into the elevator, and left.

The members turned on me. I apologized for bringing someone with me, and The Right Honorable Chief Whip told me that he had no doubt my suitemate was a “bad actor.” I felt like I had wandered into somebody else’s life and so I left, shaken.

As I walked in a daze back to my dorm, I wondered why a society so committed to free speech wanted to keep their own discourse so secret. I wondered what they worried would happen if my suitemate had a recording, and I wondered if they really believed that they were the most ideologically diverse club on campus. Did they recognize how strangely pretentious their practices were? Did they fear being ridiculed?

I never learned the answers to these questions. As soon as upperclassmen arrived on campus, the club disappeared: the fliers were gone, they were no longer recruiting, and they returned to their own. I never got another email from the Society. Sometimes I see members around campus, chattering and laughing just as they had during that debate. I usually smile at them and go on my way, that surreal night from NSOP week permanently etched into my memory.

Pomander Walk
A trip down memory lane.
By Anna Patchefsky

The first shipment of Emma Straub's *This Time Tomorrow* arrives at Philadelphia's Head House Books sometime in the middle of the summer with a familiar thud. Unlike the other boxes filled with Big Five-published Indie-Bestsellers, this one brands a message: "Do Not Open Before Release Day." I attempt to maneuver the box behind the counter, a book lover's purgatory. It's a geometric puzzle I don't have the arm strength to complete.

After a couple days, *This Time Tomorrow* takes its rightful place on the new releases table. All books can be returned except for those with an author's signature. The copies of the books behind the counter are all signed. Their fate is stamped: There's no going back.

Finally ringing up my employee discounted copy, I flitter past a trifecta of epigraphs and begin reading. *This Time Tomorrow* is a story of do-overs: of rewriting, editing and revising the relationships and past we don't yet have the retrospect to appreciate. Alice Stern, Straub's quasi-avatar, searches for a new start away from the eternal sterility of the hospital where her science-fiction-writing father lays dying. She celebrates her fortieth birthday and, in a fit of forgetfulness, falls asleep at her childhood home in Upper West Side's Pomander Walk. Alice arises to find herself transported back to her 16th birthday. As she moves around the fantastically designed apartment adorned by '90s pop culture relics, she is enamored by her father's youth just as much as her own. Alice's Pomander Walk is home to debauched nights, messy bedrooms, and breakfast cereal father-daughter grumblings.

For the past 102 years, Pomander Walk has stood as a private co-op complex nestled between 94th and 95th. The sliver of Tudor-esque private homes is visible yet inaccessible to commuters passing through the nearby transit hub. Yet, as Alice's time machine, Straub unlocks the residential fantasy for those who cannot afford a down payment of their own.

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On a recent evening, I wandered down to Pomander Walk, tired of late nights at Butler and taking Straub's advice: "The way you spend your days is the way you spend your life." I can spend my life wandering purposefully.

Its block slopes downward, the Hansel and Gretel decor sitting opposite to beckoning golden arches like an architectural oxymoron. Through Pomander Walk's locked gates is another lifetime. The walk itself consists of a narrow courtyard lined by two rows of buildings facing each other. Flora and fauna decorate its central lamp-lit path; fairies seem to whisper in the laid brick, exposing the portals of New York.

How can one enter this place without purchasing one of the million dollar apartments listed on Curbed? My finger hovers over the intercom. *Will someone let me into this slice of paradise?* Lost in the whimsy of a New York I don't yet know, I lower my finger, put my coat back on, and decide to return to Broadway and 116th.

I don't know where my copy of *This Time Tomorrow* is. It's lost in the lineage of friends and mothers of friends and sisters of mothers of friends who love that the book's romance is metropolitan—entirely enmeshed in the landscape of the city. Alice finds herself revisiting the secret haunts that make New York

an intimate home worth traveling back to. *What isn't a love letter to New York? Come remember. Let's be nostalgic together for a place you are still learning about*, the book whispers to its reader.

Alice returns to the present with a newfound appreciation for the relationships that have slipped past her. She imagines a graph which plots on one axis how much people's personalities shift after high school, and on the other, how many miles away from home they end up.

My data point requires me to take the I-95 or the Northeast Corridor every time I travel home. And everytime I embark on that journey, finding myself back in Philadelphia, I make the same memory-induced trek Alice does.

I return home frustrated that I don't have all my memories. I see myself as the plothole in my parents' aging and my sister's waning youth. But then I'll come back to the present, returning to the Upper West Side, knowing just where I'll be tomorrow: waiting for an elevator that I should not take, greeting my doorman, and still recommending *This Time Tomorrow* to whoever might benefit from a stroll through Pomander Walk.

To the Max

In a particularly rough year for NYC renters, love isn't enough to save precious neighborhood spots.

By Will Lyman, with additional reporting by Henry Astor

I feel my age for the first time in Max Soha, the sister restaurant to the recently shuttered Max Caffé. The restaurant has been a fixture of the neighborhood since 2001, serving Italian cuisine on the corner of W. 123rd Street and Amsterdam Avenue. When rent increases forced Max Caffè to close in August 2022, Max Soha absorbed the lunch and coffee menu from their counterpart. Sitting in the newly conglomerated restaurant, I see all the vestiges of the former café: the overbearing wooden mirror, the laminated index cards that announce the lunch specials, and the familiar taste of the lattes. If I close my eyes, I can picture getting drunk off their weekday wine special and stumbling onto Amsterdam Avenue with my ex. But when I open them, I'm reminded that I have lived in Morningside Heights long enough to see a restaurant live and die.

Owner Tony Bruno was left with little choice but to close the beloved spot after rent increased to $16,000 per month during the summer. The closure resounded throughout the Columbia Community as students, alumni, and local residents mourned the local fixture. To combat the loss, Max Soha, which operated under the same owner and was perched on the same block, absorbed café service and many long-time staff members.

"It's relocated here for now. Lunch is café, dinner is restaurant. That's the best option we can find so far," explained Marie, who has worked at Max Soha since last April.

The closure of Max Caffé came at the end of a painful year for New York renters. According to a StreetEasy study, rent growth outpaced wage growth by 23% in the month of Max Caffé's closure, representing the widest gap since the 2008 financial crisis. On top of that, the New York Rent Guidelines Board approved a 3.25% increase for one-year leases and a 5% increase on two-year leases during 2022. It is the highest bump in rent prices in nearly a decade. These surges come as the city recovers from the pandemic, which caused high vacancy rates in rental units as people fled the city. According to landlords, people flooding back to the city is what has caused prices to skyrocket. Yet, Lane Brown, a journalist at New York Magazine, questions if this supposed rebound is actually a market manipulation tactic used by landlords to recuperate lost revenue.

The change in the city is palpable. Renters are scrambling to keep up with price hikes, leading to the closure or relocation of local spots in favor of corporate chains like Blue Bottle, Starbucks, and LuluLemon. While living and working in the blocks above 120th, I have watched local businesses slowly disappear since coming to Columbia. Bar 314, which used to sit next to Max Caffé, moved to Lasalle and Broadway in October to replace Bettolona, which closed. Neighborhood favorite Lincoln Fried Chicken shut down, leaving customers to write poems in its memory on Yelp. Apprehension strikes me as I walk down Broadway: nothing is guaranteed. Love may not be enough to save your favorite local spot.

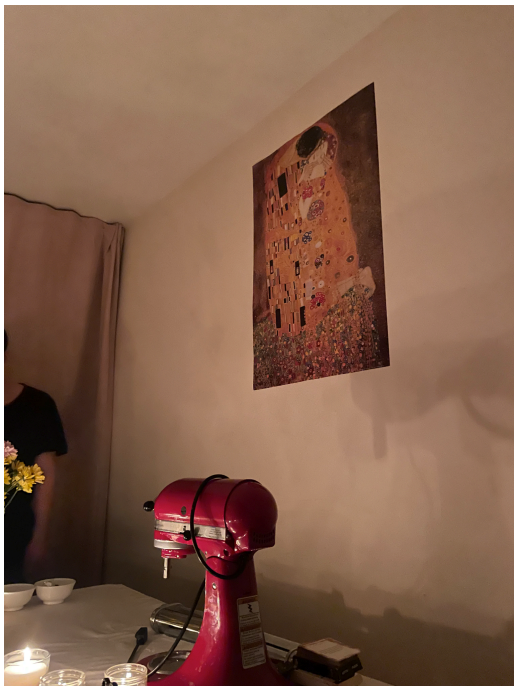
At Max Soha, I feel that I'm a patron of a world already beginning to be left behind. Whether this is true or just a symptom of melodrama, I'm certain that something must come of it. This means spending money at local favorites when you can, or supporting organizations like ROAR (Relief Opportunities for All Restaurants) that fight for incentivized lease restructures and fair hourly wage practices in New York restaurants and cafés. For now, I'll be buying my next latte from Max Soha.

Find the Kiss
Amogh Dimri

When it comes to my admittedly limited experience in the underground dining world, no laundromat speakeasy or lavishly decorated gas station basement has rivaled the allure of Find the Kiss, affectionately nicknamed Baci (Italian for "kisses"). The not-for-profit exploit, founded by Nichi Pandey, CC '23, seizes the elusive middle ground on the dining spectrum between a friend's dinner party and a hot new downtown restaurant: a supper club.

An emergent "genre of dining," the supper club departs from the informality of casual dinners. Baci's candlelit ambiance, painted glass tableware, and exquisitely plated courses indicate as much (by contrast, my most recent dinner party with friends featured paper plates with Lightning McQueen grinning beneath my meal–their dishwasher was broken). The supper club, however, also replaces the oft-stuffy restaurant atmosphere with the intimate atmosphere of a bedroom. The novelty is this: Nichi encourages guests to "come as guests, leave as friends" and books separate parties on the same night in the hopes of forging lasting connections between them.

So, what makes Baci so "underground"? To reserve a spot at the weekly Friday and Saturday dinners, you must fill out a Google Form that they release every Monday in their Instagram bio (@findthekiss) to enter the lottery. The form asks about more than potential food allergies; questions range from your hometown and major to a childhood dish you are nostalgic for, to your favorite restaurant in the city. Using your responses, Nichi concocts a menu that is unveiled course by course during the meal.



If selected to "find the kiss," you will receive an email disclosing the location of the clandestine dinner and its associated costs. Thus, five days after I eagerly submitted the form, I found myself trekking through freezing wind to the supper club on Riverside Drive with my plus one, Fergus, who had no idea what to expect.

Note: Besides Baci's staff, all names have been changed.

7:34 p.m.: Fergus and I arrive at the Find the Kiss venue with a Cabernet Sauvignon in hand, an offering for the chef and fellow diners. We meet Ingrid—a first-year and Nichi's

apron-adorned sous chef for the night—who joined the Baci team after heeding its call for applicants on Instagram. She assures us we picked a good night to attend.

7:46 p.m.: Our co-diners arrive. Two Barnard seniors: Meera, a confident and gregarious woman from Bangalore, India, and her roommate Jessica Scarlet (she insisted on the seductive pseudonym), a funny and kind-eyed Californian. A few minutes later, Jack, a soft-spoken yet discerning sophomore arrives. We know each other from the newly revamped Culinary Society and smirk at the coincidence of experiencing Baci the same night.

7:51 p.m.: As Nichi leads the way to his bedroom, Fergus remarks to me that he understands the hype now. Upon entry, you are greeted by Baci's intimate setup: five seats around a candlelit table, with an adjacent KitchenAid for Nichi to perform live demos of his meal prep. A print of Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* hangs on the wall.

7:57 p.m.: Wine bottles signed in Sharpie line the room's perimeter on the floor; Nichi explains that after each dinner, guests sign the bottles as permanent encapsulations of the night's revelry. He begins playing music from a playlist titled *Baci*, but the queue isn't working and Nicki Minaj's *Super Bass* comes on. Jessica Scarlet and Meera bob their heads in enjoyment but I help Nichi with his aux troubles. We steer the queue towards Nichi's designated Baci playlist consisting of Frank Sinatra, Italian 80s hits, and jazz piano.

8:00 p.m.: To overcome the initial awkwardness of dining with strangers, Nichi introduces the night's activity for us between courses: *Let's Fucking Date*, a card game with questions intended for first dates. The questions are categorized according to sexified baseball terminology—first, second, and third bases plus a home-run pile—with increasingly suggestive elements interwoven. If we managed to finish all the questions, Nichi also offered us the X-rated edition: *Let's Fucking Fuck*, for maximum clothed intimacy. The game's aim, Nichi tells us before disappearing into the kitchen, is not for us to "fucking fuck" but to break the ice and get to know each other on a personal level—although romantic entanglements beginning at Baci are not uncommon, he adds. Meera proposes we follow the game's rules by rating each others' answers in a binary: It either sucks or it fucks.

8:18 p.m.: Nichi and Ingrid bring out the first course, a cucumber and dill salad topped with creme fraiche and salmon roe. A bed of leafy arugula surrounds the scallop shell that the salad sits on. The delicious flavors and diverse texture of the cucumber creme and soft salmon eggs elicits *oohs* and *aahs* from the diners. Ingrid makes her way around to serve champagne on the house–a welcome treat.

8:23 p.m.: Nichi begins the first tableside demo of the night with his homemade butter. Served on a hardwood board, he dips his honeycomb in honey and drizzles it over the butter for us. Topped with fleur de sel (Nichi's salt of choice) and edible flowers, we lather it liberally onto Maryland cornbread rolls.

8:30 p.m.: We finally make it to second base. The first question: "Who is one cartoon character you'd fuck?" Jack answers first: Prince Zuko from Avatar the Last Airbender. His brooding aggression is sexy, we agree. The choice fucks.

8:35 p.m.: Nichi returns for another tableside demo, this time with his caesar salad, made "the real way." He presents egg yolk, garlic, anchovies, dijon mustard, and capers, on a wooden board before mixing them in a bowl with romaine lettuce, vegetable oil, and extra virgin olive oil. Meera, the resident vegetarian, gives up her restrictions to give it a try. A good dish to break tradition for; the saltiness of the anchovy and capers pairs nicely with the icy fresh lettuce for a satisfying bite.

8:45 p.m.: A question in the second base deck prompts us to ask Meera if she plans to stay in the US after her looming May graduation. She thinks for a moment, then tells us that she's on the fence. She loves the energy of New York, but Bangalore offers her a calmer pace of life.

8:52 p.m.: Nichi carefully feeds pasta dough through the KitchenAid's reams, revealing the thin noodles we'll later consume.

9:09 p.m.: Nichi emerges from the kitchen presenting pasta al limone with fresh cracked black pepper and parmigiano reggiano. The lemon's citrus contrasts with bold peppery bites, creating a dynamic tension. Nichi, who lingers to see our reactions, is not disappointed. In a senior-to-senior question, Jessica Scarlet asks him what his plans are after college. Nichi tells us he's been offered a job in his native town Baltimore at a restaurant recently opened by a dining collective in a repurposed bank.

9:28 p.m.: Fergus gets a string of questions from the third base pile that he's not keen on indulging, including "Name something better than an orgasm." He answers the latter that times like this at Baci, meeting new people and eating great food, *are* better than sex. The group agrees. The choice fucks.

9:31 p.m.: The peak of the night arrives: Nichi brings out a roasted lamb rack, seasoned with rosemary and garlic, with a

balsamic reduction drizzled on top. The succulent meat is cooked a tender pink throughout, with crisp and juicy fat along the bone and a balsamic tang that balances each bite. Meera gets a savory mushroom dish as a substitute with similar rosemary and garlic notes. The mushrooms' supple exteriors and garlicky crevices make me question my carnivorous habits.

9:42 p.m.: Fergus draws another card: "Compliment Me." We loop around the table swapping compliments: Apparently, the group admires Fergus' smile and Meera's confidence. Fergus calls Jessica Scarlet "a true Renaissance woman." Jack confesses that when he first met me he was intimidated by me; I laugh and say I felt the same about him. Jessica Scarlet looks at me and says, "You have senior level rizz." Did I blush after that? Probably.

9:56 p.m.: Nichi brings out dessert, a Lisbon Chocolate Cake with fresh cream. The light, bouncy cream harmonizes with the deliciously rich chocolate. I savor it slowly, partly because of the good conversation and partly because I'm so full. The card game gets interesting as we bring out the X-rated edition, *Let's Fucking Fuck,* with the question: "When did you first say I love you?" If Nichi wanted intimacy, the build-up from each consecutive "base" certainly worked. Jack reveals that he first said it to his parents when he left for college. Others add that even in their serious relationships, the three words haven't come out yet. This is seemingly a regret, as we come to the consensus that "loving is not that deep" and that you should let yourself fall in love as much as possible. The revelation should have felt awkward with people I met two hours ago, but didn't.

10:05 p.m.: Nichi grabs a chair at the table and chats with us at the end, also dropping off some shortbread for us to go. The shortbread, I later learned, is a concoction of lemon wafers, orange and chocolate biscuits with honey-glazed cashews, and dried cranberries. We goad Nichi into answering some of the X-rated questions he encouraged us to try out as we delve into the life of our chef.

10:16 p.m.: Meera and Jessica Scarlet have a birthday party downtown and say their goodbyes, promising to invite the three of us over for dinner at their apartment. I laugh to myself at the thought of them munching on Baci's shortbread at the club.

10:36 p.m.: Fergus and I sign our wine bottles, say our goodbyes, and head out. The moment the elevator door closes he says, "Wow dude. Just wow." Fergus, to whom I may have undersold the Baci dining experience, confesses that he thought the dinner would be more of a "spaghetti and meatballs situation at your friend's house."

3:05 a.m.: I find myself waking up in the middle of the night with energy and I devour the shortbread. Its citrus wafer and candied nut contrast keep each bite light, with a refreshing orange zest aftertaste. Unsurprisingly, it fucks.

Menu:

Maryland Cornbread, Honey Butter, Fleur de Sel, Edible Flowers

Tableside Caesar Salad (Romaine Lettuce, Garlic, Anchovies, Capers, Dijon Mustard, Egg Yolk, Extra Virgin Olive Oil and Vegetable Oil)

Pasta al Limone, Parmigiano Reggiano, Fresh Cracked Black Pepper

Roasted Lamb Rack with Rosemary and Garlic, Balsamic Reduction

Lisbon Chocolate Cake, Fresh Cream

Lemon Wafers, Orange and Chocolate Biscuits, Honey Glazed Cashews, Dried Cranberries.

FEATURE

The Powers That Be

The mechanisms behind the Morningside Institute.

By Iris Chen

One windy January evening, my friend and I walk over to Riverside Church in search of what it means to be "Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty." This predicament, the subject of the Morningside Institute's talk for the night, draws in a crowd of students.

One attendee has come all the way from Princeton and tells us he is here on behalf of the James Madison Program. Despite the fact that JMP was exposed in 2015 for being funded by right-wing dark money, at the Institute the association only warrants curiosity. Other students ask him about Princeton's conservative publications and mention the policing of free speech on Columbia's campus.

Slightly uneasy, my friend and I soon realize that the talk is concerned with a very specific type of religious beauty. We read some Antiphons and Psalms and get a rather ostentatious taste of Bach. Afterwards, people raise their hands to describe the deep suffering that foregrounds what they believe to be the summit of aesthetic beauty: the crucifixion of Christ. They lament the modern world's brutalization of innocence and childlike purity. They proselytize canonical works of art and music and lacerate their own shortcomings in the face of the supposed beauty, kindness, and goodwill that these works embody.

As we sit there, my friend and I cannot help but feel that we will never be subject to their particular plight of inheriting a civilized standard of beauty.

Our discomfort, while telling, does not amount to much as criticism of the Morningside Institute. But one need not look any further than the Institute's tax record to find that they are funded by America's neo-fascist, Catholic, right-wing elite.

Perhaps it is hasty to conclude from here that the Institute's hands are tied, but it is obvious that they are somewhat bound. Their website's masthead omits several of their key members; affiliated organizations and funders are notably absent. Even still, first-time attendees will pick up on the Institute's foundationalist, Catholic focus. On their events calendar, "Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty" is followed by a reading group on the works of Alexander Schmemann, a 12th-century Eastern Orthodox thinker, and talks on former Pope Benedict XVI's famous Regensburg Address.

The obscurity surrounding the influence of the Morningside Institute's funding throws a wrench into this kind of religious inquiry. If their talks are indeed conducted in earnest, why the secrecy?

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When I raise the question of the Morningside Institute's purpose to its director, Nathaniel Peters, he employs the vague language of humanism. Their mission, he tells me, is to "help students and faculty investigate important aspects of human life and what is good for us and for our society, in a spirit of intellectual friendship."

In practice, this humanistic inquiry takes the form of bi-weekly dinner seminars. Some have a religious focus and are predominantly hosted by Morningside Institute scholars. Others, hosted by public intellectuals or Columbia professors, focus on writers like Iris Murdoch or topics like Bad Music and Bad

Books. Occasionally, the Institute will also offer eclectic cultural outings—a hike in upstate New York, a free trip to the Opera, or a tour of a Met exhibition.

Peters explains that these curated cultural experiences aim to transform the Morningside Institute into "a place where it's natural to question the nature of human beings, their place in the universe, their relationship to God, or the transcendent, moral structures out there."

It is this beating religious heart which really sustains the Institute's conception of the good life. Peters' parents were at some point Roman Catholics, and he grew up attending weekly Protestant church services. His upbringing eventually culminated in a doctoral dissertation on Christian thought and ethics. As his Ph.D. concluded, a friend approached him with a job opportunity at an organization called The Foundation for Higher Excellence for Higher Education which was "helping to fund the effort" to start what is now the Morningside Institute.

Though there is little publicly-available information about the Foundation for Higher Excellence for Higher Education—their website lacks an "about us" page or a public list of staff or directors—their financial records position them within a vast web of Catholic right-wing ideological initiatives. In 2020, the Foundation spent nearly ten million dollars funding eleven other like-minded institutions at Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, John Hopkins, Princeton, Rice, and Yale.

The same man serves as both the CEO of the Foundation and president of the Morningside Institute: Luis E. Tellez.

Tellez holds many titles in the world of Ivy League adjacent right-wing think tanks, including president of the Witherspoon Institute, board member of the American Principles Project, and advisor to the James Madison Program, now widely acknowledged by Princeton's students and national publications like *The Atlantic* to be "a conservative beachhead within the liberal Ivy League." *The Nation* reported that JMP receives much of its funding from groups like the Association for Cultural Interchange, the Clover Foundation and the Higher Education Initiatives Fund, all of which are conduits to Opus Dei.

Opus Dei is an evangelizing arm of a diocese within the Roman-Catholic church whose list of controversies includes bodily torture, indoctrination of young members by older authorities, fascist politics, use of mind-control tactics (as recounted by ex-member Eileen Johnson), imposed diets and restricted sleep schedules, and an extensive list of sexual offense allegations that have together earned them the reputation of an abusive cult. Tellez serves as president of the organization's Princeton chapter.

When I attended an Opus Dei meeting at Murray Hill Place in February, the women I met there—all their meetings are gender-segregated—were all familiar with the Morningside Institute.

In 2020, the Morningside Institute received over $250,000 from the Foundation for Higher Excellence for Higher Education. Since then, they have moved out of their initial location in a Harlem WeWork office to their current room inside Riverside Church. Institutions like the Foundation have been quick to distance themselves from red money. But this money is undeniably what allows them to exist.

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The Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education is only one organization within a sprawling consortium of funders who sustain a network of conservative institutions, organizations, and think tanks.

In 2016, political scientists Theda Skocpol and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez studied how "extra-party funders" like the Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education and Opus Dei shift resources away from the Republican Party itself; in the twelve-year period from 2002 to 2014, the GOP's share of resource control fell from 53 to 30 percent, correlated with a six to 26 percent rise among extra-party funders.

Another player in this space is The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. Hacked internal documents revealed their plan to "construct state-by-state networks of activist groups to win support for its conservative agenda from coast to coast" after successfully defending Wisconsin Republican Gov. Scott Walker's recall election in 2012. They contribute $1,000,000 annually to the Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education.

Terry Considine, a board member of the Bradley Foundation who has been termed the "Bigger, Darker Rightwing" Koch counterpart, also operates his own Considine Family Foundation. They contributed $50,000 to the Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education in 2020.

The largest players in this "extra-party-funder-phenomenon" have historically been Charles and David Koch. As of 2016, the Koch brothers funded 76 percent of third-party conservative organizational budgets.

The Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education receives an annual million-dollar grant from the right-wing Diana Davis Spencer Foundation. This foundation, once called "the biggest pot of conservative money you've never heard of," is associated with the Koch-funded American Legislative Exchange Council.

Unlike individual donors who sustain scattered causes, the Koch brothers' inherited wealth has allowed them to exert wide influence across political spheres. Beyond a robust donation profile, they host conferences where conservative political donors get one-on-one time with elected politicians like Mitch McConnell and Tom Cotton.

The Kochs also have deep roots in American academia. Their conservatism unfurls under discreet labels like "free-market theory" research, courses on "Law and Economics", and the names of historical figures like James Madison.

This subtlety is key to their mission. Koch advisor George Pearson was caught on tape saying that "traditional gifts to universities … didn't guarantee enough ideological control" to the right-wing cause. To achieve control, he said, "it would be necessary to use ambiguous and misleading names, [and] obscure the true agenda."

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One might ask, "So what? Shouldn't people be allowed to fund the causes they support?"

Perhaps. But not all funders are made equal—some are made wealthier, better connected, and more ideologically stringent. Students and professors alike should also know just what it is they are about to experience.

When Nathaniel Peters was just starting out as the director of the Morningside Institute, he approached Roosevelt Montas, the former director of Columbia's Core Curriculum. Montas recalled Peters expressing a "broad interest in working with the Core."

In situations like these, Montas tries to keep third-party organizations "at arm's length."

"You're careful about them using your name," he tells me, given that it is difficult to know "how the groups are being funded and whether they have some kind of agenda."

But eventually, when Montas attended a Morningside talk as a panelist, he came away impressed.

"What they're doing is interesting," he said. Setting aside questions regarding their funding, he argues that, "as long as the programming remains intellectually integral, and are not pushing either policies or ideas that I find morally problematic," students should feel comfortable going.

Cautiously, one might agree with Montas' invocation of open-mindedness. The Institute's guest-led discussions such as "Intellectual Survival: Columbia After Leaving" and "The Dangers of Creativity" are often intriguing. Rare one-on-one, student-professor connections mushroom inside the Institute's small, carpeted room in Riverside church.

However, these professor-led events are what legitimize the Morningside Institute's more ambiguous political positions. The Institute uses these high-profile figures to attract and nurture students who attend events under innocuous pretenses that mask George Pearson's aforementioned goals of "ideological control." The fact that the content of their events is conservative or Catholic is not so much the issue as is the fact that their programming strives toward "control" of their students' political ideology—and that it does so in the dark.

Ultimately, this combination of factors comes back to harm the Institute. Many students who suspect that more lies underneath the Institute's conservative Catholic associations simply stop attending.

Martina Maximovich, CC '24, argues that those who regularly attend the Morningside Institute "probably also back the values and the funders of the Institute." As such, she does not associate with the people there.

Tianyi Ding, CC '24, academic chair of Columbia's undergraduate "Great Books" club Symposium, tells me that, at the Morningside Institute, it "just doesn't feel like you can express things without feeling a little bit intimidated." This is especially true for talks led by the Institute's own faculty wherein like-minded students and faculty form a bulwark for their shared, classical intellectual interests.

Perhaps, then, the Institute is not so insidious. It attracts those who strongly agree with its ideology and deters those who do not. However, without outside scrutiny, the insular environment that remains will only incubate the Institute's relationship with its funders. Moreover, as my friend and I experienced with the "Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty" talk, analogous opinions make for lackluster, alienating conversation. By definition, discussions need perspectives. The invocation here for more diversity is not necessarily limited to skin color or ethnicity—as my friend and I witnessed, Opus Dei's women's retreat was mostly filled with women of color. A diversity of opinion, rather, which is correlated with cultural and economic factors, is essential.

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For institutions whose humanistic curricula might attract attention from right-wing initiatives like the Morningside Institute, vigilance is required. This, of course, implicates Columbia's crown jewel, the Core Curriculum. The Core Curriculum's commitment to classical thought makes it susceptible to expropriation

by groups like the Morningside Institute that hide behind pretensions of highbrow classical and theological inquiry. Other Morningside-affiliated groups like King's College, a Christian university which offers course credit for attendance of Morningside Institute events, and sister-organizations like the James Madison Program put up similar facades, if not their own version of a "great books" core program. They posture as subtle, rare, and coveted allies of Columbia's humanistic, classical cause but harbor a firm commitment to right-wing politics.

The saving grace of Columbia's Core might be that it situates these texts within a contemporary context that considers the misogyny or antisemitism from the likes of Plato and Foucault as potent and indivisible concerns which must be addressed. Organizations like the Morningside Institute, on the other hand, see them as anomalies, or even elements to be preserved.

In its haste, institutions such as Columbia have failed to maintain an appropriate level of suspicion. All the while, conservative actors across the country have latched on and have begun to milk professors, students, and facilities dry.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Autobiography of Pink

By Aliza Abusch-Magder

Emerald rupture, to ruby, pervades
Three rings and pub tab remain, remade

That which the light touches, lush
Raw optimism: flesh flushed, affection gush

Virgin hair, never cut
Yet to see the fictive ‘fuck’

Fried fragments, pink streak
Unknown, ever inhale pique

Avril lavigne, Victoria Secret stink
The Girlfriend video of which I always think

She hates to like it when I call her baby
White lace, pink cotton, savory-sweet panties

Poking nip, prick the tit
Rotten sex, but just the pit

Sold ourselves as sluts
knowing we were mutant mutts

THE SHORTCUT
Towards One Place, From Another
By Miriam Lewis Mason

Doors open. Crowd flows into the open space, just hydrodynamics. Bodies forced together in a poorly made puzzle, spread legs and pointy elbows. A couple whispers privacies to each other and everyone can hear. A construction worker, too aware of his fatigue to sit down, stains the pole he holds with grease. The police presence. Friends gossip so loudly, airing out drama without much air. A baby cries in her carriage, and a mother begins the labor of soothing her. And Clara is dying in the corner. Doors close.

Mechanics thunderstorm on steel. The stars of the station fade to velvet underground. Clara has a whole block of seats to herself. Bag taking up the seat beside her; medicine, drugs, stimulants, whatever else are rattling bones within. It's the stench of rot that keeps her isolated. Or maybe it's that look, that aura of someone who knows the void in their soul too well. The kind of mind that could write a novel in an hour but could never write it down, that could solve all the world's crises but not lift a finger. A state of one on the verge of death or dreaming. Same thing. A thunderstorm ends and stars reappear in the lights of a new station.

Doors open. A trio of musicians enter. Like all good street performers, they sing the heart. Each note crafted to make the listener ache, each motion at once pathetic and ostentatious, a performance that magnetizes the eye and makes it weep. The train, packed, is eyeless. The baby stops crying. Teens turn up the monologue of their favorite influencer. Clara doesn't know that she's dying. A college kid pretends to read a book. A tourist is wonderstruck at the magic of a vague urinary smell. Doors close.

Wheels spin, on the train and in her mind. To be fair, Clara knows she's dying at some level. Just not most. This time, she's dying of second-hand smoke tarring up her lungs. This time, she's dying of hunger, simply no food to eat and no one can spare. This time, it's the carbon spewed from every man-touched surface of the globe. Or was it tumors. Or some deeper cut. This time, she is dying of the slow rot, the decay of her cells and DNA and all that fragile shit that binds us to the grave as soon as we're bound up after birth. Whatever. Don't look at her. Wheels stop and–

Doors open. Folks flow in, folks flow out. A man starts speaking. Loudly. On and on he goes about sports, about the subway, about anything and nothing at all, desperate to feel less alone. Everyone is talking in this car; his murmurations are said to the deaf. A murmuration, the bewildered pigeon who walks calmly into the car is not. Two lovers, drunk, start to make out. It's sickly sweet, like the wine that haunts their breath. Clara is still isolated. The man in a suit more expensive than her world is on the phone, his call more powerful than a couple silly feet of concrete and a weak cell signal. Maybe it's the stubble on her, almost visible. Maybe it's her shoulders, wide enough that she was once called Atlas. Maybe it's the snickering, that menacing sort of talk. Maybe that's why she always sits alone. Doors Close.

The pushing and pulling of movement. Clara's presence is fragile. Her femininity is inflammatory. Anything she does, that could be it, the thing that causes some stranger to snap, some asshole to anger, some knife to drink from her flesh. Every act, the thing that lets that h-word fly, that cruel transcription of laughter, that minor death: "he." Every moment she exists before others is a practice in the serial and successful management of risk. Always on her mind, the end. Always moving closer to it. The numbers have been looking bad. She's been gambling more and more. Skulls in every darkness in her vision. Scythes in every bit of metal. She just wants to cross, out of sight, out of mind, out of this fucking train.

Doors Open. An atmosphere of glancing eyes, shuffling feet, silent slurs sitting on the tips of tongues. The tense waiting for any shift. No one gets on, no one gets off. A regal old lady continues to make a throne of

her seat; a businessman is lost in a dream of a meaningful life; laughter ripples across the car. And under the stars that are the shitty station lighting, Clara dies. She dies. Management failed. Risk, rewarded. And what changes? She dies. A man flips the page of his newspaper, looking for something noteworthy. The woman across from him shakes her head in frustration; her phone won't load. A lapdog in a backpack whines when it smells the mortuary. And who notices? She dies. The droning bass of some top 40 song bleeds out of a pair of headphones. A student apologizes for the bulk of their backpack. A baby, soothed, falls asleep. And what of it? Clara is dead. Doors close.

FEATURE

Beta Males

On our complacency with a popular system of abuse.

By Adrienne de Faria

Go stand outside this Friday. Or Saturday. Or any weekend for that matter. Take yourself to 114th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam. We all know this street well: It's one that's central to campus life. Carman Hall looms, naive and bustling. Fraternity houses pulsate as crowds beg for entry. The doors of Special Interest Communities open and close. 114th Street is alive.

Beta Theta Pi's fraternity house stands a gangly five or so floors. It seems to be crumbling: coats of garish red paint crack to reveal the facade underneath. They're the only fraternity allowed to paint their house–they own it and are unassociated with the University. The comedic recklessness of Beta's decor almost distracts from what lies inside: just one of many chapters built on "Developing Men of Principle for a Principled Life." But we've all been inside. Many of our first weeks at Columbia were likely punctuated by "Men of Principle" looming over an overcrowded, open fraternity party, our plastic cups filled to the brim with jungle juice. Or, what we expect to be jungle juice, given that the fraternity prides itself on its "responsible conduct, integrity, mutual assistance, and intellectual growth."

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One early September night, Catherine (a pseudonym) took the 1 train uptown to visit her friend at Barnard. As freshmen, they both wanted to experience a real fraternity party, the kind of affair that pervades college lore. Like many freshmen, they ended up at Beta together but were split up when Catherine wanted a drink. Shadows casted on anonymous faces made it difficult to identify anyone. She ran into a Beta brother while she was wandering. He handed her a red cup, which she sipped on casually. Then he asked Catherine to go upstairs with him. She declined and left the party. After that she completely blacked out. Hours later she woke up sick and confused. Catherine explained that she must have been drugged; she had only had a few drinks that night.

Now-deleted posts from @cusurvivors detailed the culture of sexual and intimate violence that, resulted in five accounts of sexual assault associated with Beta in 2020. Beyond Beta, @cusurvivors revealed that fraternities represented 58% of the assaults reported to the account—a whopping 44 total. All fraternities had at least one assault associated with them. This is not to condemn Columbia fraternities alone: One 2007 study reported that men in fraternities are three times as likely to commit rape.

To make matters worse, the institutionalized secrecy surrounding sexual assault that characterizes frat culture is rampant within Beta. While all current brothers contacted declined to comment, three Beta alumni referred to one, and only one, incident in 2018 in which a brother was dismissed due to sexual assault allegations. However, the fraternity's handling of this case lacked assertiveness, reported Dylan Dameron, CC '20, and Ben Greenspan, CC '19.

"There was very much a blind eye policy," Dameron says. The dismissed brother just "stopped showing up, " and Dameron later learned that he was a habitual assaulter. "Why didn't they call a meeting?" he wondered. "They're associated with us and we allowed it to happen. They never acknowledged it."

Greenspan, who was on the executive board at the time, promised that there was a unanimous consensus that the assaulter shouldn't remain part of the fraternity. However, he cited legal issues with simply

"kicking out" members. "We couldn't legally, without a trial, expel him from the fraternity, but we made it clear he wasn't welcome."

According to Fraternal Law Partners, a firm that specializes in fraternity and sorority law, it is perfectly legal to expel a member from a fraternity as long the violation is clearly communicated and both a trial and hearing are held. But trials are timely ordeals that involve organization and participation by the executive board and do not always suit the urgency of some violations. Perhaps it is unsurprising that social ostracization is preferred.

Trials and proceedings constitute the ethical infrastructure of Beta, yet these procedures are not easily accessible to non-board members like Dameronz and non-affiliates. Whenever an outsider gains access to the Beta microcosm, they are immediately sanctioned. Conversely, insiders can be exiled swiftly and without warning. Irene (they/them, a pseudonym), a Barnard upperclassman, explained the degree to which secrecy is upheld within the Beta social sphere. After Irene was sent a seemingly harmless screenshot from the Beta group chat, they were banned from all social events, turned away from the house at the door, and blacklisted indefinitely. The member who shared the screenshot was kicked out of the fraternity. "It's their house, their rules, they'll treat you how they want," Irene remarked. "Even if you think they're a bunch of better guys, it's a system." Irene explained that a rule of Beta's is that all messages are contained to their sacred group chat.

Brothers themselves are not exempt from Beta's extreme social penalties. Dameron recalled a drinking game during pledge week where all new Beta members were lined up, passed a handle of vodka, and expected to down the bottle by the time it reached the last pledge. "You're not allowed to sit out," he remarked. Whenever he vocalized issues, other brothers regarded him as a buzzkill. He left the fraternity in his sophomore year. As of 2021, almost 70% of Columbia's Beta Theta Pi chapter supported some form of hazing for new members.

While Beta is perhaps campus's best-known fraternity, it is just one of many in a network of Greek organizations that perpetuate sexual assault. Phi Gamma Delta (commonly known as FIJI), for example, was once exiled by the administration in the '90s for their reputation of misconduct. @cusurvivors cited FIJI as having a campus-high of 12 sexual misconduct cases. Recruitment Chair Diego Ampudia, SEAS '24, declined to comment.

Beyond sexual violence and social coercion, fraternities epitomize social exclusion. Kappa Delta Rho, Columbia's "athlete frat," has faced multiple counts of racism and misogyny beginning in 2016 when screenshots of messages sent by members of the wrestling team—many of whom were in KDR—were leaked. The screenshots revealed countless messages degrading women, particularly women of color, on their physical appearance, including the use of racial slurs and epithets. Protests erupted outside the KDR house when the screenshots were made public. As recently as September of last year, Khi, CC '25, told me that he watched KDR deny dark-skinned Black students entry to their party one night as white women and light-skinned people flew by. After being denied entry himself, Khi lingered on 114th as a young girl stumbled out of the party and collapsed. Public Safety came. When Khi told one officer that they should make sure no drugging had occurred, he remembers the officer smirking, as if to say *this is nothing new*.

Columbia and Barnard students tend to either disbelieve that such violence occurs on campus or are deterred by the impenetrable secrecy upheld by these groups. But many exposés have divulged the corruption of fraternities, and many groups have formed in reaction. @cusurvivors, @abolishgreeklifecu, and No Red Tape have caught student attention, exposing horrific stories of sexual assault, physical abuse, and racism within Greek Life. Yet these organizations seem to have lost their momentum:

@cusurvivors has deleted their posts, @abolishgreeklifecu hasn't posted since 2020, and No Red Tape hasn't been active since 2015.

Partying and drinking in college is inevitable. Unless there is rampant social transformation, sexual assault will be too. So why have fraternities, spaces we know are riddled with this sort of violence, become a fixture of so many of our college experiences? What makes us keep going back?

The draw of Greek Life is understandable: it's exclusive and comes with benefits. Alumni networks can be vital resources for students' careers. Beta itself has earned a reputation for garnering advances in coveted finance and consulting careers for its members. In a world where friendships between men are contentious, fraternities provide a dependable social space. At a school where most housing is at best damp, brownstones with their own kitchens, bathrooms on each floor, large rooms with windows, and large shared living rooms offer a desirable alternative.

Further, on-campus parties offer an easy social alternative to elite New York City nightlife, especially for low-income students. Combine $2.75 for a subway ride downtown, $50 for an outfit, upwards of $20 for two drinks, $60 for a good fake ID, and $50 for an Uber home, and going out becomes far less feasible. Fraternities are a default option, more open and available.

But in a space so unrestricted and student-run, questions of accountability abound. Social experiences are entirely controlled and defined by the rules of the (often non-diverse) house members. Free flowing alcohol lowers the inhibitions of all who partake. Fraternity houses are an entirely male-controlled space, often leaving women and queer people vulnerable from their moment of entry. Jennifer Hirsh, a Columbia professor of sociomedical sciences, explains that the prevalence of fraternities as party hosts "effectively gives men control over party spaces and the distribution of alcohol, and funnels younger women into spaces controlled by older men." In male-dominated spaces, an unchecked upstairs bedroom can become a space for exerting control over a vulnerable partygoer just as easily as it is as space for privacy.

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Greek houses are central to life in Morningside Heights. They are closer than many residence halls and Special Interest Communities. The example of Beta demonstrates the active value placed on fraternities. Wide open parties draw in freshly transplanted first-years, doors crowded with herding brothers and itching students. Beta routinely offers showy gatherings that are rarely shut down by Public Safety. In fact, Public Safety cannot legally enter Beta's house. Beta's ownership of its brownstone endows them the rights and protections that institute more secrecy.

This stands in stark contrast to brownstones that house affinity groups for marginalized students such as Indigehouse, Q House, and Casa Latina. They rarely host parties because Columbia makes their contracts feel like a favor. On December 2, an Indigehouse party was shut down by the hall director. At the beginning of the fall semester, Casa Latina hosted a party where the fire alarm was pulled; the group stopped hosting for fear of losing the space. A Black Residential House was only just confirmed for next year. These groups had to fight for space while fraternities have had space guaranteed for decades through probations and reclamations. Students of color applying for brownstones have all had to present their case for needing a space to Columbia's administration, a process which places groups in competition for access. While marginalized communities fight to obtain and keep space, fraternities mostly made up of wealthy, white men hold on to that which they were handed years ago, in spite of a proven inability to use it responsibly.

Our complacency with fraternities is not just due to convenience; rather, it is long-embedded in our social hierarchies. It often feels impossible to distance oneself, especially at the beginning of the year, from the pull of a fraternity party. Your friends are rushing and your other friends are attending, all participating in a strained attempt to find and maintain social lives. Fraternities provide a straightforward remedy for freshman insecurity. If future Columbia generations choose to wear the fabric that participants in Greek Life have sewn, the cycle is bound to continue.

FEATURE
HEAD
The Historical Markers project grapples with the university's ties to white supremacy.
By Muni Suleiman

On April 19, 2022, Reuters ran a feature on the University's newly announced historical markers project, titled, "Columbia University to publicly mark its historic ties to slavery, racism." The piece included statements from Thai Jones, a Columbia professor and historian of social movements in the 20th century. Jones teaches the seminar Columbia and Slavery and spearheaded the commemorative project. Historical markers acknowledging the University's history of slavery and anti-Black racism, he announced, were to be placed in Furnald, Hartley, John Jay halls, as well as in 50 Haven Avenue (formerly known as Bard Hall) at the Irving Medical Center. As a result of President Bollinger's University-wide review following the May 2020 murder of George Floyd and in collaboration with the President's Commission on the History of Race and Racism at Columbia University, the University Libraries, and the Columbia University and Slavery Project, the historical markers project's advocates aspire to spread awareness about how the histories of these residential halls hold continued importance for Columbia.

Research for the historical markers project emerged from the Columbia and Slavery seminar. The course, which has been taught by Jones, Eric Foner, and Elizabeth Blackmar, among others, offers a flexibility and collaboration uncharacteristic of history classes at Columbia. Student interests guide the learning and knowledge production process, regardless of prior experience in archival research. "People come to this class who are already interested in thinking about Columbia critically," Jones told me. "They want it to be better. They want to learn more about it. They want people today to know about the past here."

Since the seminar's first iteration in 2015, discoveries have transformed the perspectives of its professors and students alike on the historic association of Columbia's campus and its affiliates with slavery. For example, the first time Jones taught the class, Jordan Brewington, CC '17, identified over 50 digitized advertisements for wanted fugitive slaves owned by Columbia affiliates, making clear the investment that such actors had in maintaining slavery.

The course also enabled Olganydia Plata Aguilera, CC '23, to hone the skills and experiences she needed in order to practice descendant-led archaeology. She employs this method to help undo the historical harms of the field, and to "do internal work" as a First-Generation Latina student contending with her own relationship with the University's discriminatory foundations. After Plata Aguilera took the class in the fall of 2021, Jones selected her alongside three other former students to contribute to the historical markers project in its early stages. The initiative was part of Jones's push to make the research conducted in the Columbia and Slavery seminars more accessible to the public.

Alongside Jones and Plata Aguilera, the team includes Vice Provost and University Librarian Ann Thornton; Columbia and Slavery postdoctoral research fellow Joshua Morrison; Tommy Song, CC '20, Journalism '22; GSAPP doctoral student Charlette Caldwell; Stella Kazibwe, CC '22; and Trey Greenough, GS '22. Jones thought it was important to include past students, given their first-hand experiences in dorms and their understanding of students' concerns regarding Columbia's impact on the surrounding community.

Each student took responsibility for one residence hall marker or initiative. Unlike the other students in the cohort, Plata Aguilera focused on Barnard's campus because her research centered on Zora Neale Hurston's challenges with residential life during her time as both an undergraduate at Barnard and a master's student at Columbia. The initial story of Barnard housing, Plata Aguilera explained, is one of

"absence." She analyzed Hurston's time at the University and examined the wider lack of historical knowledge concerning the Black women who followed in Hurston's footsteps—specifically, those who began applying to live in Barnard residence halls in the 1950s and '60s. "How do you make a residence hall marker when there is no physical place where they lived because either they were denied housing explicitly or because they couldn't afford it?" Plata Aguilera asked.

The three undergraduate Columbia dorms were more straightforward to research. John Jay's story centers the paradoxical status of the building's namesake, both an abolitionist and a slave-owner. Hartley's focuses on Langton Hughes' experiences of anti-Black racism while attending Columbia. Furnald's contextualizes the 1924 cross burning committed by the Ku Klux Klan on Furnald lawn as a premeditated attack against Frederick Wilson Wells, a Columbia Law student and one of the first Black students to reside on campus. It also highlights Columbia's decision to formally introduce segregation in response.

Researching the histories of these halls has posed different challenges. Stella Kazibwe—one of the recent alumni on the historical markers team—explained that the University's archives perpetuate the historical biases of their curators. Certain details about Columbia's history of anti-Black racism and connections to slavery, she said, are significantly harder to find than others. For example, after a discussion with Professors Jones and Blackmar, Kazibwe decided to research the Columbia maid strike of the 1970s, which responded to anti-Black behavior from the majority wealthy, white male students who relied on their labor. However, most of the information available on the subject in the Columbia archives exists in the form of articles published by the *Columbia Daily Spectator,* which preserve only the perspective of said students. Though information on the strikes exists, Columbia's archives demonstrate a lack of effort in preserving the maids' perspectives. Kazibwe managed to piece together parts of the strikers' stories from documents stored in the *New York Times* and NYU Tamiment Library archives.

Students in the Columbia and Slavery seminar found the scope of their research limited by the silences in Columbia's archives."The art of historical preservation is very elitist and rooted in white supremacy," Kazibwe explained. "To deem something worthy of historical preservation means that this voice is important enough that future generations would benefit from knowing about it."

Indeed, most students ended up researching white men. As one of the few Black students in her seminar, Kazibwe felt an imperative to do "the Black women research" when her peers chose topics with more accessible information. The disparity in the availability of archival material between white men and Black women is a direct consequence of the latter being overlooked in archival work, causing student researchers, in this case, to avoid them in favor of "easier" work. The Columbia maid strike was important to Kazibwe as she wanted to explore narratives of Black women at Columbia beyond simply their oppression, instead focusing on the efforts that they have made to overcome it. While her research was "emotionally taxing" compared to her peers, Kazibwe asserts that it was worth it because of her belief in finding more information on Black women at Columbia.

Columbia's archives have gaps in other notable areas, especially regarding its early history. The University has moved twice since it was founded as King's College in 1754, and its Morningside location is now the third in the school's history. It was thus difficult to locate structures or graveyards, for example, relevant to the enslaved people connected with the University. "Columbia having moved twice has meant the loss of a very significant part of the early archives, which didn't make the move," Jones said. He, Morrison, and Plata Aguilera all suspect that this is largely how the University has avoided conversations about its legacies of anti-Blackness and slavery.

Student researchers have, however, persisted in uncovering the enslaved labor that cultivated the land prior to Columbia's installment in Morningside Heights, as well as the slave-owning families who owned that land and who would go on to become Columbia affiliates. "Even though Columbia was not here yet, we know that this was farmland, pasture and orchard land worked by enslaved people," Jones said. "I would love to see a monument telling that history."

Every year, in concluding the Columbia and Slavery course, students collaborate on a list of "demands, suggestions, recommendations" that are presented to the president of the University. After, a formal email summarizing student presentations hits the inbox of the Office of the President, following up on this list. Past demands have ranged from curriculum reform to even removing the names Columbia and Barnard from the institutions, but the most consistent demand has been to simply increase awareness among the Columbia community about the history of the campus—in particular, the names that emblazon its edifices.

For a while, the administration's response was disappointing. Plata Aguilera described one experience she had in the Office of the President, where, as her Columbia and Slavery cohort presented their research on the history of enslavement on campus, their words jarred against "blueprints of expansion into Harlem" that the office also houses. President Bollinger "was 10 minutes late and he came with his shirt unbuttoned. The entire time he was slouching," she added.

Kazibwe has witnessed the response from the Columbia administration change over time. While she appreciated the opportunity to conduct and present the research, it seemed as if President Bollinger and other administrators did not want to acknowledge the Columbia and Slavery project at the risk of garnering "bad press." The 2020 resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement put new pressure on the Columbia administration to acknowledge the project, as communities demanded accountability for the perpetuation of anti-Black racism and beneficiaries of slavery from various institutions, universities included.

Columbia is not the only University that has moved to acknowledge its institutional histories of anti-Blackness and slavery. Namely, the University of Virginia's Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, on which Charlette Caldwell also worked, became a point of reference for Columbia's historical markers team. Dr. Joshua Morrison, who did his graduate work investigating the individuals who were enslaved at UVA, has co-taught the Columbia and Slavery seminar and is also involved with the historical markers team as a post-doctoral fellow.

Building on the original research of Eric Foner, the founder of the Columbia and Slavery project, and recent undergraduate contributions, Morrison is working to track down all officials of King's College and Columbia College that invested in chattel slavery and the over 1000 enslaved people they trafficked from 1750 to 1820 (when slavery was banned in the state of New York). He hopes that this work can expand the knowledge-base available to the Commission on the History of Race and Racism and increase visibility, generating institutional resources and support.

It is difficult to spread historical information and raise difficult questions in a way that engages undergraduates "without being too in their face," Morrison said. "We recognize that these are dorms that you're living in, you're trying to live your life, and maybe having slavery rubbed in your face every 30 seconds isn't a super positive experience." Plata Aguilera and Kazibwe shared concerns about the triggering potential of the messaging for Black students who may already have knowledge of or experience anti-Black racism on campus. They would be reminded not only of the history of anti-Black racism in their

residential halls but also of the ways in which things have not changed. The hope is that the Commission will be better-equipped to balance these concerns.

Morrison also hopes that, in the future, the historical markers project and the Commission on the History of Race and Racism will question the role of pre-existing monuments and statues. For example, the sizable Hamilton and Jefferson statues outside Pulitzer and Hamilton Halls, respectively, act as historical markers on the Morningside campus. Ironically, the larger-than-life Jefferson statue also sits outside of Furnald, not far from where the 1924 cross-burning incident occurred.

"There's this intentional disconnect between what kinds of people are revered on campus and what kinds of voices get to be the loudest, and who gets a big statue versus who gets a small plaque," Kazibwe said. "It's really symbolic of what's valued on campus." Given that the Jefferson statue was added to the campus as a gift from Joseph Pulitzer's estate and public subscription, for Plata Aguilera, "it's this reminder that these stories aren't dead." The team generally agrees that the Jefferson statue should be removed.

Specifically targeting residential halls is a more recent development. After President Bollinger's announcement that Columbia University's Irving Medical Center's Bard Hall would be renamed because of Bard's history as a slave owner, the decision prompted a broader reconsideration of the names emblazoned on residential buildings. "People connect in an especially significant way with the place where they live," Jones explained. "They deserve the opportunity to know the history of the spaces they inhabit. People who had lived at Bard Hall and didn't know that history felt a really deep sense of betrayal. That was the impetus for this project."

The initial goal set in April 2022 was to have all of the markers up by the end of 2022. But a slow bureaucratic process bounced the students' research among committees for approval and delayed implementation. The first of the undergraduate residential historical markers was placed in Furnald Hall on Feb. 17. Jones anticipates that all of the markers will be in place by mid-March. In their current form, the existing markers are screen displays mounted on TVs that project the students' research for the respective residence halls. They will serve as temporary displays for a projected 1-2 years while the team develops permanent markers.

The less than ideal transience of the digital stand-ins are comparably transient and easily removable compared to metal plaques. As Jones shared, however, the lengthy production timeline prompted a compromise in format. Supply chain problems that have made obtaining the materials for permanent installations difficult. Jones, however, believes the digital format to be beneficial in terms of student engagement, and will give the team the flexibility to alter the content of the permanent plaques in response to feedback from residents and other observers.

The current markers give a fuller picture of Columbia's history with anti-Black racism and slavery by adding to preexisting signifiers. Specifically, Hartley already has a plaque commemorating Langston Hughes on the 10th floor; one difference between that marker and Hartley's new one is that the location on the 10th floor makes it inaccessible or out of sight for most. Moreover, it focuses only on his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, leaving out any mention of the strife Hughes experienced during his time at Columbia.

Due to President Bollinger's creation of the Commission on the History of Racism at Columbia led by Professors Ira Katznelson and Mabel Wilson, Jones does not anticipate any other bureaucratic delays to the timeline. The project itself was, however, time-consuming, and finishing the non-digital markers may take years. For this final iteration of the project, discussions continue regarding location and whether to

register the future plaques with New York State or establish them privately with the Columbia administration.

After Ann Thornton's close collaboration with Honey Sue Fisherman, the Assistant Vice President of Housing Services & Student Center Operations, the team placed the digital markers in the lounges of residential buildings. They decided that the front of the buildings would be overwhelmed with foot traffic from residents, food delivery services, and other students who use the buildings' amenities.

John Jay, Hartley, and Furnald Halls are all currently predominantly occupied by first year students (although beginning in the 2023-2024 school-year, Hartley will be primarily occupied by sophomores). The fact that the halls are primarily for first-year students is a coincidence; nevertheless, these historical markers can seriously impact first-years' understanding and perception of Columbia early in their college journey (especially considering Hartley's additional connection to Black history through the Malcolm X Lounge).

A question then arises regarding the intended audience for these residential historical markers: How will faculty, staff, and other Columbia personnel, who have, at best, limited access to dorms, ever see them? Moreover, security guards, facilities, and dining hall staff, who are primarily Black and people of color, spend significant time in those halls. Plata Aguilera pointed out how troubling it might be to sit at the security desk for 12 hours watching students brush past a display on slavery's continued impact on Columbia's campus.

Still, the lounges seem best-suited to the project's intentions, at least as far as Jones is concerned. He believes placing the markers in the lounges grants them significant visibility in places where people congregate.

Plata Aguilera pointed out the challenge of garnering the attention of a distractible student body. For her, the project's priority should be to make histories of anti-Black racism and legacies of enslavement "as undeniable as possible, so they cannot be ignored."

The historical markers project seeks to sink its roots deeper into the consciousness of the student body. Kazibwe and Plata Aguilera both expressed interest in having bigger events for the permanent markers when they are installed, especially in collaboration with Black student groups on campus, namely the Black Student's Organization and the Barnard Organization of Soul & Solidarity. Notably, BSO and other Black affinity groups which form the Black Residential Space Collective received the first residential brownstone entirely dedicated to Black students at Columbia this February.

Jones hopes this project will lead to the eventual installation of informational displays at every relevant campus building. Up next, he said, should be Havemeyer. Campus tours frequently identify the building as a famed filming location for *Spider-Man 2* and the home of the Department of Chemistry. However, as Jones said, "the Havemeyer family owned Domino Sugar, they enslaved people, they purchased sugar from forced labor in the South across the Caribbean."

However, broader critiques concern whether or not acknowledgements or symbols are even enough to contend with Columbia's legacies. These criticisms primarily ask if the project allows the Columbia administration to deflect from conversations regarding reparations and continued contributions to anti-Black racism via gentrification. "I would totally agree with the idea that this is not enough," Jones said. "I never for a second thought that the point of these markers is to somehow release Columbia from

the responsibility for this history … the first step is a step of information." Jones hopes the conversation will lead to "any number of institutional transformations."

For now, a television sits perched on wheels in Furnald's lobby, ready to share its story to passersby. On the marker's first day, a few rogue visitors strayed from a campus tour to observe the marker. Furnald freshmen glanced at the screen while eating lunch as a means of filling gaps in their conversations. Other students stopped for a moment before resuming laundry or other tasks; some stayed, even sat, for the full nine minutes of the presentation. One went as far as scanning the QR code at the end that leads to the Columbia University and Slavery website. After fading to black on Columbia's decision to formally institute segregation, the video loops and Frederick W. Wells' story returns to anyone willing to listen.

CAMPUS CHARACTER
Vielka Ebadan
By Briani Netzahuatl

When I met Vielka Ebadan, CC ’23, it felt like a Saturday morning. Truthfully, it was a sunny Friday morning, but the sounds of salsa (El Grupo Tambo’s 1982 album “El Muerto Borracho” was playing on vinyl) and their text to me beforehand, asking for help cleaning up post a night out that ended at 3 am, was reminiscent of the quintessential Saturdays in my Latinx household: music on blast, bright and early, sweats on, and a mop in hand. Plants adorn each nook and cranny of Ebadan’s Q House single; they remind me of the Pothos at my house that’s somehow still alive after 17 years, adding a sense of familiarity and welcome as I enter the room. As Ebadan fixes up their bookshelf, I notice favorites like Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, LitHum classics like *Crime and Punishment*, and staples of African-American literature like W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* (they’re an African-American Studies concentrator). While I browse the shelves, they sip a cup of black coffee with a dash of sugar, straight from Variety Roasters, although I notice the Cafe Bustelo can in their kitchen. We discuss our weekends as they apologize for the “mess,” which consists of an unmade bed and two shirts on the floor. “Salsarengue” was the ‘last night’ mentioned—a night of salsa, merengue, and dembow at Bar Jade in Bushwick.

I had gone to “Suero de Amor” on the Thursday prior for a celebration of Carnival at Rebecca’s bar in Bushwick. After scarfing down tacos from La Lupe nearby, I had entered the venue to find a small crowd gathered by the DJ booth. The space was washed in a deep pinkish-purple light, and there was no stop in the dancing. Ebadan wasn’t coming on until midnight, so they, ever the gracious host, mixed and mingled, sipping on a rum and coke as they worked the room. They offered to buy me a drink (“Put it on my tab oomf”), but I opted for a warm cup of tea, given my slightly sore throat. That didn’t stop me from dancing or from singing along with the crowd, screaming over hit after hit from classic icons from Aventura to newer artists such as Bad Bunny. The energy was already high, but when Ebadan went on, launching into El Alfa’s “La Mamá de la Mamá,” the dynamism of the room soared even higher; this momentum never faltered even as slower songs by Romeo Santos and other bachateros, Karol G and fellow reggaetón stars, hit the queue. Ebadan would look onto the crowd, packed into the tight dancefloor, and take in all the smiles and laughter, the singing along and moves to the beat. It was, as my mom would call it, a *noche of perreo (pura diversión!),* in a small bar nestled on Bushwick Avenue.

Dedicated Latin nights offer rare opportunities for bars or clubs in New York City to play music solely in Spanish, uninterrupted and sans requests. Ebadan’s foray into DJing began around August of 2021, when a lack of Latinx parties–specifically parties where queer people could feel safe and comfortable– stood out to them. With friend and later frequent collaborator Diogene Artiles, CC’22, they compiled a list of potential places to play, mapping out venues within a certain radius. Their desire to have spaces where people could go and listen to the music of their childhood pushed them to start reaching out to places. I saw the smile on their face before I heard their laughter. “We went on a journey. . .like it was giving scavenger hunt.” Eventually, they heard back and booked one of their first-ever sets at Paragon in Bushwick. Going into a techno and house-heavy space, there was an expectation to play those genres. They played reggaeton and dembow despite their nerves. The set was a massive success.

Ebadan doesn’t fit into or follow the many mythologies built around DJs and nightlife. They described their first night in Paragon’s basement as “wholesome.” They don’t feed off of the sheer size of crowds or the devotion of fans who will follow them from club to club. Moreover, it’s not about clout, or money—which they stress to me is definitely *not* a lot—but “creating space and taking up space and opening doors for others.”The audience was filled with friends, and there was no barricade or cage separating them from the crowd, placing them up, above, and away in an impenetrable fortress. They

prioritize joy—rich, pure happiness—for queer, Black, Latinx communities. Joy, they feel, is a *right*, not a privilege, and figures in their dedication to making—and demanding—room for these communities. Rebecca's, the bar that held "Suero de Amor," has Latin nights every week, and they've seen shifts towards prioritizing inclusive, Latinx-centered nights elsewhere. Bars, clubs, and restaurants, they emphasized, "are those third spaces that literally keep communities together amidst gentrification, amidst erasure."

When I asked Ebadan what goes through their head during a set, they scrolled on Spotify to play the portion of The Black Eyed Peas's "The Time (Dirty Bit)" that repeats "Dirty Bit" over and over. We were cutting up, but eventually they admitted that they hate performing; it makes them incredibly nervous for a few reasons. Beyond stage nerves, it's the pressure of ensuring everyone has a good time, which makes "it hard being in that position where you want the attention to be on everybody and on the space." They don't feed off of the sheer size of crowds or the devotion of fans who will follow them from club to club. Their goal is that everyone has a good time, whether it's expressed by freestyling, jumping off the walls, a little sway, or simple head bobs.

Ebadan's always been very perceptive and caring, constantly checking in with people. Since our time together in John Jay and LitHium our freshman year, I've never spoken with them without doubling over in laughter, gasping for air. They're as thoughtful as they are hilarious in academic and social spaces; they consistently speak with intention and authenticity. We connected because of similarities in our identities, which are very present in their DJing. Ebadan is Dominican and was actually born on the island, but their family moved to Alabama around 2005. While they constantly heard bachata, salsa, and merengue back in the D.R., in Alabama the songs of their childhood came from artists like Celine Dion, Lionel Richie, and Stevie Wonder. Their cousins in the D.R. put them onto music— Bad Bunny's 2016 song "Diles" came to mind— but it was through their move to New York that these sounds became consistently part of their personal rotation. Returning to these roots via music has heavily influenced their art.

In addition to DJing, Ebedan has immersed themselves in the community and musical tradition at WKCR. They served as the Head of the Latin Department for the last two years, coordinating lineups, DJ recruitment, and overall programming. While the music played at the station is not a direct corollary to their work as a DJ, they credit spending nights sifting through vinyls in the WKCR archive for their discovery of "forgotten" artists and for making personal connections with records they had never encountered. As a musician, they've come to appreciate the histories behind the songs they play, whether at the station or the DJ booth.

WKCR's library has also given Ebadan the opportunity to connect with community DJs and native New Yorkers who grew up listening to WKCR. SalSoul legend Joe Bataán visited WKCR during what Ebadan described as a "very transitional time" in their life. Beyond discussing Bataán's music and career, they found themselves diving into spirituality and Bataán shared poignant life advice. Ebedan explained to me that WKCR has brought them "the ability to appreciate how the things that we create through music and art are the things that bring us together." (They asked me if that made sense. It did.)

New York City, and Washington Heights, reintroduced Ebadan to Latin music. "The way that people are out in the street, blasting music, everybody knows their *vecinos*, in Washington Heights reminds them of the D.R. They want to introduce this culture and its traditions to other parts of the city. Most of Ebadan's gigs have been in Brooklyn, predominantly in heavily gentrified Bushwick, with the intention that their DJing can bring aspects of the city that remind people not just of "New York," but why they came, why it's important to them, and how it connects to home.

The opportunity to DJ in the city and connect with people who just want to play music for others, Ebadan said, introduced them to a world outside of Columbia, 'the Bubble," the gates. That physical demarcation reflects an intangible one that they have committed themselves to resisting during their time at Columbia. Their interest and investments in building and supporting community, through their DJing, encompasses other passions and interests in their life. Ebadan also practices photography, setting out on solo dates by picking a neighborhood to get lost in, wander, and shoot. They cited volunteering as a way to make meaningful connections while being part of this institution, which they found through the Queer Detainee Empowerment Project, an abolitionist organization helping queer and trans asylum seekers adjust to life in the city. They helped folks register with New York State Benefits, did translation work, and delivered groceries. Even more quotidian actions, like stopping by local small businesses and greeting neighbors, have tied Ebadan closer to communities beyond Columbia. (Their favorites include Elsa La Reina Del Chicarron in Washington Heights, Safari in Harlem, and Maite in Bushwick, all of which they glowed about).

"This place makes you search for what makes you happy," they told me during our conversation, reflecting on the last four years. In searching for that happiness, through and by music, Ebadan reconnected with parts of themselves, and with others. It's in the excitement of playing Celia Cruz and Jonny Pacheco and having someone spontaneously pull out and play the *tambora*. The "soft warm feeling" of salsa, merengue, and bachata versus the "community hype, *perreo*, sing-along" of dembow and reggaetón. The pride in seeing Dominican music "get its flowers," and playing it at every set. The beauty of creating spaces to see and "relish in queer joy." They found what makes them happy, and in doing so, have made others happier in the process.

AT TWO SWORDS LENGTH
Is it Core?
By Stephen Dames and Anna Patchefsky

Negative:

As Professor Martin Hollyoke walks into the steam-heated, overcrowded Hamilton classroom, he can already smell a foul stench in the air: the Core Curriculum. Avoiding the patriarchal head of the table, Hollyoke sits to the side, making the classroom feel more equitable and open.

Hollyoke is special, different, maybe even "with it." He's not like his snooty colleagues with their offices in Philosophy and love of ancient languages. Unlike them, Hollyoke has a degree in English and Gender Studies from Vassar and has read lots of Judith Butler. He even calls his wife his "partner."

Affirmative:

Edwin "Eddy" the II is already regretting the shrimp tacos he had for lunch. For literally the first time ever, he is praying that the student workers are on strike. At least their union chants could waft up to his Hamilton classroom and drown out his gastrointestinal system.

Eddy doesn't have a friend in his Lit Hum class yet. Eddy's peers all have hyphenated last names, are probably from Brooklyn, and wear low-cut Dr. Martens. His classmates waltz straight in off the L train, insincere in their feigned poverty, with their eyebrows all bleached. He never saw this in Hyannis Port.

Negative:

Hollyoke wears thrifted off-white chinos and a wrinkled linen shirt as he hands out his syllabus, complimenting the student to his right on her bleached eyebrows.

Once they see the syllabus, they'll love me, he thinks to himself. All of his assignments are group projects, all of his readings are 1-5 page PDFs, and he "totally doesn't care if you look up the SparkNotes." In fact, he encourages the use of electronics in class.

Affirmative:

Eddy puts down his copy of *Don Quixote*. He loves the book, finally able to picture the world presented to him. He raises his hand, clears his throat, pushes his wire rimmed glasses to the base of his nose, and critiques Cervantes' limited imagination:

"Professor, just to jump off that point"—A point has yet to be made—"I think that the novel as a chosen vehicle for satire is just one medium of expression. The bridge between realism and idealism is also well understood in Marius Pepita's ballet interpretation, where dancers in white, pink, and black tights twirl and jump in choreographed whimsy . In summation, the imaginative mode is best diffused through the magnifying Galilean binoculars. But that's just my personal opinion."

Negative:

With all of his facial muscles contorted into a visage of "genuine" interest, Hollyoke informs Eddy that he agrees with him, and that the story of Don Quixote can be better understood through funky, hip, and fresh modes of performance art rather than dry text. At the same time, Professor Hollyoke is a bit surprised at Eddy's comment. He had taken his satchel-carrying student for a Patriots fan and good-old-boy, not an arts connoisseur.

"Well, surely you'll like this, Eddy. Why don't we put down our books"—they have not yet been opened—"and watch some of the ballet? There's this great alternative production done by some friends of mine in Brooklyn that has no stage, no shoes, and no music. I have a feeling that the boundlessly creative structure and deconstructionist gaze will appeal to someone like you."

He laughs to himself. Showing a video during class? He is breaking boundaries. His creative pedagogy will surely give him the CULPA golden nugget of his dreams. Before he shows the video, however, he thinks of a question that will provoke them … something that surely they've never been asked before …
"What is the point of the Core?"

Affirmative:

Eddy, for his part, is even more exasperated. How could a professor at this venerable institution defame such great men as Herodotous, Homer … whatever the others are, by asking a question such as that? It seems that Professor Hollyoke is unsophisticated, unurbane, and in short, entirely unfit for the Core Curriculum.

Raising his hand yet again, not waiting to be called on this time, Eddy defaces the modern interpretations. "This is not what the architects of the Core designed in 1919!"

A true originalist in academic pedagogy, Eddy is disgusted at his classmates' use of digital technology and is disgruntled by his Professor's *Grading For Equity*-inspired lack of accountability. iPads have no place masquerading as libraries for digital manuscripts.

Negative:

Professor Hollyoke hides his growing frustration under his coiffed handlebar mustache. Thankfully, as he usually does, Hollyoke has been saving his words of wisdom for the last five minutes of class, preferring the students to lead class discussions with "So, what I found really interesting" and "This really reminds me of how".

For Hollyoke, the Core is much more extensive than the centuries-old wisdom of some old dead white men. "Class, the Core is not what you've been *told*. It's who you *are*. We're not descendants of those Butler-inscribed names; we are composites of core experiences. For me, it's when Freddie Mercury played Live Aid. Remember that?" The class looks up blankly at this remark.

Unfazed, Hollyoke continues: "What's your core experience? It's not fancy books, no, but perhaps instead it's *Dinosaurs Before Dark,* seeing *The Phantom Menace* in theaters, rainbow looms, silly bands, and slap bracelets, or some other *core* memory. These memories cultivate a distinct aesthetic universe—like cottagecore or normcore, but specific to you and you alone: *corecore*. If you approach the Core curriculum from this personalized lens, one might call this *Core corecore.*

Affirmative:

Eddy looks around. His classmates are nodding their heads in understanding, but Eddy has absolutely no idea what they are all agreeing to. Chronically offline, Eddy wonders, what is *corecore*?

THE CONVERSATION

Olive Nwosu

In defense of the troublemaker.

By Victor Omojola

There is a scene in *Troublemaker*, a short film by Olive Nwosu, SOA '22, in which the protagonist, Obi, demonstrates true resilience. On a day that has seen the 10-year-old scolded for making faces at his mysteriously silent grandfather and embarrassed by an older neighbor for making light of the solemnity of war, he tries for one more misadventure. He returns to his grandfather and launches firecrackers at his feet. He watches with curious fear as the patriarch is thrust into a PTSD-induced flashback, exclaiming that soldiers "have come to kill me."

The film does well to reject recent claims that Nigerians are a people free from generational trauma. It also functions in conversation with *There Was a Country*, the divisive 2012 memoir by the late Igbo Nigerian literary great, Chinua Achebe.

Achebe begins the book with the following Igbo proverb: "A man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body." The book is a recounting of the Nigerian Civil War and its tragic consequences for the Igbo people and Nigeria as a whole. It has been simultaneously praised for its masterful storytelling and genre-bending knowledge production and criticized by other giants of Nigerian literature for its questionable exigence and unmindful nostalgia. If anything, however, the work is a reminder of the uncompromising forcefulness of the past and the futility of trying to forget. It's a book about the rain.

Nwosu, too, has a lot to say about the rain. An Igbo-born, British-Nigerian film artist, her work often explores the reverberating effect of colonialism and the Nigerian Civil War on contemporary generations of Nigerians living in the country and abroad.

Nwosu is a BAFTA Pigott 2020 Scholarship and a 2020 Alex Sichel Fellow. She is the most recent winner of Sundance's prestigious NHK award, which honors a filmmaker for the combined merit of a past work and a screenplay for a future feature film. This upcoming project is just one of the many topics that Nwosu and I discussed. We also talked about her time in Morningside Heights, the challenges associated with screening queer films in Nigeria, and the Nigerian presidential election, which experts are calling the most consequential in the nation's history.

Despite the seriousness of our conversation and the fact that Nwosu reads (at least to me) as an especially mature filmmaker, I get the sense she values the unique sensibilities of a childlike outlook. She misses playing, wishes Nigerian youths were given more space to cause trouble, and her most recent film, *Egúngún*, is all about putting on costumes.

...

This conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.

***The Blue and White*:** In five or 10 years, people might say that *Egúngún* or *Troublemaker* is your first film, but in reality you worked on lots of projects before that. I was watching *The Fabelmans* recently and I was thinking, *how does Spielberg categorize those early home videos he made in his catalog?* Was there a moment when you recorded something on an iPhone or other device and thought to yourself "I just told a story"?

***Olive Nwosu*:** I mean, I'm old enough that we didn't have iPhones when I was young, especially in Nigeria. But it's funny when you say that. I've never thought about it.

When I think about it more, we had this camcorder when we were kids that my dad bought and I remember shooting—it was hardly a story—but just shooting stuff with my brothers. I have four younger brothers. I would shoot them talking, us playing. I remember we'd hook it up to the TV and watch and that was so fun. That's probably the first time I did anything in moving images.

But between that and then college, I did a lot of photography. In a way, that actually feels like how I fell in love with images. I bought a Canon 5D and was taking a lot of photos throughout being a teenager and into college, and then I moved to film.

***B&W*:** Do either of those things affect the way that you tell stories now? Growing up with four brothers or the background with photography?

***ON*:** I think, definitely, photography did. I'm very visual and for me the frame is so important; I'm very anal about framing and thinking about where the camera sits because I think I have quite a specific eye and a way I see things and it's important for me to convey that.

***B&W*:** Where did you do your undergrad, and did you also study film?

***ON*:** Gosh, it's a long story. I did my undergrad at Oberlin College in Ohio and I actually went to study engineering—so I was a very typical Nigerian child—and it was great. It's an amazing program, a very liberal arts college. I took a film class just to fulfill the arts requirement and honestly just fell in love with film.

I called my dad and was like, "Hey, so I'm gonna study film now." He lost it, basically. He was like, "Explain what film is to me," and I had to explain. He still doesn't fully get it, to be honest. It was very intense knowing that I wanted to do this thing. And so I switched my major.

***B&W*:** It is a very Nigerian story.

At Columbia, I think I read somewhere that you taught screenwriting as well. What's it like to teach the conventions of something when you're an artist who, quite evidently, is interested in breaking and challenging conventions?

***ON*:** Good question. I also teach with Sundance and I really enjoy it. I really encourage people to lean into their own interpretation of the rules because I think the best work and the best art is very personal. Whether it's a personal story or not, it comes from a very personal point of view.

And so, for me, it's always about developing that point of view but then alongside knowing the history and context and tools of your art form and then making them your own.

***B&W*:** Do you have any favorite memories from your time studying here? A favorite place you liked to frequent? A restaurant?

***ON*:** We used to make these little exercises in directing class where you'd go off and make a three minute film. You'd cast classmates and the crew is classmates and there were such low stakes. I remember we shot this one that was basically on the street right by 120th, which is where I lived down Riverside Park and it was just so freeing. Everyone's having a good time and we're still just playing. Those are the things I really miss because now, I mean, it's amazing that I'm progressing as I am, but as budgets get bigger and you have more stakeholders, it can feel more difficult to just play. I really miss playing and not being afraid to fail.

I like to hang out. Hmm … restaurant … honestly, that whole area has such bad restaurants. Sorry. Like it has *such* bad restaurants. But I really love Riverside Park, Morningside Park. Morningside Park is great actually. It's one of my favorite spots for sure.

***B&W*:** I mean, no pressure. There doesn't have to be a favorite place.

I saw *Egúngún* at Sundance, virtually, last year. Going into this interview and rewatching that, I also watched *Troublemaker* for the first time and I was personally really moved by it. It's a really lovely demonstration of the effects of the civil war through generations of Nigerians, particularly Igbo Nigerians.

I think that, as young Nigerians, especially abroad, we often look at our parents and our elders and wonder why they're reticent to speak about things that happened in the past, but the film proposes that they're still processing this trauma.

I'm curious if you're willing to share any personal experiences relating to this phenomenon that inspired *Troublemaker*.

***ON*:** I'm Igbo and I grew up in an Igbo family in Nigeria. It was amazing to me how little I knew about the war and how little it came up because my dad lived through the war and my grandma, his mom, basically had nine kids that she had to take care of and were refugees and had to move through the war. The only thing my dad ever said about it was—and he would laugh about it—having to eat lizards and rats. I was like "that's not funny."

And same in school. I did up to high school in Nigeria and we never got educated about the Civil War. And that really blew my mind. It wasn't until I'd grown up and was in the U.S. that I learnt that history, which really bothered me.

As you begin to understand it, you start to feel shades of what the silence means. Silence began to have a weight to it.

My uncle, the youngest of my dad's family, had some special needs and I'm only realizing this now. He worked for my dad's company because I think he couldn't work anywhere else. My mom told me some years ago that he had had kwashiorkor which is the disease where you have no protein sources … They have all these awful photos of Igbo children during the war, basically starving, swelling-bellied. It affects mental capacity as well. That was probably what happened to my uncle. Again, you know, it's such a direct consequence—I mean, apart from the history and the loss of property and lives. It was just never really spoken of. It felt very visceral and that was really what I was trying to capture.

***B&W*:** It's also really easy to read *Troublemaker* as a film about an annoying kid who gets put in his place. But I think that it's interesting to think about that term, troublemaker, not in that pejorative sense, but in the role of members of society that try to unlock the past by provoking. Do you see Obi, the protagonist of the short, as someone who was simply trying to do that?

***ON*:** I think on a subconscious level. He's a curious kid and will prod and poke where he can sense something *is*. Often in Nigeria many kids get labeled as troublemakers or naughty. The idea of a precocious kid doesn't really exist. And I think actually that is what it is: an intelligence and curiosity and a kind of mischief that is trying to find its place because everything is too tight or too secretive for them. I think it's essential actually to ask questions and to prod. Provoke is a good word.

Chidera, who plays Obi … really is that boy. We went to the village, Ugbenu, and basically type-cast. We went around asking the people who live there, "Who's the naughtiest boy in this community?" and hands down, they were like, "It's Chidera." When you met him, you could see it in his eyes … he just had that twinkle.

***B&W*:** I do want to move on to the other film, but we are talking about the derivative effects of the civil war and there's an election happening in Nigeria soon. I was gonna ask if you had any comment about the upcoming presidential election. Feel free to say "no."

***ON*:** What do I have to say? This is the least optimistic I've felt about Nigeria ever. I was back last year and it just feels like there's been such a disappointment of government, over and over again. So it does feel like this is a kind of pivotal moment where something has to give and there is a hope that Peter Obi could be a new … direction if he wins, if he's allowed to win.

It's a wild time, I guess, is my summary.

***B&W*:** I was joking around with a couple friends and I was telling them that the argument against Obi by a lot of politicians right now isn't even policy level. It's just that "it's not his turn yet."

***ON*:** I know. Well, that's the thing, right? … What does Peter Obi actually stand for? He's just better than the rest. That's where we're still at. I do believe in staying optimistic and putting things in context. Nigeria is what, 60-something-years-old? In the grand scheme of things that is so young and it always takes a long time for a country to figure itself out.

It makes me understand that time is long and these are the early years. They'll always be tumultuous until things can calibrate. That's what I try to remind myself of.

***B&W*:** I like that. That generally made me more optimistic as well.

***ON*:** I know. I told you: I need optimism in my life.

***B&W*:** I'll shift to *Egúngún* now. The title of the film *Egúngún* means 'masquerade' in Yoruba. What can you say about the festival that takes place yearly in Nigeria for *Blue and White* readers who aren't familiar with it?

***ON*:** I've always loved masquerades for so many reasons: the artistry of the costumes and the beauty and attention to detail.

Historically, the masquerades were basically the ancestors coming back to reckon with people. There are different masquerades for different occasions and different cultures in Nigeria have their own masquerades. Egúngún is the Yoruba Masquerade, which is a specific tribe in Nigeria. We're Igbo and we have our own. When I would go back to my dad's hometown, there would be loads of them on the street and they have these canes and people are terrified of them because they're basically the spirits who come to our realm because—and this is what I love—this idea that there isn't that big of a divide between our realm and the spiritual realm. It's all permeable.

But then these are people in costume as well. So for me, that kind of symbolism … this idea of kind of hiding behind a costume … and the protagonist really feeling like she's done this most of her life.

***B&W*:** Are there any characters from films that you looked to as you constructed Salewa's subjectivity and the way that she was going to perform?

***ON*:** There are a few films that formed good references for me. First is *Touki Bouki*, which I returned to over and over again. It was the first time I saw an African character who had style. I remember watching *Touki Bouki* and feeling like all the other African films I'd watched, there was always this kind of put-upon quality that the characters had. And I knew that I didn't want that with Salewa.

Moonlight is another one. Just thinking about a queer character who is moving through space and, as you say, performing. I really just love how that was handled. The moment of revelation in the third chapter and [he] goes and sees his old flame. That connection still stays with me.

Then the third film I thought about a lot was *I Am Love*, the Guadagnino film.

***B&W*:** Those are all really good films.

What can you say about the screenplay for *Lady*, which you just won an award at Sundance for?

***ON*:** I started writing it in Screenwriting III or IV at Columbia. It's about a taxi driver in Lagos called Lady who has been saving up money to skip town and move to this island where she dreams of buying a house and getting out of the crazy hustle and bustle of the city. She gets roped into driving around a group of sex workers to make some extra cash to do this. One of the sex workers is an old friend who convinces her to drive them around at night to their clients. And so she gets involved in this kind of underbelly of Lagos life and has to deal with her own repressed desires and come to terms with how to be intimate and have close female friendships but ultimately deciding whether to follow her dream of leaving Lagos or staying. So it's a crime drama, light on the crime. I've been developing it for almost two years now, and we're going to shoot—fingers crossed—later this year, which is really exciting.

***B&W*:** That is super exciting. I will be one of the first people to watch that film for sure.

***ON*:** Great.

***B&W*:** Because Egúngún is a film about a queer Nigerian woman, I wanted to make sure we talk about the reality of the experience for the LGBT community in Nigeria. Though acceptance is growing, it's still not an easy thing to be queer and living in Nigeria.

Recently, you have young storytellers like Akwaeke Emezi assertively denying the nonsensical suggestion that there aren't queer Nigerians, that there's not a large community of such individuals. I'm curious how you see cinema playing a role in the struggle to be seen and heard for LGBTQ Nigerians and then also what it was like making a film about someone with that marginalized identity with this context.

***ON*:** I mean, I think there's a long way to go still. Before we made Egúngún, I was aware of only one film called *Ìfé* that's about two lesbian women in Nigeria, and I know that they struggled to get that film shown in Nigeria because of the very real discrimination and fear that exists, still, in the country.

I think the film industry is actually quite liberal and open in Nigeria, at least the one I'm a part of, and people were very excited to make this film and it felt like a safe space to do it. But—and I don't know why for sure—we haven't screened in Nigeria. We applied to a couple of Nigerian film festivals and haven't got in. It's that question of, even when films are made, do they get seen by the people who need to see them? Making the work is very important. The question that I've been asking myself is how to get it seen and how you really do that. Egúngún has done well with film festivals internationally, and I'm very proud of that, but at the same time I'm aware that it hasn't shown back home still.

***B&W*:** This has been a really awesome conversation. I'll ask one more light question just before I let you go: What's the worst film that you love?

***ON*:** I don't know if this is a terrible film, but I was talking to my friend about *Legally Blonde* recently, and how that was one of the first films that I remember as a child watching. I still love

Reese Witherspoon, I will stand by that, but it's also such a weird capitalist film that's like "Women, you must go and be like men exactly. But wear pink. And be great." I rewatched it recently and I was like, "Oh my God. This is definitely stowed away in my head somewhere as this model of what to be," which is very distressing, but I also think it's hilarious.

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Egúngún premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2021 and screened at Sundance in 2022. Both *Egúngún* and *Troublemaker* are available to stream on the Criterion Channel.

THE CROSSWORD

"...Shoulders, Knees, and Toes"

By Sona Wink

ACROSS

1. "Mood Indigo" singer Simone
5. Moviestar pig
9. Fry on high
14. **** master
16. Urge
17. Reached out
18. ___ Sun, pokable juice pouch
19. Lift one's lip in scorn
20. **** long
22. Definitive end, if put in a coffin
25. Escaped
26. **** spring
30. Garland at an Oahu resort
31. Writer/comedian Rae
32. Lacking forelimbs
34. Gothic filmmaker Burton
37. What the Beastie Boys lack until Brooklyn
39. Former employer of Edward Snowden, famously
40. Like an unused tire or key
42. Onion server?
43. Document with a cover letter
46. Content written in a blue book
47. Appendage often clogged or pierced
48. **** ache
50. Event hosted in a bookstore, perhaps
54. Gaming insult
55. **** Way
57. Car type called a "saloon" by Brits
61. 7-year-old Byzantine emperor
62. Floats behind a boat, recreationally
65. Eric, encouraging strangers to "Bird Up"
66. **** strong
67. Anticipates a pink line, perhaps
68. When doubled, a private chat
69. "___ and steady wins the race"

DOWN

1. "Sheeple"
2. Vitamin for anemia
3. Center forward, in soccer teams
4. Insect's "feelers"
5. Name on a pen or lighter
6. Suitable
7. Test for deafness, abbr.

8. Title for a mormon missionary
9. "Down with the ___," Disturbed song
10. Popular Italian coast
11. Preferable bunk, to some
12. Blunt
13. NY Congresswoman Stefanik
15. Unit for a diamond
21. Popular meditation app
23. Actor McKellen
24. Detroit footballers
26. Carlos and Smith's podium protest
27. Norway's capital
28. Presumed reader of an instruction manual
29. Swedish metal band
33. Force to fit
34. Roadside exclamation, pre-Uber
35. Zoroastrianism's nation of origin
36. They can be dank or surreal
38. Where one finds little houses
41. Kidney and navy's small white cousin
44. Sea eagle
45. SNL's Nwodim
47. Circle around
49. Martini & ___, sparkling wine producers
50. Result of a thrown tomato, perhaps
51. Holmes' love interest Adler
52. Merchant's wares
53. Debated zone in female anatomy
56. "Quien ___?"
58. Punch numbers
59. Tenor's neighbor
60. Letters on a compass
63. Alphabetical cluster