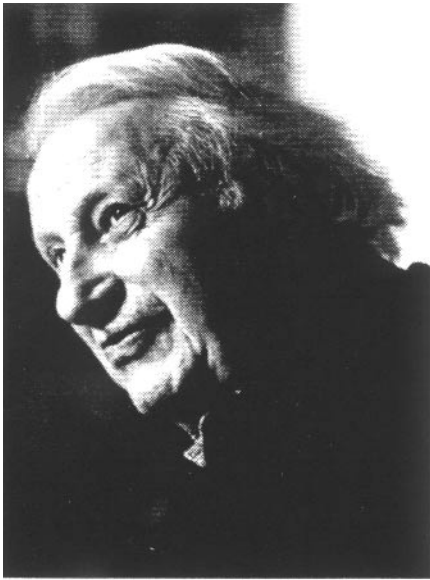


Studs Terkel talks his own history



Studs Terkel, oral historian, author, and radio host, received the Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award at the Chicago convention.

Recent works include My American Century (1997); Coming of Age: The Story of Our Century by Those Who've Lived It (1995), and Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel about the American Obsession (1992).

What cannot be characterized in a set of excerpts is his energy and manner. Terkel's presentation was impromptu, impassioned, and humble. Words tumbled from his mouth, ideas sparking in all directions (as did his presentation, which wandered wonderfully). He enjoys playing the curmudgeon, exaggerating his crustiness for humorous effect when appropriate, yet at other moments pausing, calm, then quietly cutting to the quick, finishing the story with an honest

Studs Terkel *question. Despite hard words for those in power and the agendas they keep, his amazement at human resiliency and faith in human decency clearly remains uncompromised.—Ed.]*

This award does honor me a great deal. Bonnie [Brennen] said [in her introduction] that I had been inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which is a very prestigious, 100-year-old organization. Somewhat on the stuffy

side....

I didn't have the guts of Gore Vidal who, when offered the award, said, "No thanks, I belong to the Diner's Club already."

No, this is a different award. This is one for troublemakers. And when I recall my predecessors, I'm in awe—I.F. Stone, George Seldes, Noam Chomsky, Ben Bagdikian. When you hang around long enough, anything is possible.

On oral history

What I do is what scores of those did before me. Some people say that Studs is an oral historian. [But it's not different] from the Great Depression and the WPA [Works Progress Administration].... On the writer's project, there were people going around before the days of the tape recorder asking anonymous people about the country and their lives.

When Alex Haley wrote *Roots*, where did he go for sources? To the land of his ancestors—to Gambia, Africa. And who did he meet? Griots—the oral historians.... I'm part of a long, long tradition.

(continued on page 4)

Inside this issue

<i>Headnote address.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Call for newsletter items.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>QS sessions (cont.).....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Terkel (cont.).....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Activism in the academy.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Center for Campus Org.</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Conference on class.....</i>	<i>10</i>

Joint sessions reveal QS values

FRANK DURHAM, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The Baltimore program has already begun to take shape, as discussions of proposed panels and the mid-winter meeting have begun among the membership and officers. The process is moving fast. Panel proposals are ready for the midwinter meeting. I will issue the calls for research panels between semesters.

In thinking about what it means to plan a successful meeting for QS, I want to focus on the value of collaborating with other divisions in proposing panels, both individually and at the mid-winter meeting. Not only does this practice extend our division's capital in the conference-wide planning process, but it directly serves the QS divisional mission. Our position as a division within AEJMC comes from a unique foundation and offers great advantages in the

(continued on page 3)

Headnote:

QS program a success

BONNIE BRENNEN, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

I want to thank the board members, the paper reviewers, as well as all of the division members who attended the sessions, for their help making the Chicago AEJMC conference a great one for the Qualitative Studies Division.

In total there were fifteen QS sole and jointly sponsored sessions as well as a business meeting during which James Carey presented his top faculty paper and

Carolyn Bronstein discussed her top student paper in front of more than seventy-five people.

All the sessions that I attended were interesting, provocative, and well attended, and each nicely represented the mission of QS. Many people contacted me at the conference and, since my return to VCU, have provided me with excellent feedback about our distinctive programming.

While I was thrilled with the entire program (and hope that all of you were, too), I must admit that my personal highlight of the conference was giving the Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award to Studs Terkel. Sitting on the podium next to Studs, I felt like a star-struck teenager finally meeting one of her idols. It was a

heady experience—one that I soon will not forget.

MY FAVORITE COMMENT OF THE CONFERENCE was actually not made directly to me, but one I overheard (in the ladies' room) shortly after Studs' session. Two individuals were bemoaning the lack of attendance at their afternoon session and one

explained that no one had attended because "everyone" was listening to Studs' presentation. The other person replied that every time she turned around at the convention, that there was another session on the program sponsored by the QS division that people were talking about, and she irritably asked, "Who do they think they are, anyway?"

SOME OF YOU WHO WERE UNABLE to attend the QS business meeting may be surprised to see me, once again, serving as head of the division. Shortly before the conference, Bill Solomon resigned as vice-head of the Qualitative Studies Division due to family problems.

At the business meeting I was asked to stay on, and I will be pleased to serve as head of the division an additional year. I figure that, with the excellent new board and the support of division, the "rabble-rousers" of AEJMC are on a roll. I will take it as my personal challenge to explain to all interested AEJMC members just who we are—and why they should be worried! ❖



Qualitative Studies Division 1997-1998

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Newsletter

JAY HAMILTON
S.U.N.Y. Geneseo
CAROLYN BRONSTEIN
University of Wisconsin-Madison

<http://www.geneseo.edu/~comm/qs/>

Contribute to this newsletter

We seek contributions from QS members.

We're especially interested in items for which few professional outlets exist, such as reflections on teaching, and speculative or exploratory commentary on current issues.

Send items and direct questions to Jay Hamilton, Department of Communication., SUNY Geneseo, Geneseo, NY 14454, (716) 226-6092. E-mail hamilton@uno.cc.geneseo.edu, or contact Carolyn Bronstein via e-mail at cbronste@students.wisc.edu. ❖

(JOINT, continued from page 1) planning of our annual meeting, as I shall outline below.

In reviewing the 1997 AEJMC convention program, I counted seven QS-sponsored joint-sessions. Given my assignment as incoming research chair to say something visionary about next year's QS program, I had expected to identify a broad pattern of inter-divisional alliances, or, at least, affinities, that would point to the source of the success that I observed this year in Chicago. Yet, nothing leapt out that would unlock the secret. As a result, I see that understanding how good conventions happen is more of an interpretive than an empirical task. How fitting for the QS planning process.

IN ALL, THIS IS HOW IT LOOKED for QS: We held one joint research session (History), three PF&R sessions (International Communication and Mass Communication & Society together, and History twice), and three teaching sessions (Media and Disability Interest Group once, and

two with International Communication).

Although some of these joint sessions make a certain, intuitive sense (e.g. the sessions with History), nothing here explains the logic of the overall selection process. Certainly, nothing accounts for the absences of other divisions not mentioned. To be sure, most other divisions remain attractive candidates for shared sessions.

Those familiar with the bargaining process at the mid-winter meeting can probably explain how deals are made to share sessions. To the novice, it sounds a lot like a late-night, pressure-stakes board game with one key exception. Where other divisions define themselves by their respective abilities to control the definitions of certain kinds of knowledge, whether theoretical or professionally oriented, QS does not. Instead of seeking to mimic the departmental divisions of the hyper-rationalized modern university along with the rest of the conference, QS offers the liberty to pursue the "other" side of the question, to "do

theory," rather than just re-using it to reify a knowledge base.

BECAUSE OF ITS HISTORICAL ROOTS in cultural studies and critical studies, the membership of QS tend to behave less like a division than like the unpartitioned space of an otherwise, sectored conference. I am not attacking anyone here; but the intellectual and administrative boundaries that rule the campuses we come from are themselves often the subjects of the critical research, teaching, and issues of professional responsibility discussed in QS sessions.

Because our "boundaries" are contiguous with all others as they have defined us out, I find a strength in the ideal of intellectual freedom that we represent when we put a conference program together. Because of who we are, we know many more possibilities in planning meaningful discussions than some other divisions. In proposing panels, "we-you-" should play to that strength. ❖

23rd Annual Southeast Colloquium planned

The 23rd annual AEJMC Southeast Colloquium will take place on March 12-14, 1998 in New Orleans.

The colloquium brings together faculty members and graduate students for research-paper presentations in history, newspaper and law. Also, AEJMC's Magazine Division plans to sponsor a research competition and hold its midyear conference.

It begins with a reception Thursday night, with research presentations, panel sessions and meetings all day Friday and Saturday.

Deadline for submissions is **Dec. 9, 1997**. Addresses to send papers:

History: Jim Whitfield, Dept. of Journalism, Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe, LA 71209-0322. Phone: (318)342-1403; jowhitfield@alpha.nlu.edu.

Law: Louis Day, Manship School of Mass Comm., Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-7202. Phone: (504) 388-6811;

LDAY@unix1.sncc.LSU.edu

Magazine: Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, Dept. of Comm., Seton Hall Univ., South Orange, NJ 07079. Phone: (201) 761-9474; gottlitr@lanmail.shu.edu

Newspaper: Gene Murray, Dept. of Mass Comm., Grambling State University, P.O. Box 45, Grambling, LA 71245. Phone: (318)274-3270. murrayge@vax0.gram.edu

To serve as a paper judge or as a discussant, contact Joe Mirando at Southeastern Louisiana University, Phone: (504) 549-3374, Fax: (504) 549-5021; joemirando@selu.edu

Colloquium hotel

All sessions will be held at the Best Western Landmark Hotel in Metairie—a 17-story hotel with an 8-story atrium entrance, a top-floor restaurant with a scenic view of the skyline of New Orleans, a fitness center, sauna, outdoor heated pool and over 18,000 square feet of meeting and

special function space.

The hotel offers free parking to guests, free transportation to and from New Orleans International Airport and free transportation to Bourbon Street and the French Quarter.

A regional shopping mall, movie theaters and a variety of restaurants are all within one block of the hotel.

Fees

\$75 (includes opening reception, two luncheons and breaks.

Hotel: \$89 per night plus 11.75 percent tax.

Attendees must reserve their rooms by **Feb. 9, 1998** to be assured of a room and the special rate. Phone (800) 277-7575.

For more information on the Southeast Colloquium, interested faculty or students should contact Mirando. ❖

(TERKEL, *continued from page 1*)

On anonymous workers

The non-celebrated—who are they?... I'm reminded of the [line in the] Bertolt Brecht poem: "Who built the pyramids?"

Our first reaction is, "Well, the pharaohs." But, you know the pharaohs didn't do anything.... We know who built them: anonymous slaves down through the centuries.

And the next question,... "When the Chinese Wall was built," he [Brecht] asks, "where did the masons go for lunch?"...

And, finally, "When the Spanish Armada sank, we read that King Philip wept. Were there no other tears?"

It is in asking who shed those other tears that, in a sense, what we call oral history is all about.

On technology

My aid, of course, is the tape recorder. And that is the exquisite irony. I don't know how the hell a tape recorder works.... I goof up, I press the wrong button. I'm a magician—I lose people....

I'm an ungrateful wretch, [for] if it weren't for this technology, I wouldn't be doing what I am doing. Yet, I am indebted because I don't know how to work it.

Don't mention a computer to me, because when I hear the word "hardware," I think of hammer and nails and pots and pans. When I think of "software," I think of pillow cases, Turkish towels, soap powder....

The idea is, it saved my life, too. I had a [heart] bypass [surgery] about a year ago. Technology saved me—plus, of course, the skilled hand of a human being, the surgeon.

On source reliability

I never bank on reliable sources. For example, I would never call on Dr. Henry Kissinger and ask him, "What are your impressions on our incursion into Cambodia? What do you think of it?" Well, he thought of it first, of

course.

In Chicago (I was a police reporter in the 1920s and early 1930s), I'd never think of going to one of the city's most distinguished citizens Al Capone, and say to him, "Mr. Capone, what do you think about organized crime?"

I would go [instead] to those who are the victims of it....

[In my book *My American Century*, I borrow from journalist James Cameron a justification for] why I don't use reliable sources.... "It never occurred to me in some situations to be other than subjective. And as obviously as I could manage to be. I may not always have been satisfactorily balanced. I've always tended to argue that objectivity was less important than the truth. A reporter whose technique was formed by no opinion lacked a very serious dimension."

On objectivity and commercialism

I met a great man, became friends with him (he died a few years ago), named James Cameron. If you ask any young British journalist who was his influence, who was his North Star, 9 of 10 would say "James Cameron."

I met him because he had returned from North Vietnam during the Christmas bombings. He was the first western journalist to visit Ho Chi Minh.... Cameron came back with a book about North Vietnam during the time of the bombings. The book is called *Here is Your Enemy*.

The book [said] simply that the North Vietnam people are just like American people, British people—almost identical, not unlike us at all. You got good people in them, you got bad people in them. That was the idea of the book, that we're all humans.

He came to the United States, [and] he was murdered. He was called an accomplice to Ho Chi Minh. He was called very subjective [and] non-

objective. In fact, the ones who most attacked him were CBS liberals: Eric Sevareid, young Morley Safer, Charles Collingwood....

Now he's on a book tour, being murdered. I say [to Cameron when I met him] "What a great book! You're fantastic—I've admired you—"

He couldn't get over it, so we had a drink immediately. We went downstairs.

He said, "You know what? It's a crazy world.... I was attacked by Henry Luce [in a review of the book that appeared in *Time*] and [later] got a call from some book center.

"[The representative] said, 'Mr.

**The ones who condemn
Big Guv'ment are
those whose daddies'
asses were saved by it.**

Cameron, we admire your work very much. Could we do a sequel?"

He was flat broke [at the time]. "Of course, I'd—wait a minute. Aren't you [connected to] *Time* magazine?"

"Yes, we are."

"But *Time* magazine just ripped the hell out of me."

"That's okay. We're another department."

On Bill Clinton

What can you say about a Democratic president who, along with a Republican Congress, with one sign[ature] of his pen cuts out the whole safety net—66 years—that came into being during the New Deal?

What can you say when a bill (which I call the Welfare Deform Bill) touches the most vulnerable: kids, [and] single mothers...?

What can you say when that same Congress just the other day...votes \$12 billion more than the Pentagon asked to build Stealth bombers?...?

What else can I say about Bill

Clinton? He's got a good smile. Congenial. Fast on his feet. Smooth as ice cream. But a pretty sad state of affairs.

On Big Guv'ment

Something has happened to our sense of history, as you well know. Who are the ones who most condemn "Big Guv'ment" (G-U-V apostrophe M-E-N-T)?... The ones whose daddies' asses were saved by Big Guv'ment.... Ronnie [Reagan's] town Dixon, Illinois was saved by the WPA.

[For my book *Hard Times*,] I went to talk to one of the deans of Wall Street. "Tell me about that October day ("Black October," it's called) in 1929. What happened in that crash?"

Said this wise man who advised LBJ, Kennedy, Harry Truman: "I don't know."

I said to him, "You don't know?"

He said, "I'll tell you what happened. We didn't know—the ticker tape was going like crazy, John D. Jr. was buying thousands of shares of common

stock...and it [the market] was going down. We waited for some kind of an announcement."

And I thought, waiting for an announcement? I didn't have the heart to ask him, "From whom? God?"

But, he's right. The announcement came from Big Guv'ment. It was the New Deal of course that saved their butts. And today the very ones who condemn it are the ones whose daddies' butts were saved by it.

On liberalism and the perversion of language

What happens to our sense of history and our sense of the past when these inversions occur?... We may be suffering from a national Alzheimer's Disease....

You pervert thought, and that perverts language as well. The "L-Word"—liberal—has become a pejorative word. You [are supposed to] deny

it. It has replaced the "C-Word" of the 1950s. Card-carrying liberal [instead of] card-carrying communist.

Bush in that debate, that glorious debate against Dukakis (two empty paper bags belaboring one other), Bush challenges Dukakis: "You're a card-carrying member of the ACLU."

Instead of saying, "Why aren't you a liberal?," Dukakis says, "I'm *not, really!*"

In any dictionary, there are two definitions. Part one: Liberals—generous of heart, especially to those up against it. The second definition: tolerant of the opinions of others, even those who disagree. [Dukakis should have responded,] "Do you mean you're *illiberal*? Do you mean you're totalitarian—is that the idea?" That's what I mean by perverting the American language.

Even that phrase "politically correct"—I get so damn sick and tired of it. Even the best people use it. But what's it used about? It's used about those very people who were [earlier] called "radical chic,"...a phrase coined

Has anyone raised concerns about "conservative chic"?

by Tom Wolfe (he happens to be very right-wing, but he's marvelous with phrases)... Every lazy two-bit journalist picked that phrase up.

But has anyone raised concerns about conservative chic?

On the 1960s

I remember watching—as I do as a matter of habit, [like] I have castor oil in the morning—"Meet the Press," with the conservative George Will and the liberal—God help us—Sam Donaldson.

And the both of them took off on a guy there about the 1960s (it happened to be Jann Wenner, not the best example, the publisher of *Rolling Stone*).

They demolished the 60s, excess sex, drugs and all, ignoring that that

was the one time young people had causes outside themselves....

A phrase [I've read about the 1960s] is beautiful: "The 60s [decade] is put down by those who delight in the failure of dreams."

On the crucifixion

[People often ask me] what time I would like to live [in] and still have a tape recorder.

I thought to myself, [my choice would be] the first Good Friday. The day of crucifixion, the first Good Friday.

I'm at the foot of the [hill] with a tape recorder, and here's the saint. He's a troublemaker. The Roman Empire is going to put down all those damn troublemakers.

This group, this sect called Christians [is] practicing a very subversive doctrine: Love thy neighbor. Do unto others as you would have done unto you.

The Roman Empire has got to destroy this guy and his followers. So he's going to be executed. [He's] being led up that hill.

AT THE FOOT OF THE HILL are some of his followers. They're scared stiff. One or two of them turned informers, especially his best friend. Others are scared. The generals are scared.

And then you've got the great [public] around and about—"Where there's smoke, there's fire," [they think]. "Who are these people [about whom the Romans are making such a fuss]?"

Then you've got the little Roman soldier. He's a kid with pimples; got a heavy helmet on (like any American G.I. in the world), scared stiff. He's been told they're the enemy, the Evil Empire.... You got a couple of veteran soldiers shooting craps....

And then, of course, you've got the judge ("Here come de judge"). You got Pontius Pilate....

His wife, who happens to be a good woman, says [to him], "Why do you have to persecute this man?"

He says to her, "Will you stop bothering me, for Christ's sake?!"

And that's the only time I've ever heard that phrase used properly. ❖

Activism in the Academy

Below is a set of articles that addresses an ever-present issue: whether teachers and researchers in universities can make a difference in the world in which they live; whether that difference is limited to perpetuating dominant interests in society, or whether there is a degree to which they might be able to work on behalf of progressive causes, and, if so, why such work nevertheless seems so slight in comparison to administrative research.

In the interests of keeping this debate present in QS, the following three pieces are offered. I asked Bob McChesney to draft his contribution to a panel discussion at last year's AEJMC convention in Chicago.

I've also included a piece by Dennis Grammenos of the University of Illinois (received via a convoluted e-mail trail), which dramatizes the personal side of these large-scale issues, and an item about the Center for Campus Organizing (one of my sources for items that appear in this newsletter).—Ed.

Academics, public intellectuals, and activism

ROBERT MCCHESENEY,
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Perhaps the public role of academics can be illustrated best by the following story.

I went to college in the early 1970s—a period of considerable political fervor on campuses. The activism of the 1960s had faded, but the intellectual interest in radical politics may well have been at its peak. While there, I had several close friends with whom I studied, socialized, and worked. I think it is safe to say that we were all democratic socialists and pretty much in agreement on core political issues (though we certainly had our share of knockdown, drag-out arguments, but that goes with being on the left). While some of us went on to grad school, my closest friends did not, opting for jobs in the real world.

In the early 1990s, I went back to Seattle where some of my closest col-

lege friends now live. One of them was active in the labor movement and had advanced to a pretty high position in the teachers' union. He was a strong supporter of Clinton's run for president in 1992 (I detested Clinton at the time, although I did vote for him). He understood my criticism of Clinton but still defended him with some gusto as being better for labor than the dreaded Republican alternative.

Shortly thereafter I spent some time with another college buddy, who was a top adviser to the mayor and had previously been a top aide to arguably the most liberal representative on Capitol Hill. I criticized the leading newspaper in Seattle for its generally pro-business politics, and my friend recoiled. He defended the paper, noting that it had been quite fair and generous to the mayor—his boss—in recent months.

My friends' basic values and politics had not changed. Nor have mine.

We had lively discussions of our respective positions—I learned a lot from them—and my friends appreciated the different perspective I could bring to the issues. But their work positions—specifically, the immediate demands of their jobs—had put them in positions that affected their judgment.

THIS IN A NUTSHELL EXPLAINS why societies need public intellectuals and need to provide them with some autonomy and insulation in the academy. As Harold Innis put it, the “university tradition” means that intellectuals can weigh in on social affairs with a commitment only to democratic values.

Or, as a now largely forgotten German student wrote back in the 1840s, intellectuals need to make “a ruthless criticism of everything existing, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflicts with the powers that be.” There is a crucial and necessary role for intellectuals to play in this regard in a democratic society. If we don't do it, nobody else will be in position to do the job.

In this sense, I use the terms

“democratic,” “critical,” and “radical” interchangeably.

Now, I do not wish to posit intellectuals as being “objective,” because that clearly is not the case. But I would say that once one factors in their values—and their self-interest in the university system—university intellectuals can be more objective than those seeing the world from a more narrowly defined vantage point. We can defend the tenure system to the extent it protects the integrity and autonomy of intellectuals, so that we can tell the truth and let the chips fall where they may. Frankly, being an effective intellectual requires time and institutional support.

Yet, the overwhelming majority of tenured academics in the United States are abject failures as public intellectuals. Much has been written on this matter, so I’ll summarize the main points. Universities are very much part of the social order, both ideologically and materially. If universities are hotbeds of “ruthless criticism,” their administrators face direct and intense material punishment. This institutional reality has become internalized into the operating logic of academia to such an extent that it is barely recognized by those who practice it.

THEREFORE, DESPITE THE IDEALS of intellectual freedom, scholars who challenge the existing social order face enormous obstacles in comparison to their mainstream colleagues. Radicals can and do get hired and tenured—and almost never get rejected on explicitly political criteria—but the standards are much higher than they are for those who regard the existing state of affairs as the best of all possible worlds.

Hence, as we are now in a period of retrenchment for progressive social forces, radical principled scholarship can be and is being more easily dismissed by those in power on university campuses as unnecessarily “ideological.” This provides an important lesson for critical scholars: If you think you can survive and prosper isolated in an academic climate on your own merits and without a broader political climate supportive of critical work, you are dreaming. The appearance of critical scholars on university

faculties represents the success of social movements outside the academy as much as it might the workings of the academic system.

And, of course, the issue of research funding also points work in the direction of those who foot the bill. This has devastating effects on who gets hired and promoted and what types of research gets emphasized. In recent years, the neoliberal trajectory has been for universities to rely increasingly upon explicit corporate support for research and other expenses. That this is a transparent abuse of intellectual freedom is mostly ignored or accepted as a necessity.

Moreover, the one form of public outreach (or “service”) that is encouraged is work on behalf of the powerful—be they corporations, governments, or foundations—to advance their interests. This is what we have been reduced to.

From the get-go, young scholars learn not to make waves. By the time they have completed grad school and the tenure process, whatever intellectual spine and backbone might have once existed has been systematically removed, and is covered up by all sorts of academic PR news-speak. (In fairness, lots of people entering grad school have no idea of what it means to be an intellectual in a democratic society.) I needn’t dwell on the rise of incomprehensible jargon and the growth of minuscule subfields.

Larry Soley told me of a study that said the single most highly regarded attribute in academic hirings was “collegiality.” When Larry looked into the study to see what collegiality meant, he discovered it meant the willingness to forego principle to get along with those in power. Is it any surprise we have faculties full of tenured professors who constitute what Noam Chomsky terms “the most obedient intellectual class in the world”?

BUT THAT IS ONLY PART of the explanation. Built right into the social conception of intellectuals are serious pitfalls for the creation of genuine public intellectuals. The most pressing threat comes from the elitism and paternalism that is a cornerstone of liberal

political and social theory. Academics just tend to think that, because they have been granted enormous privileges, they are better than most everyone else and certainly better than the working class and lower middle class.

It should be remembered that John Stuart Mill, that heroic paragon of liberalism, once advocated a multiple voting system whereby intellectuals would have six votes each, capitalists three or four votes each, and workers one vote each. This was a pretty honest reflection of the how liberal intellectuals regard their worth *vis-à-vis* everyone else. Only today nobody would be as crude as Mill. If that is one’s attitude—implicitly or explicitly—it would seem difficult to be much of a democratic intellectual. A guru would be more like it.

Nor are radicals in academia exempt from this elitism and its corollary: status obsession. Radicals come from the same gene pool and experience. In these times of political quiescence, many “academic leftists” have seemingly accepted the “good life” of tenure and having people below them on the pecking order kissing their butts. They have abandoned any noticeable commitment to social change.

I AM NOT SUGGESTING that academics need to be political organizers. Much of our work is such that it will only be appropriate for small audiences and communities. But regardless of what our areas of research and teaching are, we have an obligation to weigh in publicly on central social issues. And we have an obligation to take our work to the largest public audience possible when it is appropriate.

No intellectual is an island; we have to link up with democratic social movements. And activism begins at home. The autonomy and perks of academic life are under severe attack and are part and parcel of the attack on the nonmarket sector in our society. We need to fight hard to defend and create a democratic university. But that means defending a very different notion of intellectual activity than exists for the most part on U.S. campuses today. ❖

Activism in the academy

Coffee talk about academic labor

DENNIS GRAMMENOS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The following piece illustrates the difficulty in conceiving and acting upon other than capitalist, individualist ideas about work, even in supposedly “subversive” universities. Names have been changed to protect identities. Used with permission.—Ed.

I am sitting at a popular coffee-shop in Urbana this morning [mid-August—Ed.] reading the latest issue of *Lingua Franca* and sipping a cup of coffee, when my ear starts tracking the conversation at a neighboring table. It’s a discussion of the UPS strike among three grads, one of whom (let me call him Bob) I recognize as a person who has refused to join our Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO)—our grad union at the University of Illinois.

Bob is arguing that President Clinton should intervene and stop the strike because the Teamsters “have gone too far.” He knows UPS workers who make a pretty good living because of how generous the company has been. One person he went to high school with works at UPS in Chicago and earns more than \$40,000 per year. Bob is obviously not very happy at this. He feels that his friend is making far too much money for a person with just a high-school education. Bob has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree from good schools and he will be finishing up a Ph.D. in a year or so at the University of Illinois. He has been working as a teaching assistant making no more than \$10,000 per year even though he busts his tail to do a good job for his department.

Bob feels that “it just ain’t fair” for a high-school graduate to be making \$40,000 when he is barely getting by.

Besides which, what are the prospects for the future? Not so great. In his particular field chances are about 50/50 that he will be able to land a tenure-track position within five years after getting his Ph.D. Even then, the starting salary will be less than the \$40,000 his high-school classmate earns working for UPS.

BOB IS UNDERSTANDABLY BITTER this morning, and his friends are not making matters any easier for him. One of them—I’ll call her Ani—argues that UPS workers make a good living not because of the “generosity” of UPS but because of the collective bargaining power of the Teamsters (mind you, I recognize Ani as one of the hundreds of GEO members that joined to improve the lot of graduate employees). Ani calls Bob an “elitist” for arguing that the labor of a working-class UPS employee is not nearly as valuable as the labor of a graduate employee and/or of an academic.

The other participant in the discussion—I’ll call her Rosa—has trouble understanding what Bob’s point is. Does he want the salary of the UPS worker to be scaled down, or would he rather be better-paid himself?

Bob is not quite sure. He is just “pissed-off” at all the fuss that the Teamsters are making. UPS workers are lucky to have the jobs they do. There are millions of people around the country, and billions around the world that would be happy—“truly ecstatic”—to be making half what a UPS worker is making.

Rosa says that Bob is a hard worker and that he is being exploited by the University of Illinois, but this doesn’t mean that the UPS worker is some sort of culprit for his penury. If Bob wants to be pissed-off about someone, he

should be pissed-off at the administration that is exploiting his labor and the labor of more than 5,400 graduate employees at the University of Illinois—one more reason for him to join the GEO.

ANI AGREES WITH ROSA and adds that scapegoating a UPS worker because his union has managed to provide him or her with a pretty good contract is not the way to go. Bob should join the struggle waged by the Teamsters to stop the down-hill tumble that the working class has been in during the past few years.

“The corporations are part-timing America to death and they are turning one worker against another so that they can fatten their wallets and to hell with the rest of us,” she points out. “We’d better wake up and demand radical changes.”

“Yeah,” adds Rosa, “there is a reason for the saying ‘Workers of the world unite!’ If working people unite, we might be able to even the playing-field a bit. But, you see, the people with their hands on the levers of power don’t want this. So, they find ways to divide us. In your case, you barely need any prompting!”

“Besides which,” adds Ani, “I know a full professor in Mozambique who makes a hell of a lot less than we do as teaching assistants. She has a full teaching load and she barely makes ends meet for herself and her two children. By your logic she would be fully justified to argue that you do not deserve to make what you make, because you have nowhere near her education and experience.”

I have nothing to add, so I put my *Lingua Franca* away and walk out of the coffee-shop. Maybe Bob will wake-up and smell the coffee...

Of course, there is a lot more that can be said about what has transpired. But I won’t bore you with my analysis. Besides which I have a GEO action to go to. The IBEW has put up a picket outside a campus building because the university won’t let telecommunications installers to unionize. The GEO is going to be out there within the next hour picketing with the electrical workers. ❖

Center for Campus Organizing aids activism in academia

The Center for Campus Organizing (CCO) has set up over a dozen free e-mail lists to promote communication among campus activists.

This online project is called CANet—short for the Campus Activists' Network.

The Center for Campus Organizing (CCO) is a national clearinghouse based in Cambridge, MA, USA, originally established in 1991 as the University Conversion Project.

CANET is only a small part of CCO, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote peace and justice activism and investigative journalism on college campuses.

Try one or more of the discussions described below. Are all moderated (actually the term we are using is "facilitated") by human volunteers who are campus activists, so your mailbox will not be deluged.

The campus activists' network is currently divided into 15 areas that you may subscribe to individually. Some CANET discussions are co-sponsored with other organizations.

ACTION97—For planning coordinated actions at dozens of campuses, and announcing regional conferences and events.

CAN-ALERT—Action Alerts of the Center for Campus Organizing. Not a discussion list; subscribe for very infrequent, "emergency" alerts.

CAN-ALUM—Alumni Network. For alumni who used to be campus activists, on supporting campus activism and remaining active after

graduation.

CAN-AR—Anti-Racism. For campus activists involved in activities resisting racism.

CAN-BC—Boston Center. Discussion for coordinating campus activism in the Boston area.

CAN-BUDGET—Discussion for activists challenging federal and state budget priorities, and students working on the Petition for New Priorities.

CAN-ER—Educational Rights. For people who are organizing against tuition increases and efforts to cut funding for higher education.

CAN-FAC—Faculty Activist Network. Sponsored by CCO and Teachers For a Democratic Culture; responds to attacks on higher education.

CAN-LABOR—Student Labor Activism. Discussion for students who are interested in labor organizing, on campus or when they graduate.

CAN-POVERTY—Discussion for student anti-poverty activists. Cosponsored by Students Together Ending Poverty.

CAN-RW—Right Wing Alert. A discussion about responding to efforts by well-funded Right Wing groups to dictate politics on campus.

CAN-SKIT—Creative Activism. A place to share ideas for creative activist tactics, and to draft skits for guerrilla theatre.

The following three discussions ask new subscribers to state their involvement in campus activism, in order to help keep the discussion relevant.

CAN-YFN—Young Feminist

Network. For people who are involved in feminist campus organizations or who want to start one.

CAN-AJ—Campus Alternative Journalism. Restricted to people who are creating alternative campus media or who want to do so.

CAN-LAW—Law Student Activists. A network of law students interested in public interest law, legal cases affecting student activists.

Getting more information

With few exceptions, it is not possible to send mail to any of these lists unless you subscribe first.

For more information, send a blank email message to canet-info@pencil.math.missouri.edu

Publications by CCO:

- Campus Organizing Guide for Peace and Justice Groups.
- Mini-Guide to Bringing a Progressive Speaker to Campus.
- Mini-Guide to Building a Permanent Multi-Issue Student Coalition.
- Afflict the Comfortable; Comfort the Afflicted: Guide to the Alternative Campus Press.
- Directory of Internships in the Alternative Press.
- Guide to Uncovering the Right on Campus (2nd ed.).

Please call from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. EST at: Center for Campus Organizing, Box 748, Cambridge, MA 02142 617-354-9363, e-mail cco@igc.apc.org; <http://envirolink.org/orgs/cco>. ❖

Midwest Campus Alternative Journalism Meeting October 31-Nov. 2, Chicago

This event brings together campus activists from around the country for the purpose of educating and preparing ourselves to organize Democracy Teach-Ins in March 1998.

Come to meet student activist/journalists, talk about the challenges and goals that we share, hear some inspiring speakers, and play a role in firming up our network. For more info, e-mail Sonya Huber at sawnhuber@aol.com or call the Center for Campus Organizing. ❖

News necessary for a democracy

(AP)—A judge today allowed a surprise witness to testify that Marv Albert, wearing panties and a garter, bit her three years ago in a Dallas hotel room during a struggle that left her holding the sportscaster's hairpiece. [...] [*Need I say more?*—Ed.] ❖

Call for papers

The image of class in literature, the media, and society

An interdisciplinary conference exploring the idea and the imagery of class—in literature, film, television, popular culture, history, politics, social theory, business, advertising, art, music, and education—will be held in Colorado Springs during mid-March, 1998.

Papers may address the relevance of class to particular works (novels, poems, films, dramas), authors, cultures, nations, or theories.

Possible approaches and issues would include:

- Class in literary imagery; class and literary style, genre, content, theory.
- Class as a social structure, an explanatory reference, a form of control.
- Postmodern images of class; class and interpretation; class and

power.

- Class in history; comparative structures of class; class and tradition.
- Class in popular culture—film, television, music, advertising.
- Class and the global economy; class and electronic information.
- The politics of class; class and religion; theories of class.

A Proceedings will be published from selected papers presented at the conference. Previous themes have included the image of violence, of technology, nature, and of the frontier. Eclectic and innovative approaches are encouraged.

Keynote speaker

Stanley Aronowitz, author of

The Jobless Future and The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism.

Web site for information

<http://meteor.uscolo.edu/sissi>

Details on submissions

Please submit a one-page abstract, or panel proposal with abstracts, by **December 1, 1997**.

Proposals for organized panels are encouraged.

Mail to CLASS, University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo, CO 81001-4901. Email class@uscolo.edu. Fax: (719) 549-2705.

For more information, call either person below:

- Will Wright, Department of Sociology, University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo, Colorado (719) 549-2538, wright@uscolo.edu;
- Steven Kaplan, Department of English, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, New York, (716) 878-6329, kaplans@buffalostate.edu. ❖

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