

opinion

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Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down



Fall for the Book is this week! Visit Fallforthebook.org to find out more information about the numerous events and guests we'll be having.



Our government is using our money to support failing private businesses. At least in socialist economies, the taxpayer receives benefits from this process. In this case, the only ones who profit are those who mismanaged companies like Fannie Mae, Freddie Mae and AIG.

Things Fall Apart and the Debate on Colonialism

Michael Gryboski



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opinion
columnist

This week is Fall for the Book at George Mason University. Writers visit our campus to receive honors, talk of their knowledge and, of course, sign books. For Monday, the visiting writer will be Chinua Achebe, author of the tragedy *Things Fall Apart*. The book is famous in our circles, as just about every student at Mason who was educated in the U.S. since high school has had it assigned to them. In addition to being good literature, *Things Fall Apart* delivers an interesting perspective on colonialism.

The historical debate over colonialism has an emotional and political component, especially as those who did not benefit from the initiative are increasingly getting a voice. Whether colonialism was a benevolent effort to advance civilization or a malevolent entity advancing white supremacy varies not only from

person to person, but political climate to political climate. Some people, even in the developing world, want colonialism to return, at least in some form, while others blame the time period for instability and pervasive ethnic conflict. Some refer to American foreign policy as colonialist, and mean so in a negative context.

Then there is Achebe, whose best selling novel advances a surprisingly positive image of colonialism. Everyone will have his or her interpretations of the work and far be it from me to act like mine is inherently better, but throughout the text Achebe sets up a contrast of the Ibo villages, where women are second class citizens, twins are abandoned for being seen as a curse and aggression is a chief means of societal advancement with the Europeans, who arrive with Christianity and institutes like schools and hospitals. The only one who truly loses out from the arrival and establishment of "Christianity, commerce, and civilization" is Okonkwo, the novel's main character. A product of his environment, he refuses to accept these new ways, which are viewed almost as inevitable.

Like all famous writers, Achebe had his critics. Some doubt his interpretation of modern African history, in particular regarding gender roles in Ibo culture. Yet have these critics stood the test of time any better than the rebuttals by American loyalists to Thomas Paine's pamphlet "Common Sense"? How many of

them are mentioned in high schools across this country, whereas Achebe's appellation appears on many a syllabus given by English and History teachers? In the same way few have heard of "Plain Truth" by James Chalmers, an equally small number can call to mind *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* by Ifi Amadiume.

While Achebe prevailed, having been invited to Mason nearly 50 years after his novel's first printing, colonialism is dead. Not only has it been removed via passive resistance and violent upheaval, it now barely maintains a positive reputation in the very countries that once instituted it. Anti-colonialism is a popular perspective whose message contradicts the old perspective: colonialism was repression, intolerance and did nothing but create the instability found in Africa, Asia and the Middle East today.

But is this perspective any better than its opposite? The Eurocentric perspective on colonialism was fundamentally flawed because it ignored many problems with the institute, namely the subliminal racism, ethnocentrism, and oftentimes, violent subjugation perpetrated by colonialists. Yet could the anti-colonialism perspective be equally flawed for ignoring the positive impacts of colonialism, including the advancements in medicine, technology and standard of living?

There were bad things that came from colonialism, but to just end there leaves many unanswered questions. The

colonialism period lasted roughly eighty years. If it was such an obvious evil, why were so many native populations across the continents willing to have it? Why are there populations today in the developing world who want it to return for at least a limited extent of time? Why did Achebe paint it as something that only hardliners like Okonkwo rejected? Maybe colonialism offered positive and negative side-effects.

We should never forget the nightmarishly brutal rule of the Netherlands' King Leopold in the Congo, the British's antagonizing of groups against each other in the Indian subcontinent, and the ethnocentric notion of "civilizing" people. But we should also never forget the dramatic increase of primary and secondary schools built, the vaccinations that significantly lowered infant mortality, and the rapid increase in industrialization.

Achebe's classic has an interesting interpretation of colonialism, one somewhat at odds with the modern perspective. Debates will always rage as to how good or bad colonialism was for the developing world, and some will take hard-line positions one way or the other. In truth, both sides could find plenty of examples to vindicate their stances. So maybe the middle ground is better: acknowledging both the pluses and shortcomings of a foreign policy that in the current global climate may never return again.

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George Mason University's Student Newspaper

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Sexism in the Media

How a Once Pressing Issue Has Been Exploited by An Eager Republican Party

Brandon Cosby



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columnist

With Election Day six weeks away, the presidential primary season is long behind us but not forgotten. The effects of months and months of harsh campaigning and even harsher attacks still reverberate. Questions about Barack Obama's history and experience, first posed by Senator Hillary Clinton months ago, still strike at the Illinois senator. Issues of Senator John McCain's aloofness and ignorance of the economy still dog him, all first raised by the Democratic field in the spring.

But with the selection of Governor Sarah Palin to be McCain's running mate, older issues quickly reemerged. Now, it wasn't the candidates themselves propelling these old attacks, but the media. Issues of sexism and bias were consistently lobbed by the Clinton campaign back at the news establishment long ago and they've found new life in the recent weeks.

Memories of placards pleading Hillary Clinton to "iron my shirt" snapped back into the

collective minds of gender-conscious Americans with the selection of Governor Palin. Republican supporters of the ticket and some democratically and independently aligned women decried the necessary scrutiny applied to any unknown quantity thrown into the spotlight as sexist. Accusations of impropriety, her religiously tinged support of the Iraq War and a natural gas pipeline through her state, and her complete inexperience were thrown back as gender-biased jabs and unfit to be discussed by commentators on television.

Politicians then did what politicians do best and mustered up their best false outrage and effectively claimed that any question aimed against the governor, no matter how legitimate, was an offense against all women in our God-loving land.

But the GOP collectively missed the boat here. Their sentiments were in the right place, but a couple months too late. Sexism has been present in the media establishment this election cycle, yes, but not so much now.

Although it was hard for some, myself included, to see and believe, it was there. Comments like how Senator Clinton only holds her seat because of her husband's infidelity and that she has a "nagging voice," have no place in intelligent political commentary and should be decried for being exactly what they were—sexist.

Many people did stand up and say something, but such criticism was easily brushed off or completely ignored. While it's impossible to say that these things will never happen again, it is easy to say they should. If

we are to reach any sense of gender equality in our society, comments like those from anyone with an audience must be the first to go.

Making strange bedfellows indeed, the GOP has since adopted the same line of criticism spouted by Clinton followers, aiming charges of sexism back at the media. The problem is that it has become completely of place.

There are legitimate questions to be posed to the vice presidential nominee and they should not be dismissed as flatly unfair. ABC newsmen Charlie Gibson did his best recently in an interview with Palin and there is no doubt that some of her supporters and defenders saw the hard line of questioning to be sexist. But like it or not, she is in the big leagues now and there will be infinitely more scrutiny over what she says and what she knows. It isn't sexist to ask questions; it is sexist to ask unfair questions that are completely irrelevant to her qualifications for the second-highest office in the country.

So when people start talking about unfair comments about lipsticks and pigs or try to paint the governor as some sort of victim of unfair attacks by the big boys, say it's premature. We haven't gotten to the point where sexist comments start spewing from the media like they did with Senator Clinton. But the GOP doesn't understand that and as such have nearly overplayed their hand.

Perhaps the low point of their manic hysteria over gender equality came this past week when McCain adviser Carly Fiorina slammed Tina Fey's portrayal of Palin on "Saturday Night Live" as "dismissive,"

"disrespectful," and, wait for it—"sexist." Fey's parody was honest and painted the governor as the unfit candidate that she is—not because of her gender, but for her complete ignorance on the issues that press us today.

With that one statement, the McCain campaign effectively jumped the shark in its gender equality crusade. When you begin taking umbrage at a variety show's parody of your candidate, it reeks of overreaction. It's just as well to simply let those things go.

These claims by the right of unfair treatment don't even pass the smell test. The Republican Party has never been a friend of woman's rights (ERA, anyone?) and to claim that it suddenly does suggests a tremendous revelation on their part that simply hasn't happened. So on top of being untrue, these attacks back on the media are superficial.

So let the media ask questions—fair questions—the same fair questions that were often denied to the Clinton campaign. Because if they do not, we get the lazy, complacent press that has let us slid into other disasters in the past. There may be some members of the ol' boys club who would much rather never see a woman reach higher office but they're not in the majority. Their disdain is real, but it's not overwhelming, and certainly not now. So I say to the Republicans, calm down. Your candidate is the toast of the town now. Enjoy it while you can because in our fickle news cycle, it won't last long.

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LETTER FROM YOUR STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT

Why Re-Registering to Vote on Campus Matters

Since classes started, anyone who has walked through the Johnson Center or North Plaza has encountered a volunteer asking them to register to vote. While repeatedly being asked the same question and the occasional partisanship of the volunteers can sometimes be irritating, it is important to remember that they are providing a valuable service to the George Mason University community.

This semester we have just over 4,700 students housed on campus. Next year that number will rise to 5,200, and by 2010 we will have 5,600 students living on campus. This represents a significant number of potential voters.

A residential student at Mason spends at least eight months of the year here on campus. This means that for more than half of the year a residential student is living, not only as a member of the Mason community, but also as a member of the Fairfax County community and the Virginia Community. As members of these communities for more than half of the year it is important that residential students have their voices heard in the elections that choose the people who will be representing them while they are living at Mason.

Making sure that Mason has a strong advocate on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and in the State General Assembly is in the best interest of the university and in the best interest of students. Having pro-Mason representatives will help improve everything at our university from traffic to tuition. This isn't to say that our current representatives don't ably represent Mason's interests, however, anyone who represents the Braddock district on the Board of Supervisors, Virginia's 37th District in the House of Delegates, or Virginia's 34th District in the State Senate should have to consider the Mason student vote in any of his or her political calculations.

As our residential population grows, Mason students can have a dramatic impact on the outcome of our local elections. Consider this: in the 2007 election the districts that represent Mason, the Braddock district (Fairfax County Board of Supervisors), the 34th State Senate District (Virginia State Senate), and the 34th House District (Virginia House of Delegates) had total vote counts of 22,958, 46,105, and 13,916, respectively. If we were able to register every student who lived on campus and get them to the polls for next year's local and state elections Mason's residential students would account for 18 percent (Braddock), 10 percent (34th District), and 27 percent (37th District) of the total votes in the districts that represent Mason at the local and state levels. In a close race the Mason student vote could easily be the difference in the election because we would make up such a high percentage of the total voting population.

The excitement associated with this year's Presidential elections has helped register many new students here on campus. Hopefully, we can carry the momentum from this year's elections into the next cycle and continue to register students on campus so that we can have a significant impact on the elections that directly affect the Mason community.

Zack Golden
Student Body President



PHOTO BY COURTNEY ERLAND | PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Conservative Case Against McCain

George Mason University has earned national recognition for the diversity of its student body—a diversity that extends beyond simple statistics of ethnic and national identity into the realm of politics. In 2006, the conservative National Review wrote of our Law School that those who “celebrate diversity ought to cheer for Mason because it provides a much-needed dose of true diversity—the intellectual type”; Mason's ICAR and Cultural Studies programs have earned a similarly prestigious reputation on the progressive left. Student organizations range all across the political spectrum, from Students for a Democratic Society on the left to the College Republicans on the right; while other campuses can often be readily identified as the educational wing of one party or another, students at Mason boast a proud and fierce independence. And nowhere is this more evident than in the persisting skepticism among Mason conservatives of Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

In the past, I've written of divisions among the Democratic base; after losing control of both the House and Senate in 2006, however, the GOP's fragile coalition of evangelicals, libertarians and paleo-conservatives began to unravel. Politico reports that “the Virginia party remains ideologically fractured”; in an open letter last year, Mason's own congressman, Republican Tom Davis, warned his colleagues of failing to appreciate “the underlying cultural differences that continue to brand our party.” Such differences are particularly visible among the diversity of Mason conservatives.

“I'm not going to sell out on my beliefs in order to elect ‘the lesser of two evils.’” explains one Mason voter, graduate student Denver Davis. Davis is one of many campus conservatives who supported Rep. Ron Paul's (R-TX) presidential bid during the primaries; now, he plans to vote for either Libertarian Bob Barr or the Constitution Party's Chuck Baldwin. In a recent interview, Paul refused to endorse McCain's campaign: “I believe what Republicans should believe,” he insisted, “and I campaigned on that and got a lot of support. But I can't support somebody that virtually disagrees with all of my positions.”

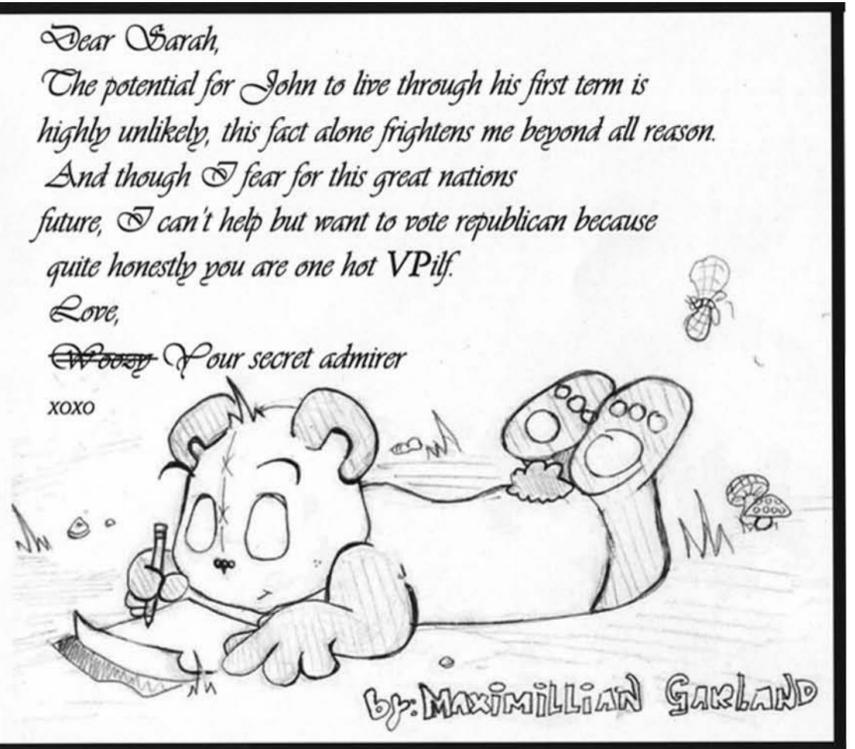
Such disagreements run the full gamut of issues. Club For Growth President Pat Toomey has called on McCain to “address those areas in which we've had strong disagreements” such as “his vision on tax policy; political speech during campaigns; global warming remedies; and his general approach towards regulatory matters.” On immigration, Townhall columnist John Hawkins observes that “if your highest priority is having open borders and amnesty, you couldn't possibly do better than John McCain.” And in last week's column on stem-cell research, *Broadside* columnist Michael Gryboski argued that its conservative opponents “should leave the religion-bashers, the hoaxers, and those who have mere hopes for unfounded progress behind”—advice that presumably applies to those considering support for John McCain, who voted just last year to allow research using human embryos. Among the barrage of criticism, McCain can neither claim the consistency of Libertarian or culturally conservative ideals, though his record does correspond with one standard in particular: that of George W. Bush, who he has voted with 91 percent of the time.

In the end, it is unlikely that dissent among the political right will hurt the GOP in Virginia — and that is precisely why many Mason students will feel free to cast a protest vote in November. In 1996, we saw a remarkably similar scenario, when an enormously popular Democrat, Bill Clinton, ran against a Republican Senator and war hero, Bob Dole. Ultimately, Dole won Virginia; but notably, he lost Mason's congressional district by two percent when five percent of area voters turned to conservative insurgent Ross Perot. The Republican Party may still count on Virginia votes, but whether John McCain can expect unquestioning support from conservatives at Mason remains to be seen.

Jacob Fawcett
Graduate Student, English

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