

THE UNION CRIER

the newsletter of the YALE POLITICAL UNION

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2007

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

POLL: Who do you think is the most influential politician? Why?

By Jane Hu

William Jefferson Clinton, because he plays the saxophone.

- Bill Clinton, LAW '73

George Washington Carver, because he did more than anyone in history to advance the rights of the peanut.

- Matthew Collier Lee, CC '09

Stephen Christopher Christoforov, because of his name.

- Noah Mamis, BR '08

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Isn't it just like Oxford, anyway?

by Katherine Maltby

"So isn't it just like Oxford anyway?" said the earnest young man, as he heard that I had transferred this semester from that illustrious British university. He was talking about the YPU, but his classmates have asked me the same thing about the architecture, the college system

and even the supposedly all-American fraternities. Nowhere am I asked this question more frequently, though, than in the YPU, whose members speak of the Oxford Union as if invoking the name of their Promised Land.

The YPU remains almost exclusively a debating society, wherein Yalies are welcome to develop and test out ideas in a relatively safe space, where experiment is encouraged and intellectual debate remains the purpose. The Oxford Union has now become primarily a social club, with its officers chiefly responsible for organizing the weekly parties that occur on its beautiful property. The sizeable building is a key meeting place for students, who work in its libraries and enjoy its heavily subsidised bars. This is not to suggest that concern for world affairs is absent from the Union: indeed one of the most rewarding perks for members is the schedule of heavyweight guest speakers, amongst them major world leaders, although the majority of these speakers come to give independent afternoon talks to an audience and do not take part in student debate.

Four guest speakers, usually political figures, will be docketed to speak at each weekly debate, alongside four student debaters. In the last ten years, there has been a significant rift between the debate team, whose associates give most of the docketed speeches, and the "hacks," who are not usually seasoned debaters

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Lefkowitz argues for human rights, security

by Geoffrey Shaw



Last week at the Union, Jay Lefkowitz, Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea, argued that the United States should promote human rights because it benefits national security. Securing human rights, said Lefkowitz, is a "laudable end in itself" but also "a means to greater ends of peace." Since disrespect for the rights of citizens and disrespect for the rights of neigh-

bors almost always go together, human rights promotion must take center stage in US foreign policy. Lefkowitz responded to three objections: that human rights violation is an internal problem (it's more than that), that rights violation is a regional problem (but we care anyway), and that focusing on human rights compromises more pressing security needs (which it doesn't). Lefkowitz then outlined the US's current 3-part strategy for North Korea. Attract international attention to North Korea; help the refugees in north-east China; and "ramp up broadcasting activities."

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The World According to Keller

Bill Keller, Executive Editor, The New York Times

I had a great time at YPU. The company was fun, the audience paid attention, the responses were generally thoughtful, people brought me wine at the after-party.

This display of courtesy and bonhamie was...appalling, frankly. How is a political union supposed to prepare students for the post-university world if it encourages such politesse? Haven't you been paying attention? Hasn't the YPU heard of Darwin? Don't you all know it's a jungle out there? Is YPU preparing you all to flop on your backs like puppies and wait to have your tummies rubbed?

I've watched enough parliamentary pit-bull democracy to expect that I would be savaged for my ideas, my style of argument, my grammar, my diction, possibly my haircut and clothing. But everybody was so damn nice. Now, maybe that's because everybody more or less agreed with my proposition -- that the government should not be trusted to decide what the press can publish. (I do hope you agree with that.) But this is an audience so courteous that on a previous occasion it voted IN FAVOR of Justice Thomas's proposition that the Constitution is dead -- not, I'd have thought, a heartfelt sentiment on the campus of an Ivy League university. Only inexcusably good manners could account for that.

If the YPU could change one thing, I would suggest that it encourage students to come to the debates armed -- not with cogent arguments, but with invective, with humiliating jibes, maybe even with water balloons or seltzer bottles.

The World According to Boaz

David Boaz, Executive Vice President, Cato Institute

I'd heard about the Yale Political Union for decades, so it was a real thrill to finally have a chance to be part of it. Not to mention that I'd heard about New Haven pizza for decades, and finally eating at Pepe's was almost as great a thrill. I loved the banging and hissing. It could be a little disconcerting, but probably less so than the silence that greets most speeches that are thoughtful and provocative rather than political sloganeering. The YPU is nothing like other student organizations to which I've spoken. The active involvement of the members is unusual, and so is the quality of the argument. If I was surprised about anything, it was the diversity in dress of the YPU members. Years ago I attended a meeting of the Jefferson Society of the University of Virginia, where I believe they required a coat and tie to speak. I figured the YPU would be equally formal. Instead, I guess the YPU reserves its formality for the rules of debate, not for attire.

Advice for YPU members who would like to be in politics: think twice. You're more likely to do good for the world as a doctor, a scientist, or a capital allocator than as a politician or bureaucrat.

If the YPU could change one thing, it should ensure that Sally's is open in weeks that the YPU is bringing in speakers! If it could change two things, it should have a Libertarian Party to sit between and beyond the left and the right.

Union Poll

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Gandhi, because he showed people the power of reason and goodness.

- Andrew Samuel, CC '09

Anthony Kennedy, because he's deciding every Supreme Court case.

- Andrew Mayersohn, PC '11

Neanderthals, because without them, we wouldn't have society in the first place.

- Daisy Long, CC '11

Ronald McDonald, because he knows how to run a business.

- Luis Medina, SY '09

Bono. Because he unfortunately has a lot of sway over a lot of people for no good reason.

- Nick Bartz, SM '10

We don't know--half the influence of the most influential politician comes from the fact that no one knows who it is.

- Justin Kosslyn, ES '09

Oxford Union

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but who interest themselves in mischievous popular machination and electoral campaigns. More recently, a number of debaters have contested elections and even won Presidential office, as part of an attempt to draw the Union back to its debating roots.

One of the most significant differences concerns the existence at Yale of multiple YPU parties. No such organizations are affiliated with the Oxford Union. Groups of like-minded thinkers banned from making any official association.

Elections at the Oxford Union are governed by a strict code which were intended to limit hackery, but in practice force candidates to adopt even more Machiavellian subterfuges. Consequently, no candidate may inform a member of the union (other than a few "close personal friends") that the election is occurring, nor that she is standing. Naturally any direct suggestion that people vote for a particular candidate is grounds for disqualification. Tickets do indeed form, but one can only be told of their existence through word of mouth, as no candidate dares to leave any written evidence. A typical "slate" will involve a group of candidates drawn from a wide range of residential colleges, whose candidates will all privately mobilize their friends and college mates to vote for them. Thus a member who could count on the votes of 20 friends, on a slate of 18, might transform that support into 360 votes. Ambitious members of the Union are often judged by their colleagues by their ability to "line?" i.e. the extent to which their type of friends can be relied on to vote on slate lines. When Presidential candidates are drawing up their "slate maps," no one wants to be carrying the candidates who don't "line".

The sheer size of the electorate also means that candidates spend much of the term being seen in as many nightspots as possible and eating dinner in every college hall, so as to introduce themselves to hundreds of voters a week. I never ran for election in the Union during my time at Oxford; my body never would have been able to sustain the partying.

North Korea Envoy Shares Expertise

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Lefkowitz made a couple of amusing remarks along the way – the first foreshadowing "Hotel Pyongyang," no doubt a favorite-to-be of ironing board activists, the second interpreting the penumbral Foreign Aid Clause of the Tenth Amendment, a perennial mystery.

Mr. Lefkowitz yielded the floor to Holly Ovington, who reminded us of our moral obligations to every human being. Matt Klein pointed out (partly by "acting out" a graph) that foreign aid does no good; it underwrites tyrants and presses the starving peasants into greater misery. Marie Diamond explained how aiding regimes "normalizes" international relations (she also compared dictators to temperamental toddlers). Jake McGuire warned of the dangers of dependency and proposed that we teach dictators to fish. Next Mike Educate extolled the virtues of the UN. Trevor Wagener then observed that North Koreans hate us. Finally, Alex Martone suggested, scandalously, that we want dictators dependent on us; we have more leverage that way.

YPU HAPPENINGS

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Name	Claps	Hisses	Laughs	Good Humor Index
B. Chaidell	5	3	4	2.75
G. Ellsworth	4	3	1	0.25
G. Liu	1	4	5	2.00
M. Educate	3	5	0	-1.75
M. Morrison	9	2	2	2.75
J. Schiffes	5	1	0	0.75
G. Bogden	3	2	1	0.50
L. Mohs	7	6	3	1.00
V. Lewis	9	6	2	0.75
A. Agyapon	3	0	2	2.25
M. Long	4	0	8	7.00
G. Rabinowitz	3	4	1	-0.50
P. Zeng	1	1	1	0.50
D. Broockman	6	3	0	0.00
E. Galvan	2	2	0	-0.50
M. Marshall	2	0	0	0.50
K. McDermott	1	0	0	0.25
C. Lucio	6	3	1	0.75
S. Burger	1	0	0	0.25
L. Beland	3	1	2	1.75
N. Lisan	4	2	0	0.00
C. Drucker	1	0	0	0.25
A. Stempel	7	0	5	5.50
N. Paulenko	1	0	1	1.00
T. Meyerson	0	0	0	0.00
A. LaCounte	3	0	0	0.75
D. Morris	0	5	0	-2.50
B. Willig	6	5	5	2.75
W. Speth	6	1	7	6.25
B. Stang	0	0	1	0.75
R. Clegg	5	0	8	7.25
A. Cole	5	3	3	2.00
M. Gerken	12	5	7	5.75
S. Gensburg	1	2	1	0.00
S. Blumenfeld	4	2	1	0.75
M. Barrosse-Antle	6	3	3	2.25
T. Wagener	7	2	2	2.25
B. Gallagher	9	2	4	4.25
T. Chandler	3	0	0	0.75
A. Feldman	1	0	0	0.25
T. Toth	8	4	3	2.25
B. Levin	0	0	0	0.00
J. Petrillo	1	3	0	-1.25
D. Beniak	2	1	0	0.00
D. Kabotyanski	3	1	1	1.00

Freshman Prize Debate

Box Scores

by Peter Johnston



This year's Freshman Prize debate topic was "Resolved: Legalize Prostitution." From 7:30 until the Yale Police kicked us out of Street Hall at 1 AM, 45 freshman gave speeches on the topic. Six won eternal glory:

1st Prize - **David Broockman**

2nd Prize - **Warren Speth**

3rd Prize - **Naomi Lisan**

Honorable Mentions - **Brooke Willig, Luke Beland, and Matthew Gerken**

Here we also document their Good Humor Index, as calculated ever-so-scientifically by this formula:

$$\frac{(\# \text{ of Claps}) + (3^* \# \text{ of Laughs}) - (2^* \# \text{ of Hisses})}{\text{Minutes Speaking}}$$

Minutes Speaking



Funniest speeches:

River Clegg - 7.25
Pimpin' ain't easy, and neither was making us laugh this hard 3/4 of the way through the debate.

Daisy Long - 7.00
The tin-foil hat (left) made sense if you heard the speech, really.

PARTY ROUNDUP

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Date	Party	Resolved:	Aff	Neg	Abst.
14-Sep	Con	That without God there is no morality	8	5	2
18-Sep	POL	The left should not support Israel	3	11	5
18-Sep	IP	Evangelicalism threatens America	10	15	1
18-Sep	Tory	America needs a new frontier	6	11	1
20-Sep	Lib	[not a debate] Self determination for ethnic minorities?	n/a	n/a	n/a
20-Sep	Con	That a liberal arts education is obsolete	1	11	0
20-Sep	POR	You can have my gun when you take it from my cold, dead hands	13	6	1
25-Sep	Lib	[not a debate] End free trade?	n/a	n/a	n/a
26-Sep	POL	Racial Inequality cannot be eliminated	6	12	2
26-Sep	IP	Abolish the Residential College System	5	15	0
27-Sep	Tory	All men are created equal	6	10	1
3-Oct	IP	Learn to live with terrorism	12	13	2
4-Oct	Lib	[not a debate] Should Yale leave China?	n/a	n/a	n/a
4-Oct	Con	That free will is an illusion	2	9	1
4-Oct	Tory	Europe should let in the Turks	1	11	2
4-Oct	POR	Universal education is the opiate of the masses	2	3	2
5-Oct	POL	Columbia should not have invited Ahmadinejad	6	12	2
10-Oct	Lib	[not a debate] Draft everyone?	n/a	n/a	n/a
10-Oct	IP	Divorce the Government from Marriage	8	14	0
10-Oct	POL	Harbor illegal immigrants	7	12	4
10-Oct	Con	Democracy breeds mediocrity	6	2	0
10-Oct	Tory	Ambition is a virtue	11	8	0
11-Oct	POR	Art is a waste of talent	3	12	0

The Union This Week



Liberal Party: “Should Intellectuals Lead the Left?”, at 7:30 on Tues.

Party of the Left: Resolved: Self-Harm is a Right, 7:30 on Tuesday

Progressive Party: Resolved: Colonize Space, at 7:30 on Thursday in the Saybrook Athenaeum Room

Independent Party: Resolved: Impeach Bush, at 7:30 on Tuesday

Conservative Party: Resolved: Extremism in Defense of Liberty is No Vice, at 7:30 on Thursday in the Branford Trumbull Room

Tory Party: Great Speeches in the English Language Event, at 7:30 on Thursday in WHC 208;
Lunch with Donald Kagan at Mory’s, Friday

Party of the Right: Resolved: Rock the Casbah, 7:45 on Friday German Faculty Lounge, WLH 3rd Floor

The Nature of the Union

by Justin Kosslyn

What is the nature of the Yale Political Union? On one level, we do the philosophy of politics. On another level, we do the politics of philosophy. But why do people devote so much time to this organization with almost no concrete gains to show for it? Yes, we become better speakers; yes, we become more capable leaders; and yes, our knowledge of Locke, Plato, and Kant increase -- but these things are hardly enough to fully explain the intensity of commitment that so many show to their Parties and to the Union. There is a deeper need being met, a more fundamental question being answered. But what?

In my opinion, we are being driven by the question of Identity: the question of what matters and who we are. The process is often not conscious. Very few people wake up in the morning and ask, "What can I do today to build or reinforce my solid notion of who I am?" Rather, we feel an inchoate need, a formless desire to feel grounded in a moral bedrock. We seek a structure of values within which we can live our lives.

This note in our souls resonates with the Yale Political Union, and with a Party in particular. So we join, and we think, and we begin to build a sense of who we are and what matters in the world. Each party offers different answers to those questions. In gross oversimplification, the Party of the Right proposes to tear your old identity down, and build you anew. The Tory Party tenders the opportunity for you to assume the manners and attitudes of a respectable gentleman. The Independent Party extends an offer for you to dazzle your peers. The Conservative Party proffers a weighty intellectualism. The Party of the Left proposes to make you a nice guy. I am less confident in my senses of the other Parties, and I invite other interpretations of the identities of the ones I listed.

We all have things about ourselves that we wish were different. And when we find a group of people with the same wish, the same desired type of new identity, something deep inside us responds. So freshmen join the party that most embodies the identity they are looking for, in the hope that the identity will be transmitted osmosis-style. Sometimes this works -- hang around the Union for a few years, and one can't help but see some people becoming more comfortable with themselves. Their parties are helping them embody an identity, and so they have a framework for interacting with the world. Sometimes, though, people don't seem to find what they're looking for.

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Union Theory

by David Kasten

I love the Union as much as I love my own party. I've debated ambassadors and dined with congressmen and drank with a Supreme Court Justice. I take this thing seriously, and, yeah, I like to brag about it too. We're a serious debating society, and although there's always room for improvement, we debate serious ideas.

After that, here's the simple truth, friends, that I've learned after three years in the Union: If it's not fun, you're not doing it right.

A lot of people call the YPU's accumulated set of organizational rules and lessons learned "Union Theory." Union Theory is intoxicating. You feel like you're part of an in-group, where you can talk about "right answers" and "wrong answers," and how you understand the Union better than anyone else. You have to be able to abstract yourself from your own party's identity, and "take the interests of the Union first."

This is the stuff that wins you votes during Inquisition. It's useful. But it's much more useful to know why those answers are right or wrong. This article, therefore, will sketch out my philosophy of why Union Theory matters.

People who tell you that the Union has inherent value, or dignity, are kidding themselves. The students in it

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Thoughts? Comments? Ideas?

Send letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and any other ideas to union.crier@gmail.com.

YPUtopia

by Alexander Soble

In the history of the YPU, two complementary but antagonistic forces seem to be locked in an eternal struggle, like Yin and Yang, the Clintons and the Bushes, Yorkside's Pizza and sleep. The forces I'm referring to are a roster of big-name guests and quality student debate on the floor of the Union. John Kerry's presidency (no, the one that actually happened) was criticized for valuing the latter aspect of the Union over the former; in the past decade, however, an increase in the quality of guests has helped lift the Union out of its slump into the robust organization it is today. Can the two coexist? Of course they can. I would say both of these characterize the state of the Union right now.

But together they lead to a slightly awkward phenomenon: that of a packed lecture hall becoming only half-full after the guest speaker's performance, and ultimately containing only a handful of hardcore YPU-ers by the end of a debate. It's a slight bit depressing to be sitting in SSS with only a few-score others and Bill Keller, the Executive Editor of the New York Times, voting on the role of the press regarding government secrets, especially right after a fascinating debate on the topic has just occurred in front of a quickly dwindling audience.

Why this happens is obvious: an interesting speaker draws the crowd of Yalies who like listening to interesting speakers, plus YPU members bring their friends to have them sign in, telling them that it's no big deal to leave after the first speech. On one hand, this is a good thing. Better to expose many to an interesting argument than not at all, right? But as the official membership of the Yale Political Union grows, the gap between those who leave right away and those who stick it out 'till the end grows. It becomes a lecture club with separate meetings of the debate society held afterwards.

Yes, the seven parties of the Union do an admirable job providing access to friendly, small-scale debate; many of those who leave Union debates after two or three speeches will spend at least one other night of their week on their party's floor. Yes, we're all quite busy these days, and many can't spare two or three hours to discuss politics or philosophy. But wouldn't it be nice if the Union itself provided as robust and personable debating scene as the parties? If vote counts at the end of debates could be counted in the hundreds? If more people could hear the deep thoughts and often stellar oratory that graces the floor of the YPU?

Perhaps I'm just dreaming, yearning for a YPUtopia that will never come to be. But maybe, just maybe, if we all contribute a little bit it can happen. Encourage your friends to stay the whole time; don't tell them that it's A-OK to just come for the first speech. Talk up the quality of YPU debates afterwards: to your fellow party-members, to your friends, to your WGSS class section. And, above all, stay yourself. The YPU is great, but together we can make it *über alles*.

Heard Around the YPU

"When someone mentions the word prostitution, it reminds me of my childhood."

- Geoffrey Liu

"I'm not an expert on prostitution."

-Noah Mamis

"Who's that, Mama?
That's a prostitute, son."

- Geoffrey Liu

"We could say Resolved: Abolish Lobbies and have an architecture debate."

- Geoff Shaw

What is the YPU?

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Maybe they changed who they hope to be, maybe their party changed, or maybe the osmosis process just didn't work – whatever the reason, people sometimes seem to be chasing a mirage, a promise of knowing who they are that recedes forever into the horizon.

So what is the nature of the Yale Political Union? In my mind, it is a place where we seek new identities for ourselves. Communicated through aesthetics, debates, informal discussions, and assuming officership roles, the Union and the Parties attempt to impart to their members a sense of what has value and how we can embody those values. Sometimes this process works, and sometimes it fails. But the project is a worthy one, and though we may answer the question of who we are differently from party to party and from person to person, the journey to answers is the true foundation of the Good life.

The World's Largest Live Action Political Role-Playing Game

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do, and our ideas do, and I firmly believe that Union debates can be more interesting and rewarding than any Party's debates. But all of that comes about only from the people who participate.

The Union matters because it doesn't matter. It matters because we can debate philosophy without the constraints of having to actually implement any of our ideas, particularly the crazy ones. It matters because we have just enough prestige to attract good guests, but not enough to make us scared of debating ridiculous ideas. It matters, in short, because it is the world's largest Live Action Political Role-Playing Game. It's a place where we can try out our identities before we discard them to political expediency or the cold facts. I can put it in no better words than those of Ms. Nereim, who described the Union as connecting us in an "arc of poetic discourse" between generations of political leaders.

Realizing this can lead us to a few important conclusions. First, while there's nothing wrong about using someone else's arguments in your speech, as many libertarians in the Union do, it's much more fun to create your own character. The almost-quite-disbelievers are far more interesting people to debate than the John Galts. Be your own speaker. Don't give a speech as someone else.

Second, you should have fun when you give a speech in a way that allows other people to have fun too. Too often, people give speeches at Union that speak only to their party, tell jokes that are only funny to their party, only respond to speeches by people from their own party. The Union's supposed to be where we break those walls down. Simply expressing your passion without making it comprehensible to others wastes your breath.

Third, the currently-popular belief that the Union "needs a good floor fight" or is "too friendly" is simply nonsense. People love to break toys they don't understand. The Union needs a good fight in its debates. Those in the loyal opposition who want more passion should channel it through that avenue first.

Finally, the Union is a great institution. It can teach you more than you'll ever expect. But expecting political enlightenment is at once both too small and too impossible a hope for your time in the Union. Instead, let the political enlightenment come when it does, and be flexible in the meantime. But demand that your Union be a worthwhile society of friends and, yes, opponents. The cultish brooding of some parties upon their own chewed-over tropes, and the petty isolationism of others, can genuinely ruin your life at Yale if you let it. Don't be turned into a political football, or forget what it is that brought you to the Union at the first place.

Do these things, and every moment you spend at the Union will be worth it. If you don't, nothing too bad will happen; you just will be sitting in a room for three hours a week, listening to boring speeches devoid of passion in a Union riven with strife. Union Theory is how we prevent that, so long as we remember why the Union is valuable.
