

The Williams Progressive

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No Bargain for Women at Wal-Mart

On Tuesday, February 14th, Wal-Mart announced that it will begin selling the emergency contraception drug Plan B in its Massachusetts stores after receiving a direct order from state regulators to comply with a statute requiring all pharmacies to dispense "commonly prescribed medications in accordance with the usual needs of the community." This is an abrupt change in policy for Wal-Mart, which has previously refused to stock the drug for undisclosed "business



reasons" in every state except Illinois, where state law requires it. Being that Wal-Mart's employee health care does not cover any form of birth control, including the morning after pill, it seems more likely that these business reasons reflect a powerful disrespect for women's ability to choose.

While this latest policy reversal undoubtedly represents a victory for women in Massachusetts, it also serves to remind us of Wal-Mart's history of discrimination against women. In 2004, over 1.6 million women sued Wal-Mart in what was later certified as the largest class action suit in history. What did Wal-Mart do to deserve the wrath of millions of women? Women make up 92% of the cashiers at Wal-Mart (which is the lowest paying job), but only 14% of the store managers. A 2003 wage analysis reported that Wal-Mart cashiers earn approximately \$11,948 per year (although other

wage analyses have placed that number at approximately \$13,800). The 2003 poverty line for a family of three was \$14,824.3. At a corporation in which only 47 percent of employees are covered by the company health plan, many women are forced to find health care elsewhere or to depend on the state and thus become a tax burden. Furthermore, it is a crime that a human being working a full time job in the United States should be making less than the poverty threshold- if poverty subsists despite a full-time job, than clearly Wal-Mart's promises of jobs which lift people up are suspect at the least.

There is also significant anecdotal evidence that Wal-Mart tolerates or encourages a culture of discrimination against women. As one manager allegedly told a female employee "Men are here to make a career and women aren't. Retail is for housewives who just need to earn extra money." This is perhaps best reflected in the following table, which shows the great gap between men and women both in terms of wages and in promotions.

This is of course not to say that Wal-Mart has not had good effects for women, and indeed all of its employees and consumers. Because Wal-Mart often sets up in poor neighborhoods where other retailers have been unable to make a profit, they

bring jobs to those who desperately need them. Furthermore, their prices have certainly helped many low income families. But this does not justify Wal-Mart's crimes- the fact that they help some poor people does not give them a blank check to act however they want, all the while speaking the mantra of "low prices" whenever they are criticized. The debate over Wal-Mart has been traditionally framed in terms of black and white, but it is not possible or necessarily good to destroy Wal-Mart, while similarly we cannot allow their crimes to continue.

Many of us at Williams College are well off in the grand scheme of things, and along with the privilege of wealth, we also have a responsibility to use our money wisely. While many people in our country live paycheck-to-paycheck, and don't have a choice of what they buy, we are in the position to be responsible consumers. There are many ways of influencing Wal-Mart: through political action, through lobbying, but also through the responsible use of our dollars. What we buy should reflect our ethical and political ideals. We can "vote with our dollars" and try to make a better tomorrow. I urge you to make a statement that the American people will not stand for irresponsible corporations by boycotting Wal-Mart. We must let Wal-Mart know that they have a duty to be socially responsible, just as each of us has a duty to be ethical toward our fellow human beings!

—Matt Britton, Green Party

How Women's Earnings Compare With Men's at Wal-Mart As wages and authority increase, the number of women decreases.

Position	Average earnings	%Women / %Men
	Women / Men	
Store manager	\$89,300 / \$105,700	14.3% / 85.7%
Co-manager	\$56,300 / \$59,500	22.8% / 77.2%
Asst. manager	\$37,300 / \$39,800	35.7% / 64.3%
Mgt. trainee	\$22,400 / \$23,200	41.3% / 58.7%
Cashier	\$13,800 / \$14,500	92.5% / 7.5%

Source: Drogin Kakigi & Assoc.

The Williams Progressive

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Mission

The Williams Progressive is a brand new publication written and designed by students at Williams College. Our purpose is both to educate by discussing important political issues from a progressive perspective and to serve as an outlet for progressive students who want to voice their opinions to the Williams community. Various student groups devote themselves to progressive causes, and The Williams Progressive aims to provide a forum that brings these ideas together.

Thanks

The Williams Progressive is part of the national network of Campus Progress publications, supported by the generous folks at the Center for American Progress.

Responses

Comments and written responses may be submitted to 08hcb and will be published at the editor's discretion. We welcome your submissions, too, if you want to comment on an issue of public interest.

Trouble in Free Trade Town

Why does President Bush have beef with President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela? Anyone who's been paying attention to U.S. foreign policy knows that the Bush administration dislikes Chavez and wants Americans to dislike him too. For his part, the president of Venezuela hasn't exactly been friendly, having called Bush a "terrorist" in at least one speech. It would seem that the feud originated with a failed coup against Chavez in 2002, which the Venezuelan believes was orchestrated by Washington. Bush denies that the US government had any involvement in the business-backed plot, despite published CIA documents showing that the agency had knowledge of the coup well before it was launched. Capitalizing on the US president's international unpopularity, President Chavez has cast himself since his reinstatement to the presidency as an indignant survivor of a Bush regime change attempt.

A hulking former paratrooper who frequently dons a military uniform, Hugo Chavez is of mixed Mestizo-African heritage, endearing him to the historically marginalized Indian and Black communities in Venezuela. He is best known in the US as the target of a proposed assassination by televangelist Pat Robertson, so some might be surprised to learn that Chavez is vocal about his Christianity. Mind you, we're not talking Bill Clinton-style "photo op with the bible" Christianity; in interviews, Chavez regularly makes statements like "Jesus was the original socialist, and Judas was the original capitalist." He considers Fidel Castro to be his close friend and mentor, which is already enough to make him persona non grata in Washington. However, the main reason for Hugo Chavez's ongoing standoff with Bush is much bigger: free trade.

After the passage of the Republican-conceived, Democrat-implemented North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the recent extension of the Washington Consensus free trade regime into Central America via CAFTA, the US was all set to finish the hemispheric sweep with the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA). That's when Chavez stepped in and started instigating against Bush in South America, railing against economic imperialism and inspiring a wave of defections from FTAA among the

continent's heads of state, including Presidents Lula of Brazil and Kirschner of Argentina. In a speech to the UN, Chavez claimed that free trade capitalism was to blame for the rampant poverty in Latin America: "The neoliberal capitalism, the Washington Consensus. All this has generated is a high degree of misery, inequality and infinite tragedy for all the peoples on [Bush's] continent."

It seems somewhat grandiose to say that NAFTA has caused infinite tragedy for North America, which is not to say that Chavez's concerns are groundless. In fact, NAFTA and its free-trade offspring inspire bad corporate citizenship by giving corporations much more freedom from government oversight than ever before. In some respects, these agreements go even farther and give corporations control over governments. This may sound overly dire to anyone who isn't familiar with NAFTA's contents. I refer specifically to the provision known as Chapter 11, which gives corporations the power to sue governments that impinge on their profits. Chapter 11 is an arrow in the quiver of corporations that can't be bothered to properly dispose of poisonous chemicals, like the Canadian gas company that sued California for banning a chemical that was poisoning that state's drinking water, or the American company that was awarded \$16 million from Mexico after the Mexican government refused to allow the construction of a toxic waste dump in Aguascalientes.

So what inspires these proud national governments to award millions in taxpayer money to corporations that insist that their profits are more important than, say, safe drinking water? It's probably the fact that they have absolutely no say in the matter after the treaty is ratified. These trade disputes, formerly the legal province of domestic courts, are now decided by NAFTA tribunals staffed with international trade lawyers for whom "conflict of interest" is a way of life. Canada was the first to realize that NAFTA turned democratic government into business's bitch when the Canadian parliament tabled pending environmental legislation in the face of threatened Chapter 11 lawsuits.

Now put yourself in the shoes of a Latin American head of state: the US

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Trouble in Free Trade Town, Continued

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opens a briefcase on the table with more dollars of investment than your country saw in the entire twentieth century, and all you have to do is give an international tribunal of business lawyers sovereignty over your natural resources and economic policy. The incentives might still outweigh the drawbacks for some, but no one mentions the fact that if you pass environmental regulations, you might have to pay a few dozen millions in compensation and repeal those nasty laws (as any free trade economist worth his suit will tell you, environmental regulations are one of the best ways to hide unfair barriers to trade). As an added bonus, the US will keep subsidizing its farmers, so

all those inefficient small farmers in your country can find new jobs to keep your economy vibrant. Oh, and don't forget to keep labor costs lower than your neighbor and your neighbor's neighbor; you wouldn't want to lose all your business to the country next door because of some silly minimum wage.

Just like they did with NAFTA, the negotiators will surely sign separate (but allegedly equal) environmental and labor agreements to appease free trade critics who point to the damaging effects of free trade on worker's rights and the environment. Past experience suggests that these agreements are meant to be symbolic, or to shame corporations into behaving. That is to say that they are absolutely

meaningless. All this might have sounded like a lot of fun to South American leaders in recent times past, but now the poor in South America have started doing something poor peo-

ple don't generally do too often: taking their economic interests to the ballot box.

Whatever else can be said about him (and there's plenty to say), President Hugo Chavez's fight to preserve the sovereignty of democratic governments in South America against the encroachments of private interests is admirable. Instead of FTAA, which has no chance of success in the current South American political climate, Chavez has proposed a trade regime of his own design called ALBA, which means 'dawn' in Spanish. Unlike NAFTA and its ilk, ALBA would actually place priority on the elimination of poverty and protection of the environment and labor, human and gender rights. To this end, Chavez's trade regime would include compensatory funds for the hardest-hit sectors so as to allow these industries and their millions of workers to adjust. Such adjustment funds receive no end of lip service from free trade advocates, but little real support, causing extremely painful transitions in countries like Mexico with large agricultural sectors. The last thing the US needs in Latin America is for its regional influence – already at a historic low – to be further weakened by the implementation of an alternative free trade program designed to humble Washington. It's time for the US to drop the regime change talk and start cooperating on a democratic trade policy that respects all people, regardless of nationality or wealth.

—Dave Schwab, Green Party



What to Watch For: *The Williams Progressive Calendar*

Tuesday, April 18th TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

7:30 p.m. *Outside Weston, Schow, and Stetson Court.*

Wednesday, April 19th REFORM, RESOURCES, & RACE: THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

8:00 p.m., *Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall.* Rod Paige, former Secretary of Education. Go respectfully listen to the architect of NCLB.

Thursday, April 20th DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T LOOK: UNDRRESSING THE MILITARY'S ANTIGAY POLICY

8:00 p.m., *Weston 10.* Film (April 19) and lecture by Allan Berube, prominent WWII Historian and Queer Scholar.

Saturday, April 29th MARCH FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

In NYC; contact 08dcs if you are interested in coming.

Sunday, April 30th RALLY TO STOP GENOCICE: SAVE DARFUR

In Washington DC; contact 06eeb@wxo.williams.edu if you are interested in coming.

This Immigration Compromise Compromises Immigrants

First, it was gay marriage. Then, reproductive rights. Immigration is just the latest issue where the conservative minority has gained rhetorical power and pulled the terms of the debate to the right. Attempts by both parties to transform immigration into a critical wedge issue in the upcoming midterm elections have been largely blocked by the recent failure of the immigration compromise. While both Democrats and Republicans bicker about where to lay blame for the bill's failure, all Americans should (for once) be grateful that Congress is unable to get anything accomplished; this compromise was not the right solution to the issues surrounding immigration, and would have been devastating to America's immigrant class.

The first problem with the compromise was its English requirement. Immigrants living in the country for five years or more would be on the track for permanent citizenship if they paid fines, back taxes, and learned English. I don't un-

derstand how the bill's authors realistically expect one of the poorest classes of American society to suddenly find the money and time to accomplish these goals; these requirements are just a backhanded way of satisfying the right-wing constituency who prefers that all immigrants be kicked out of the country. I understand the basic desire for an English requirement, but have any of these senators taken a walk around Chinatown lately? Immigrant communities can maintain a dual language system without putting any strain on the economic structures of the cities that they live in.

The other main problem with the compromise was that it would have required anyone living in the country for less than two years to immediately leave. Immigrants could pursue "temporary worker status," but it was not guaranteed. Putting aside the inherent injustice of a policy of deporting around one million people; can you imagine the logistical *nightmare* of actually enacting this pol-

icy? This policy would be impossible to realistically enforce, and it would only increase the black market trade in green cards and people and serve to drive this immigrant "class" further underground. I would rather see the money used to enact this policy spent on *actually* making the border safer, and maybe checking some of the containers that come unmonitored into this country as well. *That's* where the real security threat is, not in people crossing the border looking for a better life.

Immigration, and the right to do so, has always been an important (if long disputed) component of the ideals of this country. The compromise attempted by the Senate would have set those ideals back. Hopefully, this is the last we will see of this issue until after the election, and those in power will stop playing politics with people's lives and futures.

—Lindsay Long-Waldor, College Dems



Kozol & Friedman Fall Short of Expectations, Continued

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“green” corporations earn record-breaking profits – instead of oil companies (Exxon made a record \$36 billion in profits last year) – but that does not appear to be happening. Nor did Friedman present a convincing argument to support his assertion that the tide will shift. This was one of several unsupported assertions about the future that Friedman made over the course of the night, another being “CQ (curiosity quotient) plus PQ (passion quotient) is greater than IQ.”

Friedman repeated his spiel about petro-authoritarianism and how Venezuela should be included on the list of

countries run by authoritarian governments (see his March 1st column for the first time that he asserted this). I would like him to explain himself on this one, because Hugo Chavez is a democratically elected head of state, not an autocrat, as Friedman asserts. I understand if Friedman is ideologically opposed to Chavez, but please don’t twist the issue.

Those of us who follow Friedman’s work would have enjoyed a more thoughtful response to the critics of this book. Instead we got a response to a thoughtless criticism, which was that Friedman should have realized while writing the book that there are still a lot

of really poor people in India. Friedman’s response was a no-brainer: of course he realized this, but still considered “economic development” to be a good thing. How about a defense of the silly notion that globalization can be thought of in three distinct stages: Globalization 1.0, Globalization 2.0, and Globalization 3.0? I would have hoped for more from a man who reaches over a million people per week, and who’s in position to educate the public where this administration falters.

—Matt Piven, *Air Williams*

Court Shouldn’t Give Bush a Blank Check

The Supreme Court recently refused by one vote to hear an appeal from Jose Padilla, an American citizen held for three years in a Navy brig, which would challenge the government’s power to seize American citizens, designate them as enemy combatants, and hold them indefinitely. This past fall, after the Court had agreed to hear Mr. Padilla’s appeal for the second time (the case was sent back once before on a jurisdictional issue), the government transferred him to a civilian jail, charging him with the lesser crime of providing material support to terrorists instead of the original charge that he organized a plot to detonate a dirty bomb in the United States.

Although Mr. Padilla will now face a trial before a federal court, presumably with full due process, the Court’s refusal to take his case leaves the government

free to return him to military custody at any time; for example, if the government was unsatisfied with the outcome in federal court. More importantly, the Court has passed on an opportunity to check the President’s thus-far extremely inflated authority to conduct the war on terror unlimited by judicial review, Congressional oversight, and international obligations.

Fortunately, the Supreme Court has another chance to rein in the President with the case of Salim Ahmed Hamdan, the former chauffeur for Osama bin Laden currently being held at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Hamdan is legally challenging the military commissions set up by the President to try enemy combatants. Unfortunately, there are a lot of ways for the Court to repeat its *Padilla* retreat and handle Hamdan’s case without addressing the core and consequential questions of whether Congress can strip the Court of jurisdiction over habeas corpus claims, how to apply international obligations like the Geneva Convention, what rights (if any) enemy combatants have under the Constitution and US law, and most centrally, the extent of the President’s constitutional authority to independently prosecute the war on terror.

One way for the Court to opt for a narrow judgment and evade its responsibility to address these questions would be to accept the government’s argument that the Court should wait until Hamdan has first been convicted by the commission. Alternatively, the Court could agree with

the government’s contention that a law passed by Congress, the Detainee Treatment Act, effectively strips the Court’s jurisdiction to hear Hamdan’s habeas corpus appeal (and that of any other detainee at Guantánamo). Finally, the Court could accept one of Hamdan’s claims that the conspiracy charge he faces is not in fact a war crime and therefore should not be adjudicated by a military commission.

In a critical 2004 war on terror case, the since-departed Justice O’Connor wrote for the Court that the President is not entitled to “a blank check” on matters of national security. Any resolution – expect it by July – that avoids the substantive matters of the case and fails to rebuke the President’s unilateral arrogation of power would effectively grant him that blank check. Time and again, whether with regard to domestic wiretapping or the alleged prisoner abuses at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, the Administration has sought to unconstitutionally and inappropriately seize power and has proven unable to contain its own excesses. It is time for the Court to finally to take a stand. I would ask that Congress, too, prove itself capable of something other than complete and irresponsible compliance with the Administration’s efforts to fight terrorism at the unnecessary expense of liberty, but I will save that wishful thinking for another day.

—Rachel Shalev, College Dems



Chapin Beat: Two High-Profile Speakers Disappoint

Jonathan Kozol

During his April 4th appearance at Williams, Jonathan Kozol argued that white American society actively pursues policies of racial segregation in order to maintain a stratified social order that places whites above minorities. He declared that because segregation rates are as high as they have been since 1968, America had betrayed Dr. King's dream of social equality and reverted to Apart-



heid policies. As evidence, he pointed to a number of school districts with essentially no white students.

I object to Mr. Kozol's argument for two reasons. First, I feel that he overestimates the importance of race in the inequality of the education system. I know from personal experience that mostly white working-class schools in North Adams are under-funded—I met a sixth grader there who could not read. Moreover, Mr. Kozol did not provide evidence to suggest that school districts of similar economic composition with different racial compositions varied widely in funding per pupil. I want to believe that black schools are under-funded because black students attend them, because it would allow me to join Mr. Kozol in labeling rich white politicians as racist bastards, but I have not seen enough evidence to support this position.

Second, Mr. Kozol overlooked a rational explanation for the present composition of the inner-city schools that he

examined. His use of the word "apartheid" suggests a controlled scheme on behalf of white power-brokers to manipulate the school system, yet the evidence does not support this. Schools are a reflection of the neighborhoods that they benefit. If a neighborhood is all black, its public school will also be all black. Thus, the racial segregation of American neighborhoods explains the racial segregation of the American school system. Why have neighborhoods become more racially segregated in recent decades? One explanation is that the income of whites has increased significantly faster than blacks over the last few decades, making it less convenient to live in neighborhoods of equal or similar land values. Moreover, reduced commuter costs (new highways, faster cars, and more mass transportation) appear to have allowed whites to live further from the city center while maintaining their jobs in central business districts.

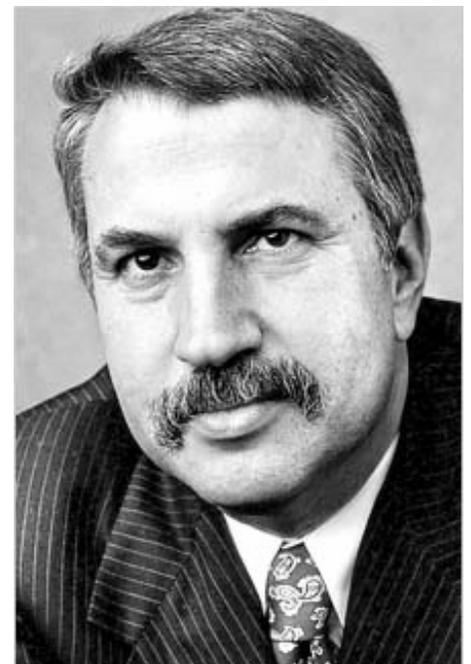
I am from Baltimore, which ranks highly on racial segregation indices on a national level. I am saddened by the racial segregation that exists there and also shocked that Mr. Kozol could share such statistics and feel like he's enlightening the crowd. But what is there to be done? I would love to see Baltimore's neighborhoods become more integrated, but not all black Baltimoreans would agree. One 59-year-old black man that I interviewed declared openly that Baltimore does not have problems with segregation, and that people should be able to live where they choose to live. This was Martin Luther King's dream, and so, while I am saddened about the present level of racial segregation, I do not resent the fact that people can choose their neighborhood. I wish that public school funding was 100% equal on a per pupil basis, but I do not feel that resolving the problem of racial segregation is an issue that the government should take up.

Therefore, Mr. Kozol pointed to a major problem in American society—the under-funding of poor black schools—and ignored the true causes and jumped over possible solutions. Instead, he relied on stunning the crowd with statistics that should not surprise any Williams student who reads the newspaper or visits American cities.

Thomas Friedman

It seems to me like people were really excited to hear Thomas Friedman (I call him Fraud-man for his repetitious tendencies) give a lecture because they showed up in droves and piled onto the stage. I heard some people even watched on a live feed from Brooks-Rogers. Those of us who had read his book were anxious to hear Friedman's new ideas, and given the title of the talk (*The World is Flat: Some Second Thoughts*), we agreed this week on my radio show to expect a revision of the ideas laid out in the book. But there was nothing new. For those of us who read Friedman's columns, even reading the book seemed awfully repetitive. Then, to hear the same material in a lecture, repeated almost verbatim from the book, was sickening.

Friedman was open about his imprecision in declaring the world to be "flat" because the world is far from providing equal employment opportunities in every corner of the globe. Yes, the world is only "flatter," which begs the question of why Friedman decided to call his book as he did. But there were further problems with Friedman's assertions on Monday night. For one, Friedman confidently asserts "green" industry to be the wave of the future. We would love to see demand for "green" business to expand and



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