

# Four Years Later: Where Am I At?

I guess it ain't where you're from, it's where you're at."—Rakim

*Where am I at?*

I never took a class with Eric Foner, Ann Douglass, Peter Awn or, Robert Thurman. I never stormed a building, spoke at a protest, or joined in a march. I never climbed atop Butler or SIPA, never explored the tunnels, and I certainly never had a coherent conversation with the woman at Wien. I never even met President Rupp (although I did meet my advisor a few times).

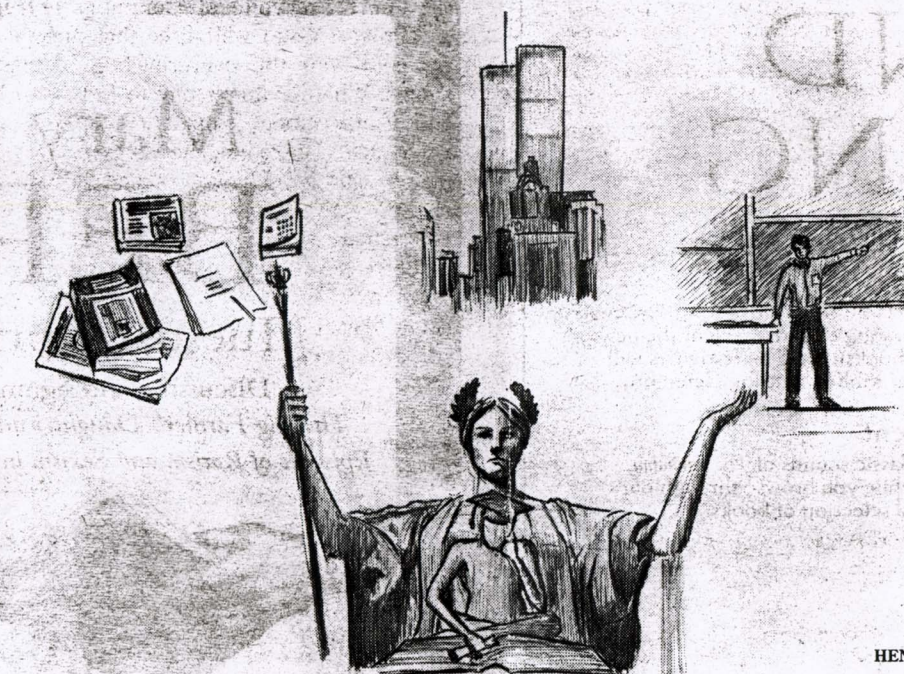
No, I never enjoyed any of the quintessential Columbia experiences. Yet I still consider my four years here to be the single greatest experience of my life. And when I walk off campus for the last time this May, I know that I will struggle to keep my eyes dry.

We Columbia students often feel that our extraordinary investment in our school earns us the right to criticize and condemn every administrative action. And certainly, there are many policies worthy of student critiques. However, occasionally I worry that in our excitement we forget just how fortunate we are.

People remind me that they paid \$120,000 for their time here and therefore they deserve the best. I agree. Just remember, when you focus solely on the flaws of an institution (of which there are bound to be many) you deny yourself the ability to enjoy the unbelievable opportunities that Columbia offers.

In the last year alone, I have listened to Edward Said and Noam Chomsky, Susan Sontag, Kenzoburo Oe, Al Gore and, Cornel West; I have eaten dinner with David Dinkins and Rudy Crew. My professors have stood as the pillars of their fields, sharing with their students an understanding so comprehensive, that to capture even a portion was fulfilling.

I live five minutes from the heart of Harlem, ten minutes from Central Park, fif-



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hour from Brooklyn, Queens or the Bronx, and less than two hours from the Catskills. Within ten blocks of my room lies every type of cuisine imaginable, from Ethiopian to Southern to Japanese to French. Outside my very building lies grass and an open space, right in the heart of Manhattan, both quiet and calm.

For one whole year, I sat with 16 other first-years and tried to understand the trajectory of Western literature. Most of us knew nothing about literary theory or analysis, but we knew how to read and we learned how to listen, and by the end it didn't even matter if we had no idea why Jane Austen was better than John Grisham.

The Core for me was Japanese movies and the Civil Rights movement. ArtHum and MusicHum were one-thousand anecdotes and just enough history to make me smile when I

enthusiastic professor, I will always appreciate him in a way I could not have before. L&R annoyed me, but it also transformed me from a grammar-ignorant fool into a fairly confident writer.

And then there was Contemporary Western Civilization. Hamid Dabashi guided my class through an educational experience that knows no equal. Decisions I never even realized I made were challenged, freedoms I took for granted were shown to be false.

In two short semesters, that one class stole my world and turned it in every direction through the writings of Plato, Epicurus, Foucault. And through it all ran one consistent thread, a professor who genuinely cared about his students, a tenured professor who shared so much of himself that he cried on our last day of class.

## Where I'm At Pete Younkin

ously never attended Columbia. My belief is that if you have not yet experienced a professor who knows your name and is interested in your thoughts, than you either have never gone to office hours or have distressingly poor luck. In addition to being some of the finest scholars at Columbia, Professors Gans, Polletta, Heller, Hannings, Anderer, Russell, and Tilly are all only one visit away from cultivating a friendship. And these are merely professors, whose classes I enjoyed, to say nothing of Professors Ferguson, Dent, Dalton, Aguilar, Roma, and the many others whom my peers praised to the heavens. To the students for whom my experiences sound false, I implore you to save your criticisms and sign up for their courses.

At the very least, register for a course, any course, with Archie Rand. There is not a finer professor, nor a finer person at Columbia. After fifteen weeks, regardless of your ability or initial confidence, you will believe in yourself and you will love art.

Then there are the students, what is there to say about Columbia students. We are both active and apathetic, critical and sarcastic, intellectual yet hip, as diversely homogenous as the city we inhabit. If every professor were to disappear tomorrow and never return, I know that my education would continue unabated. I learn more every day on the Steps than any class can ever hope to accomplish.

In many ways, this is a column of "thank yous," my last effort to recognize the people who walked beside me for the last four years. They are the people who read my column, who will fill my parents' camera with their faces this May, and the people who will continue to teach me as I will teach them for years to come.

Taken collectively, you are the greatest resource this University will ever know, thank you for sharing your time with me.