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From the Hill

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From the Hill

Authors

Emily Judem, Douglas Rooks, Stephen Collins, Mackenzie Dawson, Sally Baker, Gerry Boyle, and William D. Adams

Q&A

OAK FELLOW JOAN CARLING ON THE VERY REAL DANGERS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND REWARDS OF A CAREER SPENT STANDING UP FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

EMILY JUDEM '06 INTERVIEW

FRED FIELD PHOTO

Joan Omaming Carling, a Filipina human rights activist whose life has been under constant threat for the past year, breathed a sigh of relief upon her arrival at Colby, where she is the 2006 Oak Human Rights Fellow. A member of the Kankanaey tribe, Carling currently heads the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, a grassroots organization that advocates for indigenous peoples' rights. She and her colleagues focus attention on the environmental and social impacts of dam and mining projects that are displacing indigenous peoples. Recently, an upsurge of political killings has gripped the Philippines, and Carling is among those targeted for assassination. She talked to Colby about her work, the loss of two colleagues who were victims of political killings, and living with the knowledge that she could die for her cause.

Why human rights?

At the time that I was in college, activism was very much alive, especially at the University of the Philippines, where I studied. So it was rather the in thing to do. But ultimately, I think also because I'm naturally humanitarian at heart. I don't like to see injustice or people not given equal chances. So, soon after college I just decided to go full-time activist. I've never known any other life.

And now you're being challenged in new ways?

I can sense the difference that I feel getting here from my situation back home [in Manila], where my life is under constant threat. I can't move around without a bodyguard, I can't move around without trying to see if somebody's following me or somebody's suspicious. And I can't move around anywhere I want to, which is quite a big difference [from being] here. Of course I don't know the place, but I have a feeling of security, I have a feeling of freedom.

It must feel almost shocking, the relief.

Facing a situation like that and having your friends killed is really a big challenge as an activist. I mean, just this year my colleague in the office was killed. The person I lived with for more than two years was also killed, and she happened to be the wife of another activist, a friend of mine. So she was called "a collateral damage." It's rather emotionally stressful and depressing and demoralizing, and yet, at the same time, you can't afford to abandon it, because then you don't give justice to their lives, justice to what they have done.

When did you begin to fear for your life?

Last year. But it became more serious in December last year, when a motorcycle just followed me going home. ... That's normally how they kill activists—they follow them on motorcycles and shoot them. They're killing activists in the Philippines like chickens, you know. So then they started flattening the tires of my car, opening my car, destroying the lock of the door of my house, so we actually have to leave the house immediately, because everyone going there was being followed, and receiving weird messages on my phone that I don't understand. The office was [watched by] by suspicious men in cars twenty-four hours a day. You live with that kind of situation, it's a bit "parannoying."



Why did you apply for the fellowship?

I'm also feeling burnt out from working relentlessly for several years. We don't go for a break. You know, us, we're not work-oriented in the sense that you set your time, like eight hours a day. Our work is a commitment. So whenever you're needed, whenever your work is needed, whenever you have to finish something, then you just work weekends, days, nights, or whatever. So I've been working hard for several years and I feel like physically and mentally I'm already burnt out, that I needed a break. And, but I also want a break that I can still do some worthwhile things, and the Oak fellowship was exactly what I'm looking for. It recognizes you as an activist, you can still do things but at the same time be able to rest and reflect, and you will be able to share your experiences and also learn, which is important for me. It's not just me giving, but me getting something in return. ... It would also be good to get back in an academic community for a while, you know, without this pressure of the pace of an activist life. That means I have a lot of time to also study, to do some research, reflect, do writing. Or maybe spend time in the gym, [even] do yoga? I already feel like, wow, I've finally regained my freedom.

That's something that we take for granted every day.

Yeah, and I think that's what I wanted to teach people—that, actually, you also have to value your freedom. As soon as your freedom is threatened, really, your life will never be the same again. I mean, it's really not normal anymore. So it's really important for people to appreciate their freedom and defend it with their lives.

What kinds of things are you hoping to do with your class?

I planned my course to be interactive, so there would be debates on the environmental issues in relation to large dams and corporate mining ... and also like a [discussion of] the collective rights of indigenous peoples, because that's my focus.

What do you hope students will take away from your presence on campus?

That they also try to make a difference. Not for their lives, for the lives of others. I hope everybody will have that sense, to make a difference. In whatever way. I mean, you don't have to be an activist to make a change. But at least try to reach out to other people, especially those in need, in whatever way. I think that would be a good lesson to impart. And for them to appreciate that life is not just theirs or their family's, but it's wider than that and they should be part of it.



PAPER TRAIL

Colby to house the papers of poet Wesley McNair

DOUGLAS ROOKS '76 STORY

FRED FIELD PHOTO

Some poets are secretive, guarding their privacy and repelling the advances of the curious. Not Wesley McNair.

One of the most accomplished New England poets of his time, McNair has long made autobiographical elements an important facet of his published work and throughout a long teaching career has welcomed the inquiries of students and the public. His eight collections of poetry, appearances on National Public Radio's *Weekend Edition*, and inclusion in more than 50 anthologies and textbooks have made him a familiar name to both devoted readers of poetry and the casual listener.

Now he has made Colby the repository for his notebooks, papers, and correspondence—the raw material for scholarship that is often bequeathed and made available only long after an artist's death.

McNair, who has taught several classes at Colby over the years and been a visiting writer, is straightforward, both about his reasons for choosing Colby and why he, at 63, took the unusual step of placing his papers while he is still very much a living and working artist. (A new collection of poems, *The Ghosts of You and Me*, his sixth, has just been published by David Godine.)

Last semester McNair presented a multimedia version of the collection to a packed house, including many Colby students, in the Robinson Room in Miller Library. While he later joked that the occasion could have been seen as “a ceremony of interment, as if you're being buried alive,” it was in fact a disarmingly personal look at McNair's life and poetic materials. They go back to a grade school newspaper he produced and include his fledgling cartoons and short stories.

Colby Special Collections Librarian Patricia Burdick, who has worked closely with McNair, said that he considered archives in Ohio, New Hampshire, and elsewhere in Maine before finally settling on Colby. “This can be a very personal relationship, and trust is an important factor on both sides,” she said.

Both McNair and Burdick said that students' ability to use the papers is important and affects the way the material is being archived and made accessible. McNair's notebooks that show the often difficult road to conceiving a poem—sometimes taking five years or more—can help beginning poets struggling with their own efforts, Burdick said. Having the McNair collection on campus can help students see the creative process close up, she said.

McNair said he sees the collection as extending his own work as a teacher, at the University of Maine Farmington, where he long directed the creative writing program, and at Colby and other colleges. He also likes the idea that his papers will be housed among extensive collections from Thomas Hardy and Maine native Edward Arlington Robinson, whom he calls “two of my favorite poets.”

There were practical concerns, too. The papers, many of them going back decades, were stored in the attic of McNair's old farmhouse and needed better conditions. Once the papers were packed and labeled, they arrived at Colby and the real work of archiving began. In consultation with Burdick, McNair organized the collection, and McNair will use these headings in sending new material. As with most collections, privacy is a concern. Some papers will be available to the public in the near future, some will have restricted use, and some will be

reserved only for future release.

Unlike the work of a dead author, “This collection can be continually updated,” McNair said, “because I'm around doing it.”

At the opening celebration, Colby's Zacamy Professor of English Peter Harris, also a poet, gave an appreciation of McNair's work, speaking of the “immense technical facility” that informs its often deceptively simple language.

Later he said he admires McNair's poems not only for the gem-like lyrics, common to the best contemporary poets, but for his long autobiographical poems, especially “My Brother Running,” a complex evocation of his brother's early, tragic death, and the family mysteries that surrounded it. Harris called such poems, “his great work,” and said that McNair has the ambition of using all the elements of his craft to “make the difficult look easy—and he does.”

McNair likes to compare the making of poetry to the kind of thoughtful conversation that takes place between friends “on a summer evening, when it's twilight, and you let your thoughts fill the sentence out, with that fortunate interplay between chance and intuition,” he said. “At such times, we're almost speaking poetry to each other.”

His aim is to reproduce some of those moments in poems, “like an earnest and intimate conversation,” in part as an antidote to an everyday culture that's often focused on “the big, the noisy, and the quick.” Poetry, by contrast, is “about smallness, and slowness, and reticence.”

Now, in Colby's Special Collections, the words and gestures behind that reticence will be there for all to see.

To read McNair's thoughts on writing, go to www.colby.edu/mag

Family Matters

Increased competition raises bar for legacy applicants

STEPHEN COLLINS '74 STORY

BRIAN SPEER ILLUSTRATION

Preferences for sons and daughters of alumni in college and university admissions pools—legacy applicants, as they are known—are a hot topic in higher education. And it can be an emotional issue in what is often referred to as “the Colby family.”

Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Parker J. Beverage sets aside at least two days every spring to personally call each family where a legacy applicant is about to get a letter saying he or she won't be accepted. When he is able to get through, he tries to soften the unwelcome news, and the message he leads with is just how competitive admission to Colby has become. But not all alumni take the news well.

“Admissions is about crafting a class,” Beverage said. “Alumni need to realize there are lots of institutional goals that are in competition with one another.”

The debate over legacy admissions has taken on national proportions. At one end of a spectrum of opinions are alumni who see legacy preferences as an entitlement, in some cases a reward for their generosity. At the other are reformers who call the practice aristocratic, un-American, even racist. In the last presidential campaign the controversy became an issue in the primary when Democrat John Edwards asked colleges to abandon legacy preferences, which he called inconsistent with 21st century American democracy.

Beverage is candid about the existence of a legacy advantage and eager for people to have a clearer understanding of what the legacy advantage is—as well as what it isn't.

A prior family connection to the College is, he says, one among a large number of special factors that, for good reasons, may make a candidate more attractive as the admissions staff builds a balanced incoming class. Legacy status is not, he says, a guarantee. As Colby's admission profile gets more competitive, so too legacies have to have stronger credentials to be accepted.

What's in it for the College? Children of alumni, and applicants who had a sibling attend Colby, are less likely to be surprised by Maine winters and are more likely to know what to expect than a non-legacy applicant. They're less likely to drop out or transfer, Beverage said.

Statistics bear that out. Averaged over five recent incoming classes, Colby's overall graduation rate was 87.5 percent (extremely high compared to national averages). From the same classes, 91.3 percent of the 115 legacies graduated in the same time frame. Legacy students who also had a sibling attend Colby graduated at a 95.4-percent rate.

Beyond that academic indicator, there's a discernible loyalty among

Colby families. Director of Alumni Relations Margaret Felton Viens '77 said a disproportionate number of legacies become volunteers after they graduate. “They are very committed to Colby when their whole family shares that,” she said. “There's not as much competition [from other institutions or causes] for their time and energy.” Alumni Relations sponsors a dinner for legacies and their parents every year at Family Homecoming Weekend.

In admissions, part of the difficulty in sifting more than 4,000 applications each year is differentiating among lots of academically strong and talented students. So admissions personnel look for special talents and interests.

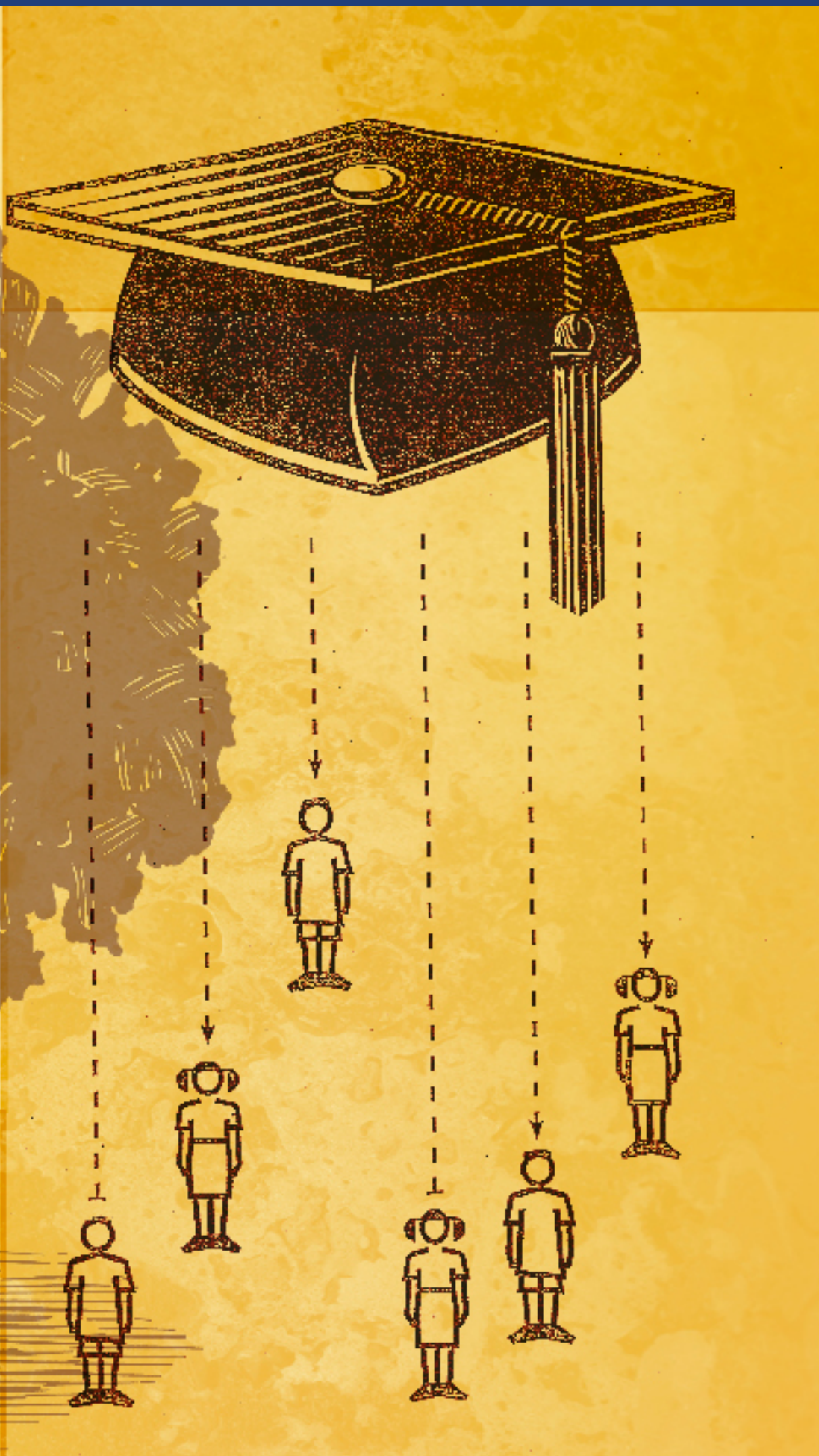
These might include a strong inclination toward an under-populated academic program, a passion for radio that might benefit WMHB, or mastery of a particular musical instrument needed in an ensemble, Beverage said. The institutional goals of recruiting more racially, ethnically, culturally, geographically, and socioeconomically diverse classes might give one candidate a slight leg up. Advantages accorded talented athletes are common throughout higher education and can be plus factors even in Division III.

Family connections fit into the same rubric of factors that might help tip the scales. Over the last ten years, 60 percent of legacies who applied were offered fall admission compared to 35 percent of the applicant pool. That's consistent with more than a dozen other selective liberal arts colleges, which admitted anywhere from 39 to 73 percent last year. Beverage explained that legacy families are more likely to know what's required at the College, so there is more self-selection up front. “They value education, enroll in good schools, are motivated... and often present a strong application,” he said. Fifty-four percent of admitted legacies enroll on average, compared to a yield of 34 percent in the overall pool. On average, legacies made up 5.1 percent of the last ten incoming classes.

Despite his best efforts to gently break the news of non-admission to legacy applicants, Beverage said it doesn't always go well. He's had people hang up on him and, at an institution where he worked previously, one father was so mad he returned his college diploma to the school.

Beverage encourages alumni with children interested in applying to Colby to call the Admissions Office early in the process, and he stressed the “counseling” role of admissions counselors. “It's not a black box, or a secretive operation,” Beverage said. “Parts of the application are confidential, but we can discuss transcripts and activities, etc.,” to give families an honest assessment in the early stages of the search.

Good communication at the front end, he said, can head off the telephone call and the severe disappointment that some families feel if their student isn't accepted.



FROM THE HILL



Unscripted

Sketch-comedy troupes wing it in search of laughs

MACKENZIE DAWSON '99 STORY

It's a Saturday night at RiFiFi, a bar in Manhattan's East Village, and Stu Luth '01 is searching frantically for a knife. The knife—nowhere to be found—is a prop in the improv comedy show Luth is about to perform with Dan Maccarone '98, Erik Bowie '00, and their friends Melissa DeLancey and Josh Mertz. Together, they make up Slightly Known People, and they perform every Saturday at RiFiFi.

The missing knife is an integral part of a sketch about peanut butter and jelly, wherein Luth will sing a never-before-performed song about his love for PB&J set to the "Phantom of the Opera" theme.

"Not to be picky, but the skit calls for boysenberry jam, and this isn't boysenberry," Luth said. "Do you think that will be a problem?"

"Just hold your hands over the label, dude," Bowie said from a chair in the corner, where he was writing new lines for one of his skits. "The audience isn't going to notice."

"Next time we're in Maine, we'll get a bunch of boysenberry jelly. I think they only make it up there," Maccarrone said, confident and reassuring (though boysenberries actually only grow in the south and southwest).

Slightly Known People began performing together in April 2004, with all five members writing, directing, and acting. But Maccarone, Luth, and Bowie aren't the only recent Colby graduates making a go of the sketch comedy scene.

In Boston, Neil Reynolds '03 carved a niche for himself in an organization called The Tribe, which has built a healthy fan base. He's also directing a two-person musical improv show called "Tiny Little Lungs" and acting in "Code Duello: Hamilton & Burr," wherein, as the show's Web site advertises, "Each night, Tribe mainstage players Neil Reynolds & Matt Tucker don the wigs and waistcoats of Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, improvising the lives of our two angriest founding fathers."

Details, daggers, duels, and jam—it's all part of putting together a new show—every week, in the case of Slightly Known People. Some skits are recycled, but Slightly Known People pledges that it has never performed the same show twice.

"This week's show is pretty ambitious," Maccarone said, explaining that it's a "sketchical"—improv comedy set to music.

"You know how in musicals they speak their lines until emotion overcomes them and they can only express themselves through music?" Mertz said. "Well, we're doing everything through song—until the emotion overcomes us and we have to break into sketchy comedy."

Musical numbers include "Tomorrow," from *Annie*, and a scene in which all five thespians do choreographed pushups to Bruce Springsteen's "I'm

Going Down." The non-musical skits include Bowie and Mertz dressed up as preppy guys with Locust Valley Lockjaw accents and pink-and-green polo shirts; Maccarone giving a slide show of his early youth and high school years; and Luth playing a wily detective ferreting out Eastern European spies on a subway platform.

If any of it seems strange, that's entirely the point—improv gives the troupe the chance to flex its acting muscles and go where the moment takes them.

It's fun for the actors—and the audience. "What appeals to me most about sketch comedy is that I find it a sort of noncommittal form of entertainment," DeLancey said. "As an audience member who has sat through many shows that I either didn't get or didn't like, it's nice to see something where I can have a short attention span and if I don't enjoy one particular sketch it doesn't mean the whole show is a bust."

In Boston, Reynolds talked about the challenges of sustaining a career in improvisational comedy.

"Before, there were only about two theaters where improv comedians could perform, and both were very exclusive ... they were near-impossible to get into, even for a night," Reynolds said. "So these artists banded together and formed their own group, The Tribe, based on the principles of inclusiveness and collaboration." The group quickly built up a large fan base through word of mouth, and it's now competing with the more established Boston improv theater companies ImprovBoston and Improv Asylum.

In "Code Duello: Hamilton & Burr," the end is always the same, Reynolds said, with Burr fatally wounding Hamilton. But the motivation for the latter's death changes with each show. That's one advantage of improv as opposed to a longer play. If one particular part of a skit doesn't work, there's always an opportunity for improvement—and increased hilarity.

"One night, the audience suggested that it was over a stolen cow," Reynolds said. "So we start discussing the cow theft, and that leads to an argument and ends with me shooting my best friend. It's gotten easier over time. The more upset I am, the funnier it is to the audience."

In addition to the laughs, the motivation behind improv comes in creating a new product completely from scratch.

"It's great when strangers laugh at stuff that I find funny, too," Luth said. "But what I like best is that we're covering all aspects of the process—writing, directing, acting, and producing. And when we're successful, it's an amazing feeling."

Now if only he could locate that knife.

For more on these improv troupes, go to www.colby.edu/mag

Above, Neil Reynolds '03, left, and Matt Tucker, as Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton in a comedy staged by The Tribe, a Boston improvisational theater company. Slightly Known People, below, from left Josh Mertz, Erik Bowie '00, Dan Maccarone '98, Mel DeLancey, Stuart Luth '01.

Power Play

HISTORIAN ALAN TAYLOR CHRONICLES NATIVE PEOPLES' DOOMED ATTEMPTS TO RETAIN LAND AND POWER AT THE TIME OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

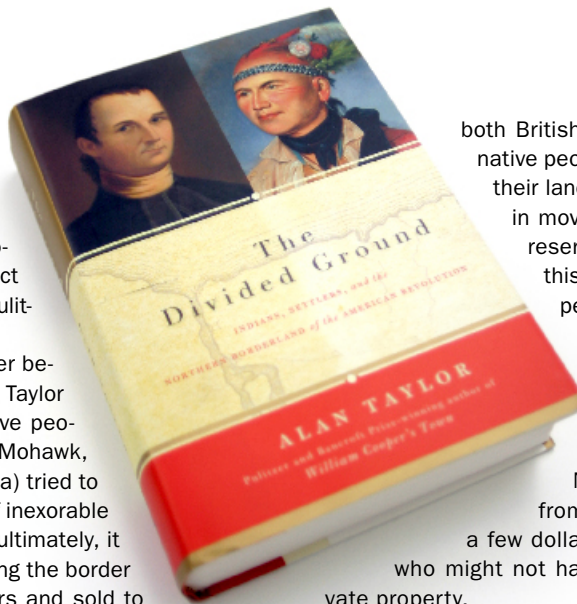
SALLY BAKER REVIEW

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as the American Revolution and its aftermath played out, another struggle for independence was being waged in what is now New York and southern Ontario. That struggle, among native peoples, European colonizers, and American settlers, is the subject of *The Divided Ground* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Alan S. Taylor '77.

"The central character in this book is the border between Canada, the U.S., and the Indian lands," Taylor said. It is the story of the ways in which the native peoples of Iroquoia (the "Six Nations," including the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora) tried to retain control of their ancestral lands in the face of inexorable pressure from Britain and the United States. And ultimately, it is the story of millions of acres of Indian lands along the border transferred for a pittance to rich white landowners and sold to poor settlers.

Researching an essay on the meaning of liberty in the early American republic and its relation to frontier expansion, Taylor came across elaborate, first-hand accounts of councils held in the 1780s and '90s and into the 1800s among Indians and British and American government officials. "I hadn't seen these before and hadn't understood the perspective of the native peoples," he said. "That was a revelation." Later, when he began research for the book he is working on currently, titled *The Civil War of 1812* and involving Americans living in Ontario during that war, he again encountered records of the councils. He was intrigued enough to write *The Divided Ground*.

For those who are familiar with the wholesale dispossession of Indians across America, the actions described in *The Divided Land* feel inevitable: the Six Nations were always going to lose their lands, the whites were always going to prevail. And Taylor notes that, "Government officials,



both British and American, were convinced that the native peoples were doomed, that they must give up their lands, and that their only hope of survival lay in moving to small pockets of land we now call reservations. The question was to what degree this should be done by negotiation and compensation or by more violent means."

But approaching the story with a sense of doom-by-hindsight robs the reader of an opportunity to break away from a stereotype—which Taylor carefully refutes. The people of the Six Nations, he points out, were far removed from those who "sold" Manhattan Island for a few dollars and far removed from native peoples who might not have understood European notions of private property.

"There's a tendency to freeze Indians in time, as if they were always the same way," Taylor said. "But the Indians had more than one hundred and fifty years of commercial dealings with Colonial peoples. They were not stupid. They had noticed that, unlike their earlier belief that only a few settlers would come to their lands, an immense number had come in. They knew what lands sold for to settlers. They concluded that they should try to become landlords, renting their lands to settlers and retaining ultimate ownership of the land."

The leaders of the Six Nations suggested alternatives to the outright purchase (for far less than market value) of their lands by governments. They preferred to lease lands to settlers. At a wide-ranging council held in 1793, American representatives offered a confederacy of Indian leaders \$50,000 in goods and a \$10,000 annuity if they would agree to certain land cessions. The confederacy, whose goal was to keep American settlement behind the Ohio River, countered:

Next, Taylor Looks at Another Civil War

Alan Taylor '77, L.H.D. '97 switched from his current project in order to research and write *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*. He has returned to work on *The Civil War of 1812* and says it is, in effect, a sequel to *The Divided Ground*, since it explores a historical period two decades after the Revolution. Both books, Taylor said, involve "what difference it makes in people's lives when a

new boundary is put through their world."

The Civil War of 1812 will examine what Taylor calls the "complex pattern" of migration from the United States to Upper Canada between the Revolution and 1812 and the divided loyalties of the former U.S. Colonists and citizens. He notes that the majority of Americans who settled in what is now Ontario during that period were motivated by economic reasons—good, inexpensive land available in Canada. Others

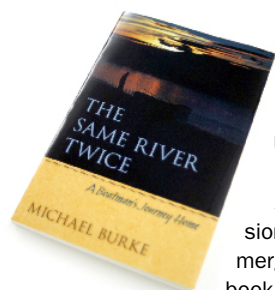
were Loyalists forced to leave, and still others, especially Quakers, Dunkers, and Mennonites, felt they would be freer to practice their religion within the British Empire. All three groups were put in harm's way when the United States invaded Upper Canada, and each was compelled to decide whether to take part in the hostilities and, if so, on which side.

Taylor is researching the new book now, with publication planned for 2009 or 2010.

As no consideration whatsoever can induce us to sell the lands on which we get sustenance for our women and children, we hope we may be allowed to point out a mode by which your settlers may be easily removed and peace thereby obtained. Brothers: We know that these settlers are poor, or they would never have ventured to live in a country which has been in continual trouble ever since they crossed the Ohio. Divide, therefore, this large sum of money, which you have offered to us, among these people...."

That, Taylor says, the Colonial, federal, and state governments could not do. Frontier expansion was an American imperative for more than jingoistic reasons, he writes, noting that "only continued public land sales could generate the revenue needed to sustain the nation's government and to fund its Revolutionary War debt."

The people of Iroquoia were increasingly surrounded by a white population reared on hearthside tales of Indian atrocities and convinced of its cultural superiority. Indians suffered as governments found it "very useful to ... nurture, construct, and perpetuate the stereotype of native peoples as primitive, unchanging, and violent," Taylor says. "Only the continued consumption of Indian land to make private property could sustain the American social order that combined inequality with opportunity."



A Passion for Paddling

The Same River Twice: A Boatman's Journey Home
Michael Burke (English)
University of Arizona Press (2006)

Associate Professor of English Michael Burke's passions—rivers, family, environmental literature—mingle and merge like the braided channels of a boreal river in his new book, *The Same River Twice: A Boatman's Journey Home*.

Writing about a wilderness river-rafting trip can be riskier than the sport itself. Out in the bush with only one companion (a virtual stranger, in Burke's case), the dangers of self-analysis, adrenaline-stoked descriptions of rapids, or maudlin reveries about nature wait like sharp rocks in a steep chute.

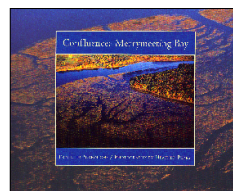
But Burke successfully navigates these dangerous literary waters, and his device—juxtaposing his own descent of the Stikine River in British Columbia with historical accounts of a distant relative, Sid Barrington, the "Champion Swift-Water Pilot of the North" during the Gold Rush a century before—gives the story a historical anchor and a personal quest. In addition, by drawing from more than three decades of his own river-guiding career, Burke leavens the book with poignant, sometimes outrageous tales of river running. "Guiding," he writes, "is part performance, part sport, part bacchanal, part Thoreau, part Twain—and nothing is much like it."

Burke's knowledge of environmental literature, a topic he teaches, also informs this story: "The adventure narratives of the 18th and 19th centuries took place on the sea, from Defoe to Melville to Dana to Conrad to Stevenson; except for *Huckleberry Finn* and *Heart of Darkness*, the river hasn't been a setting for equivalent adventures. That isn't the fault of the rivers, but of writers who haven't figured out what messages rivers bring, what metaphors and symbols they provide."

Burke's nonfiction, about rivers and other places, has appeared in *Outside*, *Islands*, *Yankee*, *The New York Times*, *Down East*, and *Colby*, among other publications. He will read from *The Same River Twice* on campus February 20—this year's Edwin J. Kenney Memorial Nonfiction Reading.
—Stephen Collins '74

RECENT RELEASES

Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay **Franklin Burroughs; Heather Perry '93, photography** Tilbury House Publishers (2006)



The bay where Maine's Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers merge with four smaller rivers is explored in prose and pictures by two artists with an extraordinary sense of this remarkable place. Perry's specialty is startlingly beautiful photographs of marine and freshwater scenes and creatures. From

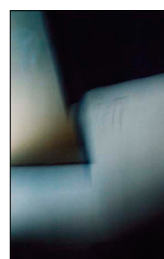
a fisheye view of migrating alewives to a soaring bald eagle, her photographs are entrancing.

The Rhetoric of Conspiracy in Ancient Athens **Joseph Roisman (classics)** The University of California Press (2006)

Roisman's latest book traces the historical context of conspiracy charges as presented by the Attic orators of Classical Athens. Invaluable sources on Athenian history, the orators filled their speeches with allegations about every facet of Athenian life. Charges ranged from murder plots to mismanagement of foreign affairs. By investigating the prevalence of the charges and what it suggests, Roisman sheds light on a little-explored aspect of Athenian discourse.

Conservative Comebacks to Liberal Lies **Gregg Jackson '90** JAJ Publishing (2006)

Co-host of Pundit Review Radio, a conservative talk show on Boston's WRKO, Jackson takes an alphabetical approach to rebutting what he says are fallacies perpetuated by liberals. From abortion to Democrats (Jackson tells readers why "they're usually wrong about everything") to "zealot terrorists," the book is a partisan guide for conservatives looking to have the last word.



Carolina Kroon '88 **Photo New York exhibition (October 2006)**

In an exhibit that showcases photographs of New York City sites and abstract images, Kroon captures glimpses of seen and unseen parts of New York life. A photographer and media and literacy teacher, she has published extensively in the United States and Europe. Recently her solo show, *Eastern Time*, was featured at the Wall Space gallery in Seattle.

The Shovel **Nick Childs '90** The Los Angeles International Short Film Festival (2006)

In this 15-minute film, Childs tells the story of a man who discovers his neighbor digging a hole in the middle of the night. The man soon learns that, in this particular small town, some secrets are better left buried. Directed, written, and produced by Childs, *The Shovel* has won multiple awards, including Best Narrative Short at the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival. In September it screened at the Los Angeles International Short Film Festival, a venue known to feature eventual Oscar nominees.

Open Door

Gordon Scholarships ensure Colby opportunities for high-achieving students

GERRY BOYLE '78 STORY

BRIAN SPEER PHOTO

Sharon Fuller '08 really likes working with ticks.

Well, not the ticks themselves, which Fuller and her research advisor, Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology Stacey Lance, gather by sweeping blankets through fields, but the analysis of the diseases that the ticks carry. In fact, when the Colby researchers analyzed the DNA of disease-carrying mechanisms in dog ticks they collected, they were surprised by the result.

"When we sequenced it, we saw something completely different," Fuller said. "What I'm working on this fall is to see whether it's a new strain or a new disease."

Or, if viewed with the characteristic skepticism of a scientist, neither of the above. In any case, the research is significant and potentially important work for an undergraduate, Lance said. The study is examining four different tick-borne diseases that affect humans. Fuller is trying to determine whether the diseases are spreading and, if so, where. Lance is clearly impressed with her research assistant, whom she called "very organized, very diligent, motivated."

Fuller, who is from Old Town, Maine, could have ended up doing her science somewhere else—had Colby not offered her sufficient financial aid to bring her to Mayflower Hill.

This year Fuller is one of the College's new Gordon Scholars—Colby students with high scholastic ability and financial need, with the need being met by a major new scholarship fund endowed last year.

The Michael L. '66 and Sally Gordon Financial Aid Fund provided awards to four Colby students this fall. The awards are the result of a \$5-million gift from trustee Michael Gordon '66 and his wife. Gordon, an economics major at Colby who earned a law degree at Boston University, is a founding partner and chief operating officer of Angelo, Gordon & Co., a leading New York firm specializing in nontraditional assets and investments.

As a new trustee, Gordon's re-exposure to liberal arts education and to Colby in particular refocused his philanthropic priorities. "There are a lot of good causes," he said, "but people should consider higher education." Looking at things that were important to him, he concluded that remaining competitive as a nation in the increasingly global environment needs to be a priority. Eager to make sure that as many students as possible get the best education they can, the Gordons settled on financial aid, specifically the new Gordon Scholarships at Colby, as the best way to have an impact, to make a statement, and to participate in Colby's Reaching the World capital campaign.

Vice President for College Relations Richard Ammons explained that that emphasis—giving academically talented and motivated students equitable access to one of the best liberal arts colleges—is one of the cornerstones of the College's strategic plan and a high priority in the ongoing campaign. "I think we're all concerned about the cost of a high quality education, and a residential liberal arts college is a particularly expensive education," Ammons said. "But Colby has always believed it should be accessible to the best students."

Increasingly, colleges that, like Colby, do not offer merit aid, are losing prospective students to colleges and universities that offer significant financial assistance to students with varying degrees of financial need. Many state universities now give automatic full scholarships to high school valedictorians, for example.

Colby has no intention of offering merit aid. As Gordon put it in a recent interview, "Giving money to students who don't need it is a misapplication of resources."

But Colby does want to be able to continue to attract students who show academic promise and who have demonstrable financial need. Colby must be able to compete for the best students, Ammons said, citing President Williams Adams's emphasis on excellence, opportunity, and competition.

The Gordons' gift for financial aid "speaks to all of these," Ammons said.

Among the four students named Gordon Scholars is Tim Concannon '10 of Norwood, Mass., who arrived on Mayflower Hill this fall with interests in math and in continuing his study of Japanese, in which he already is conversationally fluent. Concannon, who also intends to play basketball, said he narrowed his search to three NESCAC colleges before choosing Colby. "Everything seemed to work out for Colby," he said. "By the end of April it was a pretty clear choice."

Fuller, a National Merit Finalist, said she was contacted in high school by colleges that offered her full scholarships based solely on her academic accomplishments. "When I saw Colby didn't offer that, I wasn't so sure [about coming] because that would have been a great opportunity," she said. "But with the financial aid that Colby gave me, it made up for that."

Now in her junior year, Fuller runs cross country and is active in the Colby Christian Fellowship in addition to her work in biochemistry. When she goes home to Old Town, she tries to spread the word, she said. "My friends at home say, 'I can't afford to go to Colby,'" Fuller said. "I say, 'Just try.'"

Gordon Scholar Sharon Fuller '08 sets up a polymerase chain reaction on samples of tick DNA as part of her research with Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology Stacey Lance. The test will help to determine whether Fuller and Lance have found a new tick-borne disease.



Putting College Rankings in Perspective

William D. Adams, President

Last summer Colby was named a “New Ivy” in the 2007 Kaplan/Newsweek *How to Get Into College* guide, and I got many congratulatory e-mails, letters, and comments from Colby alumni/ae and parents.

I was touched by the depth of feeling these messages contained and the enthusiasm for the College. This is a very good place, and I share the pride that students, alumni/ae, and parents feel when they think about Colby. It is nice to be included on “best of the best” lists. But it is important not to let those lists dazzle us.

Many of the ways Colby is rated by outside publications are impenetrably arbitrary. We don’t know how we earned the new Ivy designation, for example, and if it turns out to be an annual event, we are just as likely to be left off next year as to be included. We know from the “best and worst” lists included in *The Best 361 Colleges*, published by The Princeton Review, that a college can be at the top of a superlative list one year and missing the next—yet the campus got no less attractive, the food no better or worse, the professors no less engaged in their teaching.

Even rankings that purport to be based on objective criteria, such as those in the annual *U.S. News & World Report America’s Best Colleges* guide, are subject to manipulation, both by colleges and by editors who know that rankings must change from year to year in order to sell magazines.

Director of Institutional Research and Assessment Mark Freeman responds to many requests for information from guidebook publishers each year. He also files information about the College with a variety of clearinghouses, including the College Board, the Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System (an arm of the National Center for Education Statistics), and the NCAA. Most guidebooks combine statistical portraits of the College (the size of the student body, mean SAT scores, comprehensive fee, faculty-student ratios, etc.) with deeply subjective material that is compiled by editors who never set foot on our campus.

Hence, Colby is said to be located in an “urban” setting while, on the same page of the same guide, Thomas College is “rural.” Colby overlooks “hundreds of acres” of pristine Maine woods (I can see the lights in the Home Depot and Wal-Mart parking lots from my office window). The “average” Colby student is “from within 20 minutes of Boston” or from one of more than 40 states and 60 foreign countries, wears J. Crew and preppy fleece or is a bearded, beaded hippie, is a liberal or a conservative, is happy, is unhappy. . . . You get the idea. There are many college guides for niche-market students that celebrate our commitment to diversity and one that attacks us for being “addicted to the shibboleths of multiculturalism” and for “sacrificing traditional education to feed [our] flesh-eating sacred cows.” I’m not sure what any prospective student is supposed to make of that.

The 800-pound gorilla, of course, is *U.S. News*, part of whose assessment of colleges and universities is based on statistics gathered from the clearinghouses I mentioned above and from an elaborate survey that institutions fill out and submit to the editors. Twenty-five percent of a college or university’s score in the *U.S. News* rankings is based on a survey that is distributed to presidents, deans of faculty, and deans of admissions and asks them, essentially, “Which colleges are the best in the country?” A variety of other measures influence a college’s final score, including SAT scores, graduation and retention of students, acceptance rates, class size, and student-faculty ratio.

Virtually all of the indicators in the *U.S. News* methodology are re-

source-driven, and colleges that both have more money and *spend* more money tend to capture the top places on the list. Economies such as those Colby has practiced for years—keeping our staff very small relative to peers’, for example—are penalized. The editors have consistently refused to compare apples to apples on such measures as the cost of living in central Maine vs. western Massachusetts or suburban Los Angeles and other regional differences.

Schools that, like Colby, continue to require the SAT also have noted for years that comparing their scores to those from schools that are SAT-optional is another oranges-to-apples situation that distorts the *U.S. News* rankings and serves readers poorly.

Some colleges decline to participate actively in the rankings. As a group, the NESCAC schools decided a few years ago not to cooperate with an effort to rate athletics programs, and the effort was stillborn. But, tempted as I am sometimes to opt out, I see at least two reasons not to. Doing so alone might prove confusing to prospective students and therefore disadvantageous to Colby. And a protest by one institution—even one as good as Colby—would not be likely to alter in any way the behavior of *U.S. News*.

But we can and should keep the rankings in perspective by recalling several things. First and foremost, Colby’s own market survey research, as well as independent national studies, find consistently that rankings and ratings lie pretty far down the list of things that influence the college application and decision-making process. Academic quality and reputation, the campus visit, and the breadth and excellence of the educational program are far more important. As it turns out, prospective students are considerably more savvy as consumers than we sometimes imagine, and we must listen to them when they tell us what drives their decision making.

Second, college guides and rankings are essentially commercial enterprises, at least as concerned with their own bottom lines as with deepening public understanding of higher education and the college admission process. In the absence of better means of comparing institutions, these enterprises are perhaps inevitable. But we should not dignify them by acting as though they have the public interest solely in mind.

I understand the challenges that college-bound students—especially high-achieving students—and their families face in trying to narrow their choices. The students are inundated with mail from colleges and universities throughout their high school careers. They have told us in focus groups that any serious effort to wade through the material would take all of their waking hours. Ratings and rankings *seem* to provide focus and clarity in the midst of this flood of information, but they can be highly misleading and superficial.

So what is to be done? College administrations and governing boards need to stay focused on the true metrics of quality and on understanding and evaluating both ends of the educational enterprise—what we provide students by way of excellent faculty and facilities and programs and what we and the students can say and demonstrate about the value of the enterprise when it is over.

We need to stop reinforcing the grip of commercial ratings and rankings systems by acting in ways that appear to validate them. This is hard to do in the very competitive world of college admissions, but it is an important measure of our dedication and seriousness. A great institution, secure in itself and energized by the work that goes on within its walls, doesn’t have to live and die by the one-liner.