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Smith's Reference Belittles Sit-in

We write in response to your story about Earl Smith's recently published history of Colby, *Mayflower Hill* ("History with a Twist," fall 2006 *Colby*). While Dean Smith's book has received a number of accolades since its publication this past fall, in at least one very important respect it falls short—specifically, its account of the April 16, 1999, occupation of President Bill Cotter's office by students of color and their allies.

Dean Smith's version of this critical event is both incomplete and inaccurate. In so doing it belittles and ridicules the commitment and energy of the nearly 100 Colby students, faculty, and staff who participated in the sit-in. The sit-in itself garners only one short sentence in Smith's volume—followed by this footnote:

Many students who occupied the office were enrolled in Pamela Thoma's course "Gender, Race, and the Politics of Difference" with a syllabus requiring participation in a community or campus "action" and a three-to-five-page paper describing it. The papers were due the following week. ... (P. 336-337)

The not too subtle implication here is that the motivation of those engaged in this important aspect of our democratic legacy wasn't genuine, but, rather, they were simply involved in a self-serving attempt to meet the requirements of a course. This insinuation is patently false, and profoundly disrespectful, both to Professor Thoma (who was not aware that a sit-in was being planned) and to those students of hers who participated. In point of fact, while the sit-in was motivated by a long list of grievances that increased over time, it was a genuinely spontaneous event. It took energy and courage for the students involved to plan the sit-in, to write the list of demands they presented to President Cotter, and to engage in the negotiations that followed. Moreover, the students (now alumni) involved were some of Colby's best and brightest—none of whom were there simply to complete a course assignment, but instead were there to participate

in a longstanding tradition of civil disobedience (for a much more accurate account of the 1999 sit in, see www.colby.edu/education/activism/stories/sitin.html).

We often wonder, why do so many students of color experience Colby as alienating and unwelcoming? Perhaps it is because, as an institution, we continue to tell incomplete and misleading stories about ourselves. *Mayflower Hill* represented an opportunity to set the record straight, and to tell the truth about an important event in our recent history. Unfortunately, it failed.

If we are truly committed to preparing a citizenry able to think critically and to act on behalf of social justice (as our precepts indicate), then we should applaud the actions of these students, whether or not we agree with their position. For to trivialize and dismiss their actions, in the end, is to trivialize and diminish the value of a Colby education.

Lyn Mikel Brown, Professor of Education
Julie de Sherbinin, Associate Professor of Russian

Jorge Olivares, Allen Family Professor of Latin American Literature
Tarja Raag, Associate Professor of Psychology

Hanna Roisman, Francis F. Bartlett and Ruth K. Bartlett Professor of Classics

Joseph Roisman, Professor of Classics
David Suchoff, Professor of English
Betty Sasaki, Associate Professor of Spanish

Mark Tappan, Professor of Education

In Wartime, Comic Relief

Earl Smith's vivid account of the 1970 day Maine's senators came to Mayflower Hill brought back memories. I too recall an atmosphere thick with antiwar fervor. However, my recollection of the reaction to Waterville's own Ed Muskie is a little different.

The crowd did indeed respond to Muskie's prepared remarks with applause that was often polite and occasionally enthusiastic, but many in attendance remained highly skeptical of the senator.

Some suspected his stance on Vietnam may have had more to do with political calculations than deeply held principles. Cynics—there were many in 1970—wondered if he was doing much more than pandering. If memory serves, Muskie had initially declined to attend the Colby event, changing his mind only after Margaret Chase Smith agreed to be there.

I stood at the very back of the crowd that day, enabling me to take in the entire scene. A small group of middle-aged men appeared next to me while Muskie spoke from his notes. These men could have come from central casting in response to a call for local politicians. They were suited, paunchy, and cocky. One puffed on a cigar.

They listened intently to the long, detailed, pointed, sometimes angry questions that followed Muskie's prepared remarks. As members of the crowd murmured or shouted support of the questioners, the men by me grinned broadly, bobbed their heads, and guffawed. The smoker took the cigar from his mouth long enough to call out, "You're in trouble now, Ed," or "How you gonna handle that one, Ed?"

I couldn't decide if they were old foes, acquaintances, or even friends of Muskie's, but the men in suits clearly enjoyed the spectacle of the senator's discomfort. They provided an amusing little scene at a time comic relief was in short supply.

Jon Weems '70
Morgantown, West Virginia

Echoes of Woodsmen Past

I'm writing to thank you for your [Inside Colby] podcast piece on the woodsmen's team. I was captain of the women's team for two and a half years. I received the link to "Inside Colby" from the alumni mass e-mailing [Out of the Blue] and hadn't heard anything about it before.

Listening to your story while sitting at my desk at work, I was taken immediately back to the great feeling of being on that field—chopping after a day of class, throwing my ax over my shoulder and walking back to the cabin at dusk, or earning my "crazy Colby girls" reputation

at a meet with other teams.

As soon as I finished listening I e-mailed the link to Meghan Fallon '98, whom I hadn't been in touch with for years. She and I were both so glad to hear the spirit of the team alive in the voices in your story. The woodsmen were truly the outstanding experience of my time at Colby and I was thrilled to hear them honored through your work. Thank you!

Nelia Dwyer '00
East Burke, Vermont

Editor's note: to hear the Inside Colby podcast on the woodsmen's team, go online to www.colby.edu/mag and type in the keyword "woodsmen."

False Allure of College Rankings

In his essay "Putting College Rankings in Perspective," (fall 2006 *Colby*) President Adams couldn't have better captured the false allure of the ratings game. Whatever the field of endeavor, be it academia, medicine, law, or athletics, the companies that sell their products using these ratings exploit our penchant for commendation and ranking, and it's wise advice not to take them seriously.

Spending weekends at Colby each fall, observing the energy and commitment, listening to my son and his friends tell of their experiences, I've come away wishing that I might have ignored the rankings and chosen a school like Colby over the very popular and highly ranked "Ivy" that I attended. So, right you are—even though I couldn't help but smile when I read the "New Ivy" rating confirming the wisdom of my son's decision.

Jeff Chanin P'09
Tiburon, California

Trying to differentiate between the top 10 to 20 colleges seems fruitless. The stories are legion of students from unheralded schools who are successful (one of the finest trial lawyers I know in Los Angeles graduated from an unaccredited law school) and those with pedigreed

backgrounds who fail to live up to their promise. I chose Colby (and was awarded admission) as an early-decision applicant, so I did not have to contend with multiple school rankings—indeed in my day, I don't believe that there was such a beast.

With the understanding that our emphasis is on maintaining a quality product, I see no reason to be proud or ashamed whether ranked 12th or 18th.

Robert J. Ryan '81
Houston, Texas

After Their Time

Perhaps it's my Orwellian-induced fear of history being rewritten, but a desire to set the record straight (pun unintended) drives me to point out that in the printed version of your article "Rock Never Dies: Sixties Rock Finds New Fans Among Today's Students," (summer 2006 *Colby*), roughly half of the album covers displayed in the accompanying photographs and collages were released in the seventies. Most notably amiss was Fleetwood Mac's 1977 album *Rumors*, which only predated the MTV era by a mere four years.

John D. Ervin
Technical Director
Colby Theater and Dance
Waterville, Maine

"Four Fingers" is a Life Lesson

From the Colby football stands and from the sidelines of Seaverns Field we've seen them. Four fingers held high in the autumn air, some bloodied, some taped and swollen. Raised by the players at the beginning of the fourth quarter, they serve as a silent reminder that the last quarter of a football game is a very special place in time: Four Fingers recall the months of hard work and preparation that have led to these precious final fifteen minutes. Four Fingers beckon each player to find those last reserves of strength, resolve, and stamina. Regardless of the score or the particular game situation, those Four Fingers carry one very singular message: *Finish Strong*.

We should hope that for some of those players, the significance of Four Fingers

might just carry over beyond the last game. Can lessons learned on the gridiron extend to life beyond football? Can Four Fingers still be recalled during, say, senior spring? Perhaps one more hour's work revising a final history term paper or after graduation, getting one more opinion on that job offer or in later life.

For many of us, however, we anticipate the approaching conclusion of a task by a slow and sometimes imperceptible reduction of effort—a bit like easing off the gas pedal as we bring our car to the crest of a hill.

During a recent checkup, I asked my primary care physician what he thought might be the most important thing I could do to ensure a long life. (I'm 60.) He responded, "Don't retire." While kicking back in Margaritaville is certainly an inviting thought, it got me thinking that as I approach my life's fourth quarter—well, maybe not quite yet—but when I do, perhaps I should be reminding myself of Seaverns Field in the fall, of those tired but determined Mules, and of Four Fingers held high.

Jim Sullivan P'06, '10
Rye, New Hampshire

Teachers' Program Resonates

I am very impressed with and encouraged by this innovative program ("Back for the Future: With eyes on their own curriculum, Waterville High School social studies teachers attend Colby," spring 2006 *Colby*). I am a former high school teacher and current anthropology doctoral candidate, and it is my goal to integrate anthropology into secondary curricula wherever I end up teaching. I can use this program at Colby as a way to promote this idea on other campuses. Thank you for your willingness to think outside the box and foster greater collaboration between the university and the community. We can all benefit from such initiatives.

Carol Conzelman
Boulder, Colorado