This issue was made possible by grants from:
The Reuter Foundation
The Baruch College Fund
and Israel S. Wiesel ('40)

We are grateful for the support of:
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We appreciate the assistance of:
Peter Miroshnik, Journalism Programs
Staff of the Office of College Advancement
Jane Crotty, Director of Community Relations and Economic Development
Karl Schmid and the Office of Campus Facilities and Operations
Richard Teitman, Director of Information Services
Professor Emily DiMartino, Associate Dean, Mildred and George Weissman School of Arts and Sciences
And: Professor Fran Antmann, Zane Berzins, Gina Bonhomme, Professor Jerry Bornstein,
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Professor Ben Hudson, Lucy Lee, Professor Myron Schwartzman, Professor Virginia Smith,
Professor Deborah Stead, Dave Strickler, Mark Strickler, Professor Leonard Sussman,
Connie Terrero, Brenda Vercesi, Frank Werber, Professor Lucinda Zoe

Special Thanks:
Carolyn Shapiro

Printing:
Tri-Lon Color Lithographers Ltd.
Welcome to the 20th Anniversary issue of Dollars & Sense.

Healthy and twenty years old, we should focus on the present and consider the future. With that in mind, this year Dollars & Sense homes in on how the realities of business, economics, technological advances and urban re-definition affect day-to-day life, especially right here in New York City. In this issue, Dollars & Sense takes business out of the boardrooms, onto the streets and into our homes.

New York has always been a city of merchants. During the Starbucks hegemony, Dollars & Sense felt it time to highlight small businesses—the old-fashioned “mom and pop” operations that laid the foundation of this great metropolis. The section titled “Minding Their Own Business” presents profiles of six unique businesses, each independently owned and operated by industrious New Yorkers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. “If You Can Make it Here” continues the inquiry into the economic nitty-gritty by profiling a cross-section of New Yorkers and showing how they make ends meet.

In our section “Urban Renewals,” our writers examine the contrasting effects of the Times Square redevelopment effort, document a united community project to erect a monument to abolitionist Frederick Douglass and detail the effects of gentrification on the poor of Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

“Labor Pains” offers two features on working issues: contract struggles for unionized hospital workers and child care realities for working mothers.

The benefits and pitfalls of cyber-trends are discussed in “The Future Bytes Back,” which explores personal money management, how computers will weather the approaching millennium and how Internet-based media may affect journalistic standards. “Marketing Mischief” delves into the manner in which advertising manipulates journalism and looks at specific target-marketing by clothing and luxury-goods producers. In “Notes from the Underground,” our writers sound off about two growing musical movements, electronica and Rock en Español.

Insidel-Out is our hidden jewel. Section editor Mark Stephens has assembled a magazine-within-a-magazine expressing the personal voices of a collection of gifted student writers.

And last, but not least, we give ourselves a hearty pat on the back in “Looking Back: 20 Years of Dollars & Sense.” With a history of the magazine’s origin, a retrospective chronicling of topics covered in these pages and where-are-they-now profiles of former student contributors, we bask in our golden past.

Now “I” must separate from the “we” so that I may give personal thanks to our dedicated editorial staff, the enthusiastic art and design staff and all our contributors. Extra warm and fuzzy thanks to our faculty advisers Alisa Solomon, Leon Wynter and Terry Berkowiz. All of us on staff at Dollars & Sense gratefully acknowledge the faithful financial support of the Reuter Foundation. Finally, thanks to you, the reader. It is our earnest wish that you’ll get even more pleasure reading Dollars & Sense than we all have had in creating it for you.

Sincerely,

Brett Wilder
## Contents

### Minding Their Own Business
Six Small Businesses Found Only in New York

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mojo Working</td>
<td>Brett Wilder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tofu in the 'hood</td>
<td>Sergy Tabuteau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rice Up Your Life</td>
<td>Suk Yin Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>East of the Border</td>
<td>Ivan Castaño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Diamonds in the Dustbin</td>
<td>Brett Wilder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cleaning with a Conscience</td>
<td>David Ortiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marketing Mischief

22 We Shall Overspend?
Luxury Items Targeted at Black Consumers
by Lois Shellie

26 Sizing Up the Market
by Michelle Lewis

28 Free Press for Sale
Advertisers Buy Favorable Coverage
by Francine Phillips

### If You Can Make It Here...
How Five New Yorkers Make Ends Meet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>No Green Card, No Gold Card</td>
<td>Elaine Wu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>By Any Means Necessary</td>
<td>Alec Turner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>She's Gotta Make It</td>
<td>Cherisse Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Joint Venture</td>
<td>Ivan Diaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Breaking a Record</td>
<td>Kim Charles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes from the Underground

31 Oye Como Va
A Look Inside Rock en Español
by Harold Velarde

38 Chart Breaking Beats
Is Electronica the Next Big Thing?
by Balázs Földvári
THE FUTURE
BYTES BACK

58 PHOTO ESSAY
Underground Sounds
A photo essay of
New York City
street performers

Urban Renewals
Over the Bridge,
Under the Gun
Rent and Welfare
Reform Threatens
Williamsburg Poor
by Jennifer Ma

62
66
66
66

TURNING A CORNER
Narrative of the
Life of a Public
Monument
by Rita Barol

66
66

TIMES SQUARE
From X-Rated
to Gold-Plated
by Mark Stephens

72

LABOR PAINS

52 Unfair Labor Practice
Childcare Still not
a Dad’s Job
by Chan-joo Moon

77

Juggling Act
by Maria Medina

78

56 Contract Condition: Critical
1199 Girls for a Fight
by Julie Christie

79

LOOKING BACK:
20 YEARS OF DOLLARS & SENSE

An Editor Remembers
by Deborah Erickson

77

Two Decades
by Mike Galicia

78

Imagine You’re Writing for a Magazine...
by Yury Mashkovich

79

How Dollars & Sense Began

Where Are They Now?
by Yury Mashkovich

80

Checking in with Former Dollars & Sense Staffers

83 INSIDE/OUT
Minding Their Own Business

Six Small Businesses Found Only In New York

A long-haired young man, his brow knitted in concentration, hunches over a workbench, a hot soldering iron in his hand. The object of his attention is a cheap hollow-bodied electric guitar, a poor patient, badly in need of this doctor's healing touch. Chris Cugh, the co-owner of Mojo Guitar Shop, finally looks up from his work as another long-haired man rushes through the front door. It's Lenny Kaye, guitarist of the Patti Smith Band, on his way to the third of a four-night stint at CBGB. The pair exchange greetings and chat awhile before Kaye leaves the store with a black Fender Stratocaster guitar, lent to him by Cugh. "Thanks Chris, what would I do without you?" says Kaye, a sentiment shared by scores of guitarists who depend on Cugh for the personalized service that he provides.

This 450-square-foot shop, located at 102 St. Mark's Place in Manhattan's East Village, serves not only the New York music community, but also customers among its clientele such internationally famous artists as Sonic Youth, ZZ Top, Bob Dylan and the Smashing Pumpkins. Mojo is the shared creation of Cugh and his significant other, co-owner Arline Lasberg, who began the business together 12 years ago.

"We started with nothing but the first month's rent and three guitars," Cugh says, as he recalls the birth of Mojo at its original location: a tiny, dark, hidden store-front on 12th Street, just west of First Avenue. After four years of barely breaking even, the expansion-minded partners moved Mojo to its present location, where the store has been operating for the last eight years. Business since has nearly tripled to over $200k a year, with

THE GUITAR DOCTOR: Chris Cugh, co-owner of Mojo Guitar Shop.
the help of the high-visibility and increased foot-traffic that St. Mark’s Place offers.

“It was definitely a great move. We went from being a clubhouse to being a store,” says Cush. From its inception, Mojo became somewhat of a gathering place for friends and musicians. On any given day, a diverse group of locals and out-of-town visitors can be found gathered in the cozy shop, socializing and doing business, sampling the instruments and swapping descriptions of guitars they own, have owned or hope to own. Customers and friends enter and leave, but the two constants are Lasberg, who keeps the store well-stocked with merchandise and handles the books, and Cush, who does instrument repairs and handles the day-to-day operations.

The majority of items offered for sale at Mojo are used instruments and amplifiers, and the store is often called upon to locate hard-to-find or vintage guitars. Cush is himself a life-long guitarist who knows all too well the experience of lying awake deep in the night, haunted by the elusive image of a long-desired instrument. “Lots of times I’ll get a guitar and call someone right away, knowing it’s what they’ve been waiting for,” says Cush. In this manner, Mojo sets itself apart from larger music stores by concentrating on the individual needs — and even fantasies — of its loyal clientele.

Along the road to success, Cush and Lasberg have had to deal with the hard reality of doing business in New York. “You still have to answer to people, the tax department, consumer affairs; it’s your store, but it’s still like a job,” says Cush. “When you go into business in New York, they don’t fully explain insurance and what-not — they should give out a big long check-list.” So how, one might ask, does the fledgling store-owner learn of the myriad of regulations that needs satisfying? Cush laughs, and says, “You find out when a city official comes in and gives you a ticket!”

It’s now late in the business day and Chris Cush the guitar doctor begins to put away his tools. Arline Lasberg makes her final call to a musical supplier, and the ever-present gaggle of guitar geeks slowly pry themselves away from Mojo for the evening. As he prepares to leave for the day, Cush shakes his head and with a bemused smile says, “There’s one thing that puzzles me with such a focus on day-to-day stuff: How do you plan for retirement?”

Tofu in the ‘hood

By Sergy Tabuteau

Seeing Bagels ‘N’ Stuff on Atlantic Avenue is as unexpected as finding Tavern On The Green sandwiched between Mama’s Fried Chicken and Da Spot. This new restaurant is a far cry from the ‘hood’s greasy spoons that serve accapurios and fried wontons. Seventy percent of the dishes and products sold here are made with organic foods.

Stepping inside is like speed-traveling to one of the many quaint little coffee shops that are so popular throughout the Village in Manhattan. The radio is playing softly in the background while several customers come in huffing and puffing from the cold air outside.
"What are organic foods anyway?" inquires Ashumba Bryan, a local youth who happens to stop by for the $3.00 lunch special. The owner of Bagels ‘N’ Stuff, Michelle Davidson, 31, says she receives this question at least twice a week from her customers.

Organic food, she explains, is produced with natural additives and without chemical pesticides, unnatural fertilizers and hormones. It is a booming industry, which grew 26 percent last year to $3.5 billion in sales. The entire natural products industry, which includes organic foods, beverages, dietary supplements and all natural personal-care products, grew 25 percent in 1996 to $11.5 billion, according to a retailer survey conducted by the trade publication Natural Foods Merchandiser.

The market for these products has blossomed with the maturation of the health-conscious baby boomer generation — the same kids who painted themselves green on college campuses on Earth Day in 1970. Today they are the upper-middle and higher classes who patronize the Body Shop and other health product stores that are scattered throughout Manhattan. But how did such a business, proffering what has come to be thought of as an upscale product, end up in a poor, minority neighborhood like East New York, Brooklyn, where people have limited purchasing power and even less information concerning healthy diets?

"I thought I would see an organic food store only in the Village or in Manhattan somewhere, not in the middle of East New York," remarks Cleon Quinton, a regular Bagels ‘N’ Stuff customer. In minority communities such as this, where people are coping with poverty, drug traffic and a high rate of crime, the last thing on their minds is their diet.

Drawn to inexpensive, ready-to-eat foods, economically disadvantaged Blacks and Latinos tend to have diets high in meats that are smoked or cured. Cheaper than fruits and vegetables, these meats have a high fat and cholesterol content — and they have been directly linked to the skyrocketing high blood pressure in minority communities. Compounding the problem, cigarette and liquor advertisements are a common part of the landscape in such neighborhoods. Many East New York residents say that it is no accident and that the billboards found in their neighborhoods are all but absent in communities where the residents are predominately white.

Indeed, according to Health Department surveys, minorities in America have overall poorer health than their white counterparts. The Office of Minority Health has found that diseases such as diabetes affect African Americans disproportionately. The OMH attributes this discrepancy to several factors, among them, the inability to afford preventive care, which includes yearly check-ups, poor living conditions that may expose people to various health risks and poor diet.

Davidson hopes that her business will take a step toward providing "equal opportunity" to a healthier lifestyle. "Why should healthy foods be available only in good areas?" she asks with a frown as she passes six freshly packaged organic eggs to a customer.

But assuring that food is healthful begins long before goods make it to the store. Switching from a diet with a high proportion of smoked meats to one with a high proportion of vegetables would be a good move, for instance, but if those vegetables are heavily treated with toxic pesticides,
they may pose new problems. According to the National Academy of Sciences, 80 percent of the most commonly used pesticides have been classified as potentially carcinogenic. Heavy reliance on pesticides has been suspected of increasing cancer rates and reproductive problems in humans.

Critics of organic foods question these findings. They point out that the Environmental Protection Agency highly regulates the use of pesticides and that it has determined that there is not enough evidence to prove that pesticides have an adverse affect on people. In addition, several Food and Drug Administration surveys found similar pesticide levels in both, organic and inorganic foods.

Runoff water and pesticides shifting in the air have been the suspected cause. Proponents of organic foods respond that taken one at a time, minuscule amounts of pesticide may not be harmful, but people consume more than a single vegetable at a meal, and it's the accumulation of toxins that causes damage.

Despite the debate over whether organic foods are safer for humans, both sides agree that organic farming is safer for the environment. Pesticides used in organic farming affect more than the crops they treat: run-off into rivers, lakes and other bodies of water results in extreme damage to wildlife and affects humans as well. At the same time, heavily industrialized farming contributes to topsoil erosion. One-third of the nation’s topsoil has already eroded. With each inch lost, there is a 6 percent drop in produce, as well as increased flood exposure due to siltation.

Davidson acknowledges the debate, but insists that people should have the information they need to make up their own minds, and access to acting on their decisions. “I didn’t think that it was fair that people in this neighborhood are not even given the choice of what they can eat,” she says as she sells her last box of Horizon milk. “Hopefully, Bagels ‘N’ Stuff can help make people aware of what the real issues are.”

Photo above: BAGELS ‘N’ STUFF: Bringing organic food to East New York.
Photo right: Owner Michelle Davidson (L.), with partner Margarita Moreno.
Rice Up Your Life
By Suk Yin Lee

Standing at the crossroads of an ever-expanding Chinatown, swanky Soho and what used to be Little Italy, the restaurant Rice at 227 Mott Street capitalizes on New York’s number-one attribute: its stew of cultures. Go there for dinner with a few friends and one of you can order Middle Eastern shish-kabob, another Indian curry, the third a Chinese stir-fry. The cuisine is eclectic and “totally multi-ethnic,” says founder and co-owner David Selig. No matter what the menu choice, the dishes will all have one thing in common: they will be accompanied by a bowl of rice. Rice choices include Thai black, Bhutanese red, basmati or brown.

Together with manager and Chief Financial Officer Peter Lawrence, Selig opened the 30-seat eatery in March of last year, hoping to provide tasty, varied and simple food amid a plethora of neighborhood pizza parlors and a sea of Chinese take-out joints. Built on credit cards — all paid off now — Rice made $21 on its opening day. Business quickly grew to an average of $1600 per day, and later topped $2000. Based on this trend, Selig predicts a 15 to 20 percent growth in income every few months.

Rice’s kitchen does double duty, also producing food for Selig and Lawrence’s tapas bar, an (pronounced en-yay), on nearby Crosby Street. During the winter, the team expanded further by opening a rice stand on nearby Lafayette Street — right in the middle of a car repair shop. Selig admits that while the setting is gimmicky, it does get attention. He says he chose the neighborhood as the site of his business because it looked “ripe for retail.”

Selig had no formal training from a restaurant school but he had worked in kitchens and he figured that it “would be easier” to run a restaurant. At first, neighbors were critical, but Selig puts that down as a general resistance to change. He shrugs off his early business mistakes as part of a learning process. The toughest challenge for him has been learning to manage his staff and getting the public’s attention and approval.

He doesn’t rely on advertising to promote his vision of multicultural dining — stating that it’s too expensive and not effective — and finds that restaurant reviews and word-of-mouth help. So far, the restaurant has had favorable write-ups in New York, The New York Times, and Time Out.

The clientele remains local.

White, Brown or Basmati? Rice co-owner David Selig.
— neighborhood folks, according to Hollis Dougherty, the counter person at Rice. Most are in their 20s and 30s although the age range is wider on weekends. About a third of Rice's income comes from its delivery service and the rest from eat-in customers.

The kitchen now produces 16 to 18 hours a day and Selig hopes to expand the operation. They pay rent for 24 hours, he explains, so why not use it for 24 hours?

East of the Border
By Ivan Castaño

The menu looks standard enough for a hole-in-the-wall fast-food taco joint: a back-lit yellow sign with black lettering offers mouth-watering fajitas, quesadillas, burritos and other forms of wrapped up beans, veggies, chicken or steak. But not everything at Fresco Tortilla Grill, on Lexington Avenue at 24th Street, has Latino roots. The entire staff — cooks, cashiers, delivery men and even the owner — are Chinese.

"Everyone here speaks Mandarin," shrugs Mina, a 23-year-old counterperson who came to the United States four years ago and has been working at the Grill for a year.

Fresco Tortilla was first opened in the summer of 1991 by Deshi Zheng, who worked for a Mexican restaurant when he first immigrated to New York. Having learned the trade as a worker at Tex-Mex Bakery in Greenwich Village, he decided to open his own take-out operation. Since then, the business has flourished. Zheng has
expanded to five more locations in Manhattan, raking in average weekly earnings of $15,000 to $20,000.

According to employees, Fresco owes its success to a brisk take-out business in the area, as well as to a regular stream of street customers who include local office yuppies on quick lunchbreaks, strapped Baruch students on their way from one college building to another and neighborhood regulars. The clientele changes as the day wears on: the on-the-job folks who perch on one of the joint’s four high stools and enjoy a quick lunch give way to nighttime locals who call in for delivery to their apartments.

But how does Mina feel about serving up beans and guacamole instead of eggrolls or turnip cakes? Her answer comes easily: With tacos, “you spend less and make more.” A Chinese restaurant, she explains, is more complicated to run because it requires a wider range of groceries that are not always easy to find.

“This food is cheap,” adds Mina, as she wraps up a takeaway order for an impatient customer, “Quesadillas are $2.69 and chicken fajitas are $1.49, and they’re available on demand to all who are in a rush.” She turns to call the next order to the cook — in a lilting Mandarin.

Diamonds in the Dustbin
By Brett Wilder

Upon turning east at the corner of 10th Street and 4th Avenue, the unsuspecting pedestrian is confronted with what resembles a market-stall at an Arabian bazaar. Amid the dusty dolls and lunch boxes in the store window, an illuminated zipper-sign reads: “My wife’s making me get rid of a lot of my cool stuff — Now’s your chance of a lifetime! Come in and rub elbows with musicians, artists, freaks and bums!”

There is “stuff” of every imaginable kind in piles, in stacks, on shelves, in boxes and on the floor. Books, toys, clothing, pots and pans, records, fine china and pornography — remains of the last 50 years of culture. A sharply dressed, hirsute man in a battered straw porkpie hat emerges from the back room, straining beneath the weight of a large box of who-knows-what, the soaked and
frayed stub of an unlit cigar between his teeth. He finds a patch of unoccupied floor and lays his burden down, takes the cigar from his mouth, smiles and quacks out a Jerry Lewis-like “Hello.” Meet Larry Fisher, the king of this unkempt castle that he calls Space-Age Bachelor Pad. Some might describe Fisher’s $40K a year business, located at 77 East 10th Street in Manhattan, as an “antique store.” Fisher, on the other hand, calls his wares “junk.”

Call it what you will, Fisher began amassing his ever-mounting collection of curios at an early age. “Being isolated as a child, I took comfort in baseball cards, Mad magazines and monster toys,” Fisher says, as he chronicles his early days as pack-rat of epic proportions. He had an unconscious knowledge that there was gold in what some people might consider worthless trash: “I was in Monticello, N.Y. in 1970, just 10 years old. I had saved $80, and I went to the local head-shop and bought every original Woodstock festival poster they had for 25 cents apiece. If my mother hadn’t thrown those out ...”

Prior to going into business for himself, Fisher had worked as a production assistant at Time-Warner for eight years before his division closed. He then turned his stockpile of “stuff” into a full-time job. “I sold books on the street in the East Village,” he explains. “When they started cracking down on street vendors, I decided to open a store.”

In March 1994, he opened Wild Wants on East 9th Street. Space-Age Bachelor Pad opened in March 1995, and both stores operated for a year before the original location closed. “Honestly, I couldn’t manage both stores at the same time,” says Fisher, who puts incredible amounts of time and physical labor into keeping his business stocked with fresh merchandise.

Fisher details his typical buying regimen: “I do clean-outs of apartments, I get stuff through estate sales and Sunday flea-markets, so I can’t go to sleep on Saturday nights. This week I went to the flea-market at 4:00 a.m., and all the good stuff was already gone!”

Another method of procurement for Fisher is bidding at auction on the largely undisclosed contents of unpaid storage rooms. The bidders do not
know what they’ll find in a locker full of boxes. “It’s like playing the lottery, a gamble. It’s a treasure hunt and I’m addicted to that,” says Fisher.

Regardless of the amount of effort he exerts to obtain his stock, the current craze for kitschy gee-gaws has not tempted Fisher to demand overly-inflated prices. He points to the wall where a row of plastic Mike Tyson dolls are displayed. The hand-lettered sign next to them reads: “Mike Tyson-$2, Two for $3.” Adds Fisher with a wry smile, “There’s a store across town that’s charging $6 apiece for those.”

So why is it that a business-person would keep prices so low, when the potential for increased profit exists? Fisher contemplates, then says, “My philosophy is, there’s the right thing for the right person. If it was the right person, and they didn’t have enough money and walked out the door — it’s just garbage now, isn’t it?”

Cleaning with a Conscience

By David S. Ortiz

Ecomat’s mission is, very simply, that of any business: to look after the bottom line. But the Park Slope-based “wet cleaner” — Brooklyn’s first — looks after two of them.

That double bottom line — financial and social — enables Ecomat, an environmentally conscious alternative to traditional toxic dry cleaning, to pursue a twin mandate of environmental responsibility and community-based economic development.

The franchise, owned by Community WetCleaners, Inc., the for-profit subsidiary of the nonprofit Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC), was opened to help provide jobs and career-development for unemployed and low-income resi-

MAY 1998
idents of South Brooklyn and lower Park Slope.

At the same time, through a process developed in Europe known as wet cleaning, Ecomat cleans garments without using perchloroethylene, the toxic chemical used in traditional dry cleaning. This chemical has been designated an air pollutant and a probable carcinogen.

According to Alison Prioleau, an FAC project coordinator who helped design Ecomat’s operations and financial systems, profitability and social conscience are not mutually exclusive. “Where they meet is the most interesting part,” Prioleau says. “You want to make money, of course — and you want to employ people who have special needs or spotty job records. I haven’t found those things conflicting.”

A cornerstone of FAC’s approach to community-based economic development programs is “a commitment to the people you hire. It sounds warm and fuzzy,” Prioleau admits, “but on a day-to-day basis, it’s not.”

FAC declined to provide revenue figures for the five months that the business has been in operation, but Prioleau says that business volume has already exceeded expectations.

“Our garment intake is good and high,” she explains, adding that the business is already creating more jobs: one full-timer and one part-timer have recently been added to a full-time staff comprising a manager, a shirt specialist, two pressers and a wet cleaner, as well as two part-time washer-folders and a part-time counter person.

“One thing we didn’t anticipate is the need for part-time positions,” Prioleau says. “There are women who have children but also need to bring income into the home. And part-time works for them.”

Meanwhile, Ecomat manager Bilal Muhammad says the enterprise is well-received in Park Slope. “Just having an alternative to chemicals is a blessing to our clients,” Muhammad says. “This is a very green neighborhood, so we fit in very well.”

Most of Ecomat’s work force has had little or no experience in the business. The shirt specialist, for one, had never done the job before. Nevertheless, says Muhammad, “His training period and his hard work have made him very proficient.” As for the others, Muhammad continues, “Even those who did have some experience needed extensive retraining because of the differences in the equipment.”

Muhammad himself, who has managed businesses before, has been working from 65 to 75 hours a week since Ecomat opened. As the manager puts it, “Right now we’re running a pretty close-to-the-vest ship. So when there are any staff shortages, I’m the man.”

FAC, formed in 1977 to address issues of affordable housing and community development in South Brooklyn and Park Slope, hopes at some point to branch out, develop satellite Ecomats and, once profitability has been sufficiently established, set up employee ownership. “It’s not something we’re prepared to do at this time,” says Prioleau, who holds an MBA in economic development from New York University. But she’s sure that FAC’s job-creation and career development strategies can fulfill their promise.

“Just the structure is a strategy,” Prioleau points out. “Having a nonprofit owner helps.” That’s because unlike a more traditional for-profit ownership structure, it’s understood that Ecomat’s profits will quickly be turned back into the business to create more business — and more opportunities.

“It’s a reinvestment,” Prioleau explains.
June of 1989 should have been a festive time for John Chan (not his real name). He had just graduated in the top 10 percent of his class from the State University of New York at Buffalo with an MBA in accounting.

However, instead of celebrating, Chan was worrying about finding a job without a green card and about how to survive without a car after his had been stolen. His applications to the Big Six accounting firms had been recently rejected because he didn’t have the proper documentation for legal employment in this country: he had only a student visa.

Chan wasn’t used to such problems. Coming from a middle-class family — his parents paid for his undergraduate and graduate tuition in Hong Kong — this was the first financial crisis he had to deal with on his own.

“I was so depressed during that time,” Chan recalls, “I was about to go back to Hong Kong. But then I told myself, ‘I can’t let New York beat me!’”

Indeed, Chan held on. He found a job at a lesser-known accounting firm in White Plains, N.Y., and financed a brand new car after he received his first paycheck. To this day, the SUNY graduate still regards this period of his life as a turning point. “It was after this experience that I learned the value of money,” he says.

Now, at 31, Chan is working as an audit supervisor at a local accounting firm in Port
Jefferson, Long Island, with an annual salary of $58,000 plus bonuses. Chan estimates that he is being paid at least $20,000 below market because he lacks a green card. However, he is willing to stay at this company because it is sponsoring him to become a legal resident in the United States.

With monthly rent of $600, along with telephone bills and dining out, Chan’s other huge expense is clothes. Just last week, he spent about $1,000 on a suit, jacket and sweater. However, over the years he has learned that buying retail is no bargain.

“I have pretty much stopped buying retail because all too often I have seen the same sports jacket selling for $500 at full retail price but only $299 at a discount store, and the only difference is the color of the shopping bag,” he says.

Being on his own for the last eight years, Chan has learned other ways to save money and maximize his cash flow. “Whatever income I make I put into my savings account, and I always wait till the last minute to pay my bills to maximize interest,” he explains. Chan pays his credit card bills five days before they are due — and in full. He even uses his American Express card more than the others so that he won’t be tempted to pay back only a portion.

He currently has $16,000 in his Bank of New York savings account and is not required to maintain a minimum balance for his checking account. Taking advantage of this offer, his average checking account balance is 47¢. “I move money to the checking account whenever I write a check and keep the balance as low as possible,” says Chan.

In addition to the savings account, he also has a 401(k) retirement plan with a current balance of about $12,000. With a yearly return of about 15 percent, Chan’s portfolio consists of different types of equity mutual funds with no bonds.

Obtaining his investment information mainly from The Wall Street Journal and from his clients, Chan likes the higher return he receives from equity and the idea of mutual funds. “With mutual funds, I get to buy a little of everyone,” he explains.

Although he has no money in stocks or bonds currently, Chan plans to withdraw $10,000 from his savings account to invest in equity once his balance reaches $20,000. He regrets that he didn’t enter the market before the Dow Jones reached its record highs, but expresses optimism about his investment strategy for the future.
Pearl Cleaver (a pseudonym), a 22-year-old near-poverty-stricken public administration major at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has been breaking federal and state laws for years. Like thousands of other students in the City University of New York system, Cleaver is a Welfare recipient. She is periodically granted several thousands of dollars in financial aid from federal and state funds — illegally. It’s the only way, she says, that she can survive.

Cleaver is trying to avoid getting pulled out of school into the ranks of “workfare,” a project intended to get people on Welfare to reimburse the state by working in public projects, such as the cleaning of parks, subways, and roads.

But what happens when an aspiring law student like Cleaver is pressured to drop out of school to clean parks? Although New York state and city lawmakers said that the workfare program was meant to motivate slackers to work for otherwise “free money,” Cleaver resents the epithet. She has been striving toward law school since the ninth grade.

Growing up on public assistance programs in a housing project in Queens, Cleaver considers herself a “Welfare expert.” She estimates that at least one out of five Welfare recipients that she has encountered is trying to improve her job prospects by going to school.

“If I told you all the bullshit I went through with Welfare . . .” She breaks off with a heavy sigh, then adds, “But I needed it so bad, that I found a way to make it work for me.”

Cleaver says that she lives her life according to two principles: “positive movement and self-improvement.” In the face of adversity, she explains, it’s acceptable to “accomplish your goals by any means necessary—so long as you don’t hurt anybody.”

That’s the rationale every time she falsifies her financial aid and housing documents and submits them to government officials. The illegality begins when she answers questions about past and present jobs. According to Cleaver, the more one shows as earnings on the application form, the less one gets in aid.

Cleaver says that she has tried to apply the proper way, but that Welfare is a Catch-22: Regulations would allow her to maintain a single job of not more than 20 hours per week, and not paying more than the minimum hourly wage of $4.25. Juggling school and three part-time jobs, Cleaver makes nearly $800 per month. As a science educator for a children’s program she earns $6.75 per hour, and as a part-time evaluator for the same educational facility she makes $6.50 per hour. Her third job is the most lucrative: $7.00 per hour at a popular clothing chain in midtown Manhattan.
where she works up to 20 hours per week.

This may seem like sufficient earnings for the average student, but Cleaver has extraordinary circumstances. When Cleaver was 19 her mother passed away, leaving her with only two possessions: the lease to a rent-stabilized two-bedroom apartment where Cleaver and her nine-year-old sister still live, and a mountain of debt. Her father has been out of the picture for years.

The rent gets paid by Welfare, thanks to the falsified income report. So do the utilities, medical insurance, and a $50 bi-weekly living allowance. The cash stipend puts some groceries into the refrigerator, while the $800 she earns by working covers clothing, household items, and other bills, such as an average $50-a-month phone bill. Cleaver’s commuting expenses to her jobs and to school run upwards of $22.50 in MetroCard swipes each week. Her three credit cards are maxed-out.

A member of the National Dean’s List, with a 3.7 grade point average, Cleaver intends to graduate from John Jay College, break out of the spiral of Welfare, and snag a high-paying job in public administration. She also wants to pay her own way through law school. Finding loopholes in the system to benefit her situation is Cleaver’s way of life for now — as well as for hundreds, maybe thousands, of other students who need such assistance to succeed. 

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Sitting on her mother’s living-room couch with her 11-month-old, Leticia Washington (not her real name) tries to think of a way to come into some money.

Washington is a single parent living at home with her mother in a small one-bedroom apartment in a Bronx public housing complex.

She is not on Welfare, but she is not employed, either. She has no income except for unpredictable $100 checks that come from her ex-fiancé who lives in Alabama and is also the baby’s father.

“I can’t work with that,” Washington says. “I’ve asked him if he could send a very small amount, like $25 every week, so that I could have something constant to make a budget around,” but she hasn’t seen any improvement from him. He still sends the checks when he wants to.

When she receives a sporadic $100, she must give her mother $50, because her mother demands that she contribute to the household in some way. Her mother, who is on Welfare, has to spend more money on food and the phone bill since Washington has been home. Washington likes to talk on the phone for hours at a time, which runs the phone bill to just over $100 every month.

After Washington pays her mother, she is not left with much. She spends the remaining $50 on food for the baby, disposable diapers, and necessities for herself. She can’t afford any splurges, like the biweekly trips to the beauty salon that she used to make when she and her fiancé were together.

Every day her mother pressures her to get a job and find an apartment of her own. But Washington, 23, has her own financial master plan in mind: getting back together with her child’s father.

“I’ll be sitting around the house and my
mother would say to me, "Why are you just sitting there looking dumb? Why did you miss your Welfare appointment today?" Washington says. "But if I apply to Welfare, they'll contact him and take money out of his check, and I will definitely ruin my chances with him.

It wasn't always like this for Washington. Until the summer of 1997, she lived in Alabama in a one-bedroom apartment with her child and her fiancé, Michael White (not his real name). He had three jobs, which brought in over $50,000 a year for the family, and provided health insurance for his son. It was enough money for him to keep up a car with its own cellular phone. Between his jobs as a police officer, a supermarket guard and a security guard for their apartment complex, the family lived comfortably.

Even though Washington had a high school diploma from the competitive LaGuardia High School of Music and Art, and 24 credits from Alabama State University, she found it difficult to find a job there. She has excellent communication skills, but no typing or computer skills for the office positions that she applied for. She also had problems finding a good baby sitter and access to transportation.

She was also choosy. Once, she recalls, White told her about an open position for a cheerleading coach at a school. "He kept encouraging me to apply for it and I kept telling him that it wasn't for me," Washington says. "I saw it like I was avoiding a job, but I didn't want some mindless job coaching a bunch of bimbos," she explains, adding that it wasn't what she went to school for.

Tension built in the household. While White went out to work every day, Washington remained the housewife, who kept the apartment clean and took care of their child.

She urged her to get her driver's license and a job. But she remained completely dependent on him for money and transportation, especially during her numerous job searches.

"When he came home from work every day, he would see me on the couch," she says. "I think he resented the fact that he had to go out to work every day, and it looked to him that I just sat home and relaxed."

They frequently argued and fought over Washington's lack of independence. Eventually, whenever she asked for money or a ride somewhere, it led to a fight. The argument that triggered the separation began when Washington told White that she thought she might have been pregnant with their second child. White was irate, she says, and his anger enraged her. The next day she packed her clothes and moved back to New York to live with her mother, leaving many things behind.

It turned out that she wasn't pregnant.

Now that Washington and White are separated, Washington's primary plan for financial security begins and ends with getting back together with him. Her short-term goal is to get enough money to make the move back to Alabama, get her driver's license and purchase a small car there.

Washington does not want to make the same mistake of being totally dependent on White as before. In the six months since she returned to New York, she has gone on several job interviews, none of which has led to employment. When it comes to finding jobs, Washington is at a disadvantage because she doesn't have money to cover a lot of expenses that a job search can incur. She can't afford a baby sitter. She lacks money for carfare and the proper attire for job interviews.
out of relationships in which they are completely dependent, Washington lacks the skills and experience needed to find a good job. In her scant career she's had just five jobs in retail, none of which lasted for more than a year.

Another problem is her bad record with credit reporting agencies. It excludes her from being eligible for certain jobs she's tried to get, such as bank positions.

Although she received full financial aid for the two semesters that she attended college at Alabama State, Washington had to take out a loan for $2,000 in the third semester before she dropped out. In addition, she has used two credit cards to their maximum limit, leaving her over $5,000 in debt, which she has made no attempt to start paying off.

While Washington sits and waits for White to change his mind, her mother grows more impatient. Her mother had given her an ultimatum: either apply for Welfare, sue White for child support or find another place to live.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Washington says.

always believed I would be rich some day," says Nancy P., a 29-year-old mother of two.

"Ever since I was little, I thought this would happen," she adds, looking up from her couch as if trying to ask her heavens why this dream has not yet become a reality.

The P's describe themselves as a family taking steps to better their economic situation. They have gone from receiving public assistance when their first child was born in 1992 to now planning to start their own business.

They live in a three-bedroom apartment in the Bronx. "It is a nice area if you don't look for any trouble," says Miguel P., a 34-year-old taxi driver.

Mrs. P. is a graduate of Iona College, where she majored in social services. She was born and raised in New York City. Her husband is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. He obtained a degree in accounting there in 1987. They were married in 1992, the same year in which Mr. P. arrived in the U.S.

Mrs. P. works as a social worker in one of the city's youth help programs. Her yearly salary is $37,000. Her husband, on the other hand, is not able to practice his profession and has to earn his living as a taxi driver. He blames his career problems on his inability to speak English well. After trying many other avenues to find work, "I had to start driving a cab to pay the bills," he explains. His salary varies from $500 to $700 a week.

Mr. P. works for Ready Car, a Bronx-based gypsy cab company. He frankly admits that one of the advantages of this job is that drivers "don't pay any taxes on that money."

Mrs. P. considers herself the big money spender in their household. She says she loves to go shopping. "I was spoiled by my father, who bought me everything I ever wanted," she says.

Their finances are controlled by Mr. P., the accountant in the family. This includes the responsibilities of doing their banking, grocery shopping and payment of bills. "I try to set up a budget for us, but it is hard to keep it up," he confides.
Within the next five years, the P’s plan to establish their own business that will mainly provide insurance, tax help and international phone call services. “It will be targeted towards the Dominican population in the upper part of Manhattan,” says Mr. P.

The P’s did not worry a great deal about saving money in the past. However, their attitudes changed as they began to have children. “We want to be able to provide for them,” Mr. P. says, referring to Andres, 5, and Evelyn, 3. Mrs. P. adds that the couple has started to put money away “to pay for their college education.” They also have individually acquired life insurance. “You never know what might happen tomorrow,” explains Mr. P.

The couple has also started to think about their retirement. In 1996 they started to deposit money in a 401(k) plan through Mrs. P.’s job. Mrs. P.’s job matches up to 15 percent of her salary towards the plan and, she says, they have about $7,000 saved up so far. The P’s say that they don’t follow their stock investments on a day-to-day basis, but rather wait to receive reports on them.

The two have another method for saving money as well. Mrs. P. claims fewer than the appropriate number of exemptions for payroll-tax withholding purposes. Therefore, she has more taxes withheld from her paychecks than she would otherwise. As a result, when they file taxes, they get a larger tax refund. “I can force myself to save money this way,” explains Mrs. P. This practice has enabled the P’s to solve many emergency situations. Last year, when Mr. P.’s taxicab broke down, they were able to purchase another car with this money.

The family’s main expenses consist of rent payments, baby sitter fees, and gas and maintenance for Mr. P.’s cab. “Sometimes, I can spend $300 to $400 when the car breaks down,” he says. Another main expense is Andres’ education. He attends St. Raymond’s elementary, a private school in the Bronx. Mrs. P. says that they want to provide the best education possible for their children.

Mrs. P. says that she is not looking forward to Christmas this year, as their credit card debts amount to over $7,000. “We both have big families and they all expect gifts for Christmas,” she explains. To avoid defaulting on credit card payments, they often transfer balances from one credit card to another. Another significant debt is Mrs. P.’s student loan, on which she still owes more than $15,000.

Sometimes the P’s have to rely on close relatives or friends to borrow money for luxuries. For example, when they went on vacation last year to Aruba, they borrowed money from a friend to purchase their plane tickets. “If we didn’t borrow we would never have gone there,” says Mrs. P. “We can pay them back little by little,” Mr. P. adds.

Mrs. P. is not quite living the life she fantasized about when she was a little girl. However, she feels the future is looking better for them. “I think we are economically stabilizing ourselves as time goes by,” she says. €
Rick Saunders (not his real name), 43, has been out of prison for two years now. A Jamaican immigrant with U.S. citizenship, Saunders has a long history of arrests. “I’m six-foot-four, and my rap sheet is taller than me,” he says. “As a matter of fact, I would have to roll it out to you.” His most recent conviction was for drug and gun possession, for which he’s now on parole.

Every year, thousands of convicted criminals come out of prison in search of a new life. Some have served their sentences in full; others are released on parole, and serve the rest of their sentences in society while being monitored by parole officers. Once outside, how do ex-convicts like Saunders get back on their feet financially?

Saunders has been working as a sheet-metal mechanic for an air-conditioning manufacturing and service company for the past two years, installing air ducts and vents. He has two children, a nine-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl. He now lives with the mother of his daughter, since the mother of his son squandered all the money that he accumulated by selling drugs, he says.

As a sheet-metal mechanic he makes between $10 and $15 an hour. With his weekly salary he supports his two children, pays his bills, and pays the mortgage on an upstate New York house which sits on five acres of land.

“The money is spent before I even make it,” he says, “By the time all the bills are paid and the kids are taken care of, there’s nothing left for me except lunch money for the week.”

Since Saunders is an ex-con still on parole, his status holds him back from many opportunities—saving money in the bank, or owning credit cards or anything that can be used as equity. “If they see I have money in the bank, the government will try to seize it, because they’d think it’s drug money. That’s why my house is in my wife’s name also,” he says. “As for credit cards, they claim they don’t discriminate, but once they find out you have a record you’re turned down immediately.”

Despite the problems, Saunders still considers himself fortunate. He remembers the complications that some of his fellow former inmates have encountered. While out on parole, he explains, ex-convicts are given a certain amount of time to find a job. When the allotted time is up, if they don’t have a job, back to prison they go.

When Saunders was released, he got lucky. Through a friend, he was able to land his job in no time. And Saunders’ manager understands what’s at stake; he knows that if at any point Saunders isn’t working, he goes back to prison. When lay-offs come, Saunders is never on the list.

Although Saunders wasn’t reluctant to take the job at the air-conditioning company, it didn’t mean he had no other alternative. It was just that he had done sheet metal work before he went to prison; it was his skill by trade.

While in prison, Saunders studied refrigeration to gain another skill that could lead to a better-paying job. Right now, he’s thinking about going back to school to continue his study of refrigeration and get his degree. But that will have to wait, he says, because he has to get up at 5:00 a.m. to commute to work, and then spend eight hours on the job. For the time being, Saunders is grateful that at least he has a pay stub to present to his parole officer every week. That keeps him on the outside—and, he contends, on his way to building a better life.
A black woman wearing a gorgeous — and unmistakably pricey — fur coat twirls around the television screen in a commercial for a well-known department store. In the middle of prime-time programming, to boot. More and more, black actors and models are being shown enjoying luxury goods in ads that they simply did not appear in before.

This new visibility seems like a good thing — but good for whom? The answer is easy: for the businesses seeking to target black consumers and for the ad agencies — both largely white-owned. It’s not so good for the black consumers who take — or mistake — the term “disposable income” to mean “get rid of it as quickly as possible,” and who, in the meantime, are missing out on an unparalleled opportunity to increase personal and community wealth. And the wallets of black-owned advertising agencies are not being fattened in proportion to those of their white competitors.

According to Target Market News, a frequently-quoted source that tracks African American consumer market trends, African American earnings increased more than 13 percent in 1996 to $367 billion, up from $324 billion in 1995. Target Market News also notes that “black households are spending more than their white counterparts for new cars, clothing, home furnishings and [appliances].” The report shows a dramatic increase in spending by African Americans on computers and computer software. For on-line services alone, blacks outspent whites by 150 percent in 1996.

Advertisers cannot overlook these figures. There has been an undeniable effort to attract the dollars of this once ignored but lucrative market. Finally, the black dollar has become green.

Deep green — and not green enough only for McDonald’s and Coke, with their traditional images of minimum-wage black teens targeting to similar demographics. Luxury goods are now being pitched to black adults using both target-
ed and general market ads, on television and in the print media.

For example, Ford is advertising its top-of-the-line vehicles in media guaranteed to have appeal to blacks. On the African Heritage Movie Network, in the wee hours of a recent Saturday morning, a commercial for Ford's Lincoln Continental — a car that sells for approximately $39,000 — features black models exclusively. Recently, Ford has even employed the image of a black "urban cowboy" to tout its hottest-selling line of trucks, the Explorer. Meanwhile, in the pages of Essence — the premiere magazine for black women — a black couple smiles contentedly above a shiny red Lincoln Town Car. During a prime-time Sunday night movie, an ad shows a sophisticated black couple out for a night on the town with their equally suave white companions in yet another expensive Lincoln. The company motto, "What a luxury car should be," flashes at the end of the actors' playful romp to the car, reminding the viewer that its product is no mere "common" conveyance.

There was a time — not so long ago, really — when advertisers considered black models to be the kiss of death for their products — if they even considered using them at all. "I wouldn't think of putting a black person in those ads [for luxury items]," says Marissa Clark, a junior ad account representative at a prominent ad agency, reflecting the persistence of the old view. But Clark, who is white, stresses that her answer is based on marketing principles rather than racism. However, explaining the noticeable increase in the use of black actors to advertise luxury goods to the general market, she explains that a multi-racial cast of models would work well "if you're trying to catch a varied, non-race-specific target audience."

Leon Wynter, author of the Wall Street Journal's monthly "Business and Race" column, comments upon this marketing trend: "The impetus to cast minorities in leading roles in commercials comes from a new understanding among advertisers that whites and minorities can be reached by the same ads." Indeed, the increased visibility of blacks in mainstream ads for all kinds of goods represents a fundamental shift in marketing thought about the role of blacks in advertising.

Donna Montaque, an educator and a black consumer, ascribes blacks' increased presence to more lofty — namely socio-political — ideals: "Black folks are making more noise; they want to be seen and heard and represented." Montaque says she is more likely to buy the item being advertised if she sees a black person advertising it. "When you see a white person it's kind of like background music," she says. "A black model reminds you of what's missing."

Yet while it may give a certain tingle of satisfaction to African Americans that blacks have now gained representation in the medium of advertising, there is a flip-side to the good news.

Along with the increased representation, income and spending, there is a disturbing reality: while blacks are spending more money than ever on shoes and clothing, they still are not earning as much as whites on average. Further, it's not by consuming that blacks can close the gap in wealth between themselves and whites; it's by saving and investing.

Allison Mitchell and Odette George, two employed black college students in their mid-twenties, are prime examples of this tendency to neglect saving in favor of conspicuous consumption. Their habits support the view that increased income by blacks is more likely to
result in increased spending, rather than a larger stash of cash saved. They vividly recall the clothing and other apparel they purchased over the past six months, but when asked about their saving habits for the same period, both spontaneously laugh. “What savings?” gasps Mitchell. “Put it this way: I save when I get paid — until a few days later when I spend it all again.”

Conversely, Heidi Smith and Jill Roberts, both white, employed and in their mid-twenties — and both recent college graduates paying back student loans — are saving their income. They do shop. But they buy fewer items per shopping expedition, and shop more aggressively for bargains in places such as thrift stores and outlets.

That hardly means that every black person is a spendthrift and every white a model of fiscal responsibility. Indeed, a 1995 Rand Corporation study found that given the same levels of income, blacks and whites are likely to save at about the same rate. This, however, does not negate the fact that blacks, on average, have significantly lower incomes than whites, and thus, much less money in the bank. The same Rand study found that among workers aged 31 to 61, whites reported mean financial assets of $72,571, compared to $12,780 for blacks.

One persistent canker irritating the issue of black-targeted advertising is the limited payoff it brings to black advertising professionals, who represent only 4.1 percent of the advertising industry’s work-force according to Fortune magazine. The article adds that of an estimated $865 million “national marketers spent ... to reach black consumers last year, only about a third of that total ($330 million) was spent with black-owned agencies.” This amount “represents less than 1 percent of the estimated $173 billion advertising market.”

But, Wynter points out, $330 million is still a substantial sum. “Black[owned] ad agencies handle the lion’s share of ads featuring black people,” Wynter says. The all-black
Wynter counters that the dissatisfaction of black advertising agencies such as Bynum's may be based more on the inequity in distribution of black-targeted advertising business among small and large black agencies, as opposed to just between black and white agencies competing for general market ads.

Either way, visibility in advertising may not be the best indicator of the advances African Americans are making in the American economy. Maybe when a smart balance is struck between the dollars the African American community earns, spends, earns again — and ultimately saves — it will finally be time to feel comfortable.

In the meantime, those designated "targets" would do well to keep in mind that being fixed in the cross-hairs of advertisers' artillery is not necessarily the most healthy place to be.

ads running in black media, or on television shows with 50 percent or more black audiences — such as the African Heritage Movie Network or Living Single — are usually produced by black agencies. According to Wynter, "Whenever you see one of those ads, you can almost bet that it was produced by a black advertising agency. As a matter of fact, that is their niche, their reason for existing." On the other hand, one cannot be sure that ads featuring blacks placed on "non-black" shows are made by black firms. He further points out that, generally, major network, prime-time ads are done by the general market (white) agencies.

This may account for much of the dissatisfaction felt by some black-owned agencies. Russell Bynum, of Bynum Advertising Service, 12-year veterans in the ad business, complains that "very few African American firms or individuals are hired to do work." And when they are, Bynum says, "their budgets are small in comparison to what white agencies get for the same type of projects."
By Michelle Lewis

In a satirical ad campaign by The Body Shop, Barbie, one of the most popular icons of American girlhood, has been electronically transformed into a 200-pound Anti-Barbie. She lounges on an emerald-colored settee, oblivious to her pudgy stomach, shortened legs and big thighs. She exudes a cool defiance toward her old figure—one that would measure 31-17-28 if she were 5-feet, 5-inches tall, according to Elaine Pederson, an associate professor at Oregon State University, who has extrapolated from the 11-inch toy's distorted hourglass body. The Anti-Barbie's never-changing smirk conveys The Body Shop's new slogan: "Love your body." As the caption states, "There are 3 billion women who don't look like supermodels, and only eight who do."

Manufacturers are finally beginning to notice. According to Michele Weston of Mode magazine, "Seven years ago there were only 200 vendors in the large-size industry. Today there are over 2,000 of them." Indeed, the special-sized clothing market is the only continually growing sector in the fashion industry. After all, 62 percent of American women wear clothes larger than size 12.

In order to revive itself after the last recession, Seventh (or "Fashion") Avenue needed to reach a wider market. Banishing their old "0-to-12" elitism was the best way to move back into the black. Fashion stylist Daniela
Roebuck says, “This is a long overdue idea. For too many years, larger-sized women’s dollars were not respected.”

One reason for the new respect is that “self-esteem” publications like BBW and Belle magazines began enlightening women who had long been denigrated by unrealistic beauty norms, and have caught the attention of the fashion industry. Meanwhile, Mode, the premiere fashion magazine for “style beyond style,” had begun been working to diminish the abiding dichotomy between full figured fashion and the skinny standard. Even fashion monthlies like Vogue and Glamour, which once exclusively promoted the thin-is-beautiful image, now dedicate at least some space to fashions in large sizes.

As a result of this trend toward big beauty, the careers of supermodels like Sophie Dahl have been rising. Dahl, who wears a size 16, has modeled with some major size 6’s. Some top couturiers, such as Jean-Paul Gaultier, have also been seduced by this new direction in fashion. Bored by the recent waif and heroin-chic images of current leading models, these designers have summoned fuller models to the catwalk. Large-size designer Madeline Wade of Madl Couture points out that “women need to celebrate the beauty of diversity. That’s why I use models that are sizes 6 to 26. Beauty, style, and fashion does not stop at size 12.”

These positive images of being big and fashionable will take time to trickle down to the masses. Many pre-teen girls gain their perceptions of beauty through television. According to a widely-reported survey, 80 percent of 11-year-old girls said that they felt overweight and were dieting to shed pounds. Many of them end up as victims of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating. The dolls seen on commercials during Saturday and Sunday morning cartoons also reflect the thin image young girls are literally dying for.

Thinness has not always been the supreme ideal of female beauty, even in the United States. In the ’60s, sex-symbol Marilyn Monroe’s popularity confirmed (with her ample size 16 figure) that beauty and sex appeal came in many sizes. But more recently, from Twiggy to Kate Moss, fashions have been paraded on women whose bodies resemble human coat hangers. Naomi Wolf, author of The Beauty Myth, argues that the shift was no accident: “Newly rigid ideals of beauty are instruments of a backlash against feminism, designed to lower women’s self-esteem for a political purpose.”

As the fashion industry is beginning to recognize, larger women are starting to talk back to the backlash, rejecting the culturally-imposed tyranny over their bodies. Like the Anti-Barbie, they are increasingly comfortable and self-assured in their girth. Willing to spend on large-sized high fashion, they are insisting that thin is not as phat as it used to be.
Free Press for Sale

Advertisers Buy Favorable Coverage

If advertisers call the shots, who can you trust?

It is a great personal victory for an artist or writer to win a top industry award, but Milton Glaser, graphic designer and co-founder of New York magazine, made no qualms about withdrawing as a nominee for the Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design in 1997. He relinquished any personal and professional gains he may have achieved as a matter of principle when he found out that Chrysler was using its financial muscle to influence the print media. The company required advance screening of magazines for articles that could be harmful to its image — forcing editors to factor the possible loss of Chrysler’s large advertising dollars into their journalistic decisions.

Incidents of this nature are becoming increasingly common within print media as advertisers demand to control where their ads will be placed, and what editorial content may surround them. Whether by rescinding funding, by pulling ads or just threatening to do so, they have succeeded in getting editors to make changes — including withholding articles from publication.

“In recent years there’s been an escalation of conflicts of interest with sponsors, and more examples of crossing the lines between advertising and editorial,” says Janine Jackson of Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, a New York-based media watchdog group.

Guidelines established by organizations such as the American Society of Magazine Editors and the Society of Professional Journalists strongly oppose any intervention by advertising into editorial departments of publications. SPJ’s code of ethics specifically states that journalists should “distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the two.”

Writer Greg Hassell discusses the deterioration of journalistic ethics in his Houston Chronicle article, “Advertiser’s Pull Felt at Magazines.” He describes the relationship of advertisers and editors as requiring a division akin to the separation of church and state. Hassell defines church as “the magazine’s heart and soul,” and

**SUMMARY**

Advertisement... 1
Editorial .......... 2
Advertisement.... 3
Advertisement.... 4
state as "the pursuit of money that makes church impossible."

However, some experts contend that this separation is impossible only in certain situations. For instance, Carolyn Phillips, assistant managing editor of The Wall Street Journal, says, "Absolutely not. Advertising does not affect editorial content of the Journal, not even in classic ways." She explains that the paper "is strong enough financially that the news department can take extra space if it is needed," without fear of what advertisers will say. "Few publications can stand up to any and all advertisers the way we do," she says. Citing local publications as an example of those in a weaker position, she adds that being able to stand up to advertising "depends on the size of the market and editorial strength."

Jim Ledbetter, media critic at the Village Voice distinguishes between publications that function almost as "vehicles for advertisers," such as magazines that focus on, say, boating or fashion, and those that are "more serious and high-brow and tend to have an independent voice." Like Phillips, he says that his publication is beyond the reach of advertisers, more so than its competitors.

Nonetheless, about eight years ago a memo from the Voice's publisher caused a stir among the staff. It required all writers to notify their editors if they were writing a story that may contain any negative mention of tobacco, so that advertisers could be warned. "After much protest and petitions, it was called a mistake," recalls Ledbetter, who affirms that there has been no other incident involving attempts of advertiser censorship since.

Still, it is not unusual to find editors who work closely with advertisers on special projects. In a November 19, 1989 article for The New York Times, Randall Rothenberg describes a "collaboration" between the editors of Esquire magazine and the advertisers of Absolut vodka to produce a story contest. He describes this as a "threat to readers," because "the short story...[for the contest] is clearly defined as an advertisement. Equally clear is the notice that the winning tale was selected by a panel of Esquire editors...." He refers to a 1982 ASME guideline that makes such a practice a violation of journalistic autonomy.

In another telling case, Martha Stewart, contributing editor at Family Circle magazine wrote articles about Kmart, the corporation for which she simultaneously worked as a consultant. This went a step further when "the retailer purchased all the advertising space surrounding the features," says Rothenberg.

It is easy for multi-million dollar advertisers to wield financial power over the media because of the high prices that they pay for advertising space. One full-page ad in the business section of The New York Times costs about $69,000 on a weekday, while a half-page ad runs $39,500. Even though small publications may charge far less for advertising space, their more narrow access to advertisers may make it even more difficult for them to forego income in order to avoid breaking the guidelines of ASME or similar organizations.

Ledbetter says that the ASME bill rights to address this issue is a "positive development", but worries that "the realities of the marketplace will prevent editors from being successful.

Meanwhile, as news media are increasingly bought up by huge corporate conglomerates, stamping out or avoiding unethical media practices becomes even more difficult. "Most
major newspapers, with the approval of their chief executives, have surrendered their editorial integrity to the marketing interests of corporate owners, who use papers to make acquisitions in the pursuit of high profits and diversified media holdings,” states an excerpt in Plundering the Newsroom, a book by James D. Squires, published by The Wall Street Journal.

Various publications are trying to develop strategies to maintain their independence. To increase consumer awareness, Kiplinger’s Personal Finance published an article called, “Do the Ads Tempt The Editors?” The writer, Steven Goldberg, focuses on the actions of other financial magazines, including Money, Worth and Smart Money. He describes how “Money’s business staff prepared special promotional materials for Citibank, which were mailed to bank customers.” Goldberg also charges that Jordan Goodman, editor of Money “spends much of his time talking to advertisers about the editorial content of the magazine—though not selling ads.” When questioned, the top editors of all three publications denied any interaction between their editorial and advertising departments.

“There is no such thing as absolute freedom,” laments Ledbetter. Citing the areas where his own publication must be especially careful, he notes that while many of the advertisers for the Voice, who are also distributors, are “small retail shops and boutiques that can’t exercise much power because they are small and spread out,” there is a potential to have advertising affect editorial content in cases of bookstores and record stores whose products are reviewed in a paper in which they also advertise. Writers and editors must do everything to resist increasing financial pressure, he urges. He warns that writers and editors must always remain on guard, because the more they resist, the more advertisers’ strategies will become “much more subtle because they want to maintain a certain atmosphere in order to keep themselves in there.”
It's a cool Monday afternoon in New York City, and before it's even dark, a crowd is gathering in front of the Palladium for a concert that won't begin for another couple of hours. Few of the club's regular patrons have ever heard of the bands on tonight's bill, but for those waiting on line, Soda Stereo and Aterciopelados are far from unknown. They are the leaders of a burgeoning movement—Rock en Español—and among its first bands to perform in one of New York's hottest mainstream clubs.

Soda Stereo, from Argentina, and Aterciopelados, from Colombia, don't get to New York very often. Most local Hispanics haven't heard of them. But the Palladium will be packed with the faithful. And why not? After all, who ordained that Hispanics must listen only to salsa, merengue and tejano music? Like Anglo rock bands, Rock en Español acts get the fans bopping and bouncing. But tonight, dancers from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina and other Latin American countries will leap into the mosh pit flapping huge flags of their native homelands in the air. White, black, brown and yellow fans, and all the shades in between, dance and sing along to the Latin rock/pop beat. This is the segment of Latin community nobody talks about, a youthful, multinational, community united by one thing: Rock en Español.

Large music stores like HMV are now offering more rock in
Spanish, or opening subsections of their Latin music departments devoted exclusively to it. The genre is gradually becoming more popular among the growing U.S. Hispanic population, which approached 22 million according to the 1990 census. Already, major record labels like Warner Brothers that never had a Latin division are signing local Latin rock bands. And the Latin units of major distributors, like EMI Latin, that used to focus primarily on Latin America, are now expanding their marketing in the U.S. Their aim is to tap into a vast market with bands like the Mexican group Maná, which has sold more than 6 million albums worldwide.

So what’s so special? Is this just rock in another language being pushed by the growth of the Hispanic population? In part, yes. But Rock en Español is much more than a translation. It embraces many different Latin cultural elements and fuses them with modern rock music.

For the most part, Rock en Español does not resemble its Anglo-American counterpart as the music contains strong elements from Hispanic heritage fused with lyrics that address the unique social and political concerns of Hispanic life.

As Jorge Garcia-Diaz, promoter of “Rock de los ’90s,” a Rock en Español concert series, told the New York Daily News, “It’s not easy living in the U.S. The energy you see at these concerts is the frustration of the condition we live in, but it’s also pride and excitement about the music, about sharing the language and culture.”

La Historia

No one knows exactly where, when and how Rock en Español started. During the ’50s and ’60s rock bands in Latin America simply translated American hit songs into Spanish. For instance, “El Rock de la Carcel” was a popular remake of “Jailhouse Rock.” However, some fans say that Rock en Español really started with the need to express what the young were feeling. During the ’60s Latin America suffered from turbulent change—chiefly, unstable economies and governments. That’s when Rock en Español showed its first signs of life.

It’s not clear where the first bands originated; there are still arguments about whether it was in Mexico, Argentina, or Spain. One of the best known early bands was Sui Generis, born in the late ’60s in Argentina. These early pioneers attracted 35,000 fans to a performance at Luna Park Stadium in Argentina at a time when an average rock concert in Latin America attracted only 2,000 fans,
according to *La Banda Elástica*, a magazine devoted to the *Rock en Español* scene. Sui Generis was one of the first bands to write its own songs in Spanish, touching on themes facing Argentina under a repressive military dictatorship.

By the '80s a few more bands appeared, but *Rock en Español* was not yet welcomed by the majority of young Hispanics throughout Latin America. One of the criticisms was that it just imitated what the rest of the world was doing. Still, *Rock en Español* didn’t do badly; in fact, a handful of bands not only became well-known in their own lands, but their fame crossed borders, creating new markets for their music. From the mid to late '80s, while established bands were still being criticized for merely copying their English-language counterparts, a new generation of musicians began adding a touch of psychedelia. Maná offered an arty mix of pop/rock and reggae. Cafetacuba blended still more styles, exploring facets of the *mestizo* identity and its influences, combining mariachi, *quebradita*, punk and the Brazilian samba. Like others in South America exploring

The energy you see at these concerts is the frustration of the conditions we live in, but it’s also pride and excitement about the music, about sharing the language and culture.

exploring a fusion of different styles of music. Most of them remained in the underground scene, without attracting the attention or economic support of record labels. But from this '80s underground sprang the bands that would later put *Rock en Español* on the map.

In the '90s, the experimentation of the '80s finally began to bear fruit. The Argentinean group Los Fabulosos Cadillacs got recognition as an important band, perfecting their fusion of ska, reggae, salsa, and rock, among other styles. From Mexico, bands like Caifanes explored the mystic sounds of pre-Columbian cultures, their roots, Aterciopelados married folklore and punk to a mix of Afro-Colombian rhythms, *boleros* and rock. Pedro Suarez Ortiz, whose pop/rock style is deeply braided with the Inca’s soulful music, also reflects a synthesis of roots and rock.

On paper, some of these cultural mixes might not seem to blend, says Henry Mena, president of the New York indie label 220 Records, but they do. “Victimas del Dr. Cerebro, from Mexico, have a song in which they mix *cumbia*, death metal and dance hall in one song, and it works. This sounds like a recipe for disaster, but
it works,” says Mena, who is also lead singer of La Ruta, a New York Rock en Español band.

**El Movimiento en el Norte**

Rock en Español has been filtering into the U.S. since the early ’90s, carrying within it elements of reggae, cumbia, salsa, punk, mariachi, metal, ska, rap, hip-hop, blues and Andean music, among other forms. Though the U.S. Rock en Español movement is in its infancy, there is a history of American bands of Hispanic descent that have included some songs in Spanish in their repertoire. The most famous is Santana, which added a Caribbean Latin flavor to American rock music. Santana can be seen as the grandfather of Rock en Español in the U.S., giving the first indication that Hispanics could rock. However, according to Frank Barbano, who started Retila, an L.A.-based fanzine dedicated only to Rock en Español, today’s U.S. movement probably started among Mexican Americans when a few urban bands came north from Mexico in the ’80s.

“It started more like an awareness along the whole border — L.A., Texas, Arizona, New Mexico,” Barbano says. “Chicago is highly Mexican (American), and that’s where a lot of the pushing and moving of Rock en Español kind of got started.”

The influence spread, setting in motion a wave of new Hispanic-American bands making rock in their native language for the first time. “Around 1990 is when the first [American born] bands of Rock en Español appeared, bands like Voz de Mano and Ley de Hielo, who later became the first U.S.-based band to get signed by Aztlán records,” says Barbano, referring to the first indie record label dedicated solely to Rock en Español acts. Today there are about 35 Rock en Español clubs in Los Angeles alone. Aztlán is still signing more U.S.-based bands, recently adding Maria Fatal and Orixa to its roster. Pastilla, another Los Angeles band, was recently signed by BMG.

While the movement has already infiltrated Los Angeles college radio airplay, in the Northeast the story is a little different. In New Jersey and New York, the Hispanic population is predominantly of Caribbean descent and more loyal to traditional Afro-Cuban styles like salsa and merengue. But in the New York area, Rock en Español is finding its audience in the fast-growing communities of immigrants from Central and South America, such as the Colombian enclave in Queens, and the burgeoning Mexican communities in upper Manhattan, the Bronx and Westchester.

The movement here got rolling in part through the entrepreneurial efforts of Garcia-Diaz, who promoted parties and concerts around Manhattan, then later organized the Rock de los ’90s concert series. He began using some local bands to play regular gigs, occasionally bringing guest artists from Latin America, to build the audience. But others also lay claim to bringing the movement to New York. Citing the influence of his own band, Henry Mena says, “La Ruta is a pioneer for this movement. Our first gigs were in late ’92, and there was no place for us to play. At that point we did not know any bands that played Rock en Español here in NYC.” Mena also began a series of shows dubbed Alterlatino in 1994 to add some “diversity” to Garcia-Diaz’s Rock de los ’90s. Daniel Rodriguez, founder and president of Caravana Records, was arguably the first to promote shows in New Jersey. Meanwhile, entities like Zemento Productions, among others, also organized concerts and par-
ties in Queens, New Jersey and Manhattan.

Some New York bands have won faithful followings — and some have come and gone. The first and only one so far to get signed by a major label is King Chango, discovered by David Byrne (formerly of Talking Heads), who signed them in conjunction with Warner Brothers and his own label, Lauka Bob. Around the same time, Espuelas de Bronze released their first work independently, followed by releases from Grito and Pío Grande. La Rota has also released its first full-length album, “Adios Ruperto.” Caravana Records, in the most ambitious project to come from the tri-state area, has announced the Spring ’98 release of a CD called “Artenativo NYC,” a compilation of some of the outstanding local Rock en Español bands.

The Biz

For the movement to jump from cult status to the commercial mainstream it needs to sell records, and that means getting radio play and corporate sponsorship. It’s not enough that tickets for Los Fabulosos Cadillacs at the Palladium were sold out, or that Maná filled Radio City Music Hall, or that Caifanes played three sold-out shows in a row in L.A. To tour the U.S. with a concert series called Rockinvasion in the summer of 1997, Retila magazine publisher and promoter Barbano made a breakthrough by getting sponsorship from Pepsi, but he says Rock en Español is still a long way from the big money.

“The name Rockinvasion was on 15 million cans, mostly in California, but they were there!” Barbano says. “[But] Rock en Español in this country hasn’t proved to be a good seller, and there’s not a lot of
Caravana Records

Caravana Records, a small indie label in New Jersey, will be the first in the tri-state area to release a compilation of local Rock en Español bands. More than simply offering fans a handy collection of new sounds, the project will help local bands break into the recording business.

The record is the brainchild of Daniel Rodriguez and Alex Marquez, two Ecuadorians who spent their childhood in their native country and went through their adolescence here. "We went to high school in the U.S. and started playing music in English, doing American rock, but there was something missing," says Marquez. "That something was la sangre latina, la raza — that little Latin thing. We're doing this because we're sure there are a lot of people who also feel that something is missing."

But having a feeling and producing a record are two different things. When Rodriguez founded Caravana Records three years ago, he didn't have the money, equipment, or experience to get his company off the ground. He started promoting concerts and hooked up with Marquez, a freelance sound engineer who shared his aspirations. With the financial

radio support for these bands. This music has survived because of the people who supported it." He adds that Germans seem to love Rock en Español, noting that Heroes del Silencio, a Spanish band, is the number one band in Germany. "Europe doesn't get hung up in language," Barbano says. "If a band is good, they get play everywhere. It's only the U.S. that gets hung up, but it's slowly turning around."

In New York, the business is even harder to crack. "I used to complain that big labels and labels in general are not signing anybody here, until I discovered that they didn't even have any Latin A&R [artist and repertoire] department divisions in the NYC area," says Mena. "For Sony, the nearest A&R department is in Miami, same for Warner Brothers and other big major labels. If there is no one here to sign, who is going to get signed?" New York radio play for the music is almost non-existent, and the unfortunate time slots for those radio shows that do exist present a real problem. "I have come across Rock en Español shows
counseling of Miguel Rodriguez, they were complete and ready to face the music.

The first priority was to pay for the recordings. Rodriguez explains, "Basically, that’s the main reason we’re doing this. Most of the bands out there don’t have enough money to do their own demos, not even a demo with a four track. That’s why I invested my money to build the studio first, so that way bands wouldn’t have to spend money recording," Marquez adds, "Just doing shows at clubs doesn’t pay enough for recording."

When the pair started approaching bands, some just couldn’t believe the offer. "Because nobody here has ever done anything like this," says Rodriguez, "some people did not take us seriously. Some of the bands even now tell me, ‘For real? You still doing that?’"

Thirteen bands believed, and joined the project. Caravana took its time, trying not to rush anybody. "We wanted the bands to be as comfortable as they could and not to worry about having to pay," Marquez explains. "We wanted them to sound as good as they really are. That way, the product coming out is better, and a lot more from the heart."

The album will be called Artenativo NYC, which means Native Art NYC, since it showcases, as Rodriguez says, "bands that mix their folklore with rock" here in NYC. The featured bands include Dulces Pesadillas, La Ruta, Grito, and others.

But Artenativo is not looking for a large profit on their outlay of some $25,000; it wants recognition. As Marquez puts it, "We intend to build a reputation and the credibility of the company."

— H.V.

at six o’clock in the morning on Saturdays," says Mena. "Call me crazy, but 6 a.m. on a Saturday is not prime Rock en Español listening."

Nevertheless, New York is still considered to have great potential for the movement. Retila is widening its distribution to the East coast, and with local labels like Caravana, 220 and others, concert promoters and the few radio outlets that do exist, the future seems to be getting brighter for Rock en Español in New York.

As Barbano discovered in L.A.: "I wish I could say, ‘Yeah I predicted this huge market trend,’ and all that, but we started the magazine when really there wasn’t one, except for the two clubs around. And it’s very clear to me now that this movement is like reggae was 20 years ago."
Is Electronica the Next Big Thing?

By Balázs Földvári
Illustrations by Sylwester Zawadzki

Roni Size, the gifted drum-and-bass artist, seems to have the best of both worlds. His 1997 album “New Forms” recently won the prestigious Mercury Prize for best album in the U.K. He’s toured half the world in the last 18 months, including at least four appearances in New York City. But despite his mainstream success, Roni Size has kept intact his membership in the underground musical movement called electronica.

Electronica is actually a collective term, invented by producers and managers of the U.S. mainstream music industry, for a number of underground dance genres that now include techno,
drum-and-bass (a.k.a. jungle), trip-hop, ambient, trance and digital hardcore. Most of these genres use heavy sampling, loops, electronic sounds and danceable, fast-paced rhythm patterns called breakbeats. Most sounds are created by sampling other records or even sounds in nature. Roni Size, for example, says he would go as far as sampling human breath to make a rhythm.

It was convenient for industry executives to lump the genres of the underground dance industry under one name. Once categorized, electronica exploded in the U.S. faster than expected, but it was still very difficult for the uninitiated to follow what was really going on in electronica.

_Time_ magazine was skeptical as recently as last June, wondering whether the summer of 1997 would fulfill industry expectations and become the "Summer of Electronica." But then some important entertainment publications, including _Rolling Stone, Details_ and _Entertainment Weekly_, fueled the electro-hype, weighing in with many more enthusiastic reports from the supposed front lines of pop music innovation.

The music media's appetite was whetted when The Chemical Brothers' album debuted at No. 14 on _Billboard_’s top 200 chart in April 1997, selling 48,000 copies of "Dig Your Own Hole" during the album's first week of release. Then in July, The Prodigy drove the electronica-hungry U.S. crowds crazy, debutting at No. 1 on the U.S. _Billboard_ charts, with its eagerly anticipated "The Fat of the Land," selling 201,000 copies in its first week of release.

By February 1998, the _Village Voice_ "Pazz & Jop" critics’ poll placed no less than four albums and four singles by electronica artists in its top 40 albums and top 25 singles charts, including The Chemical Brothers' "Dig Your Own Hole," and Roni Size's "New Forms."

It didn’t hurt that big name rock artists like Pearl Jam, REM and Counting Crows — bands that helped lead the rise of alternative rock — all released commercially disappointing albums in early 1997, throwing the industry into a state of despair. There was no longer an established band that could guarantee big record sales.

Adding to the panic from faltering sales, Warner Bros. Records laid off more than 700 employees last year. The parched music business was ready to turn with begging eyes toward the rising waters of electronica to rescue itself from this commercial drought. As _Entertainment Weekly_’s Chris Willman put it last fall, "Executives, humbled by 1996's flat sales and youthful yawns, are eager to spot any popular uprisings that might replace the increasingly faded strains of guitar grunge and jangle angst."

The dance and rave scenes had been flourishing overseas for years, and acts like The Prodigy and The Chemical Brothers gave American music executives hope that they could make it big on these shores. That made sense to MTV’s Todd Mueller, who last year launched Amp, a program dedicated specifically to promoting elec-
tronic artists. “Techno embraces technology and encourages the fusion of man and machine,” says Mueller. “We’re at the dawn of the 21st Century; it’s logical that technology would be part of everyone’s mindset.”

But the healthy sales figures do not mean the number of electronica devotees has suddenly gone off the scale. The word among industry insiders is that the success of these releases has less to do with a mass market embrace of the genre than with these artists’ ability to attract the rock and alternative audiences by default as they desperately wait for some fresh air in their preferred styles.

“The Prodigy is trying to take the rock-star thing that America still seems to be in love with and work that,” explains MTV’s Mueller, referring to the four-man British act whose energetic, electronic sample-based dance music is reminiscent of ’70s punk. The band’s videos for “Firestarter” and “Breathe,” not to mention its controversial fall 1997 release, “Smack My Bitch Up,” contrast sharply with videos from the faceless acts usually seen on Mueller’s late-night show. Unlike other electronica groups, The Prodigy tackles edgy subjects and flaunts itself before the cameras, often shocking viewers. “Smack My Bitch Up” was almost immediately banned from airplay on MTV because it supposedly carried a misogynous message while seeming to glamorize alcoholism, drug use, prostitution and antifeminism.

When The Prodigy lead vocalist Keith Flint sings, his veins pop with punk rocker Johnny Rotten-like gusto. Lawrence Lui — DJ and producer of the critically acclaimed electronica radio program, “DiJilution,” on New York University’s WNYU — has a theory to explain why: He contends that the industry believes electronica can only succeed by mimicking traditional rock’n’roll signifiers. He dismisses The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy as “rock bands in electronic drag.” Lui’s insult was prophetic: this year’s Grammy nominees for “best alternative music group,” a category dominated by groups like Nirvana and Pearl Jam in the past, included The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy.

According to purists like Moby, a veteran techno DJ, composer and recording artist based in New York, real elec-
tronica artists "are reclusive, making their music behind stacks of electronic equipment. The dance scene has always been underground and electronic artists usually do not strive for public recognition."

Still, the music industry is ingenious at combining the old with the new. A number of rock artists have started releasing collaborations with electronic artists. These usually include remixes of already released rock songs, like Nine Inch Nail's "The Perfect Drug," but David Bowie based most of the songs on his recent album on electronic sounds. Other collaborations seem more natural, like Beck's "Odelay" album, produced by the Dust Brothers. But the notion of "mainstream electronica" is seen by many critics as an oxymoron.

Electronic music departs most from rock in that many bands and artists — The Prodigy notwithstanding — do not have much of a stage personality. In The Chemical Brothers' video, the band members never once face the camera. Revolutionary trip-hop/acid jazz artist Tricky almost completely turns off the lights so he cannot even be seen when he performs. Artists on the influential trip-hop label Skint Records would never jump around on stage trying to get the crowd hyped up, though crowds usually go crazy when they hear the first few beats of a song.

The appeal, instead, suggests Los Angeles Times pop music critic Robert Hilburn, comes from "imaginative rhythmic patterns that express all the emotional colors, from exhilaration to despair, that we are used to in pop." Indeed, many of today's artists, like Roni Size, Fatboy Slim, Doc Scott or The Future Sound of London, masterfully hit upon a full range of emotions using digital music, and don't concern themselves with what the audience might — or might not — see.

"When Nirvana came out and the grunge revolution started, there were a trillion bands waiting in the wings to get signed who were commercially viable, had a willingness to do interviews, do photo shoots, make videos, whatever it took to get the music across," says Moby. "But there aren't four or five commercially viable electronic bands like The Prodigy — techno bands who are more than just a couple of guys in a bedroom, but who really put on a show."
Debit Cards Keep Spending in Check

By Irene Bellas

Credit cards are easy to use — maybe too easy. Users often rack up more debt than they can handle while high interest rates push them further into a financial hole. For those unfortunate consumers addicted to the use of credit cards, a new breed of plastic is coming to the rescue: the debit card.

Debit cards come in many varieties — ATM card, Visa Check Card, MasterCard MasterMoney, Smart Card, even the subway MetroCard — and share an important common feature: using them means not borrowing money, but spending cash already set aside. With debit cards you can only deduct exactly what you can afford.

The basic premise behind the bank-issued debit card is simple but revolutionary: it looks and is used like a credit card, but acts like a check. That is, your bank card will usually bear a credit card logo and will be swiped through a credit card “reader” when you use it to buy something; yet the money will be deducted directly from your checking account.

There’s little doubt that the debit card will be popularly embraced as an alternative to carrying a wallet full of cash. According to the Nilson Report, the rate of card usage is increasing rapidly. In 1995, 21 percent of consumer payments were made with cards (among them, credit cards, debit cards, prepaid cards and electronic benefits transfer cards). By the year 2000, 43 percent of consumer payments will be made with cards.

Besides standard ATM cards, the new debit cards include credit-company issues like the Visa Check Card and MasterCard MasterMoney cards, which, instead of a PIN, require a signature on the receipt when a purchase is made. Though they resemble credit cards in that
respect, the money is immediately taken out of the bank account linked to the Visa or MasterCard debit card. As an added benefit, this type of card can be used anywhere the Visa or MasterCard logo appears, and users are not limited to places where ATM cards are accepted.

The most advanced form of debit cards are the Smart cards, so called because of the large amount of information they carry which can be accessed by a wide range of service providers. They can be linked to a bank account, just like ATM cards, but they keep track of the balance on their own. The student ID card carried by all CUNY students, for example, is a Smart card. The black stripe on the back looks like an ordinary magnetic strip found on any ATM or credit card, but it carries a lot more information. With a swipe of the CUNY ID card, students can enter campus buildings, check out books from the library, get emergency cash from an ATM or charge telephone calls. In addition, students' financial aid checks can be automatically deposited into the debit card account. Or, if a student lives away from home, the parents can deposit money into the account.

Smart cards can be used everywhere ATM or credit cards are accepted, and within a growing number of non-financial systems, such as libraries and corporate identification systems. Other pre-paid cards include the heavily promoted phone cards, which are especially popular — almost indispensable — abroad, and New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s MetroCard.

The ease with which debit cards can access direct funds benefits both purchaser and bank. Since banks get two percent of the purchase price from merchants each time someone pays with a debit card, banks favor their usage. As for merchants, they get use of the purchase money much sooner than had they accepted a check. Customers pay no interest on the transaction, as they might with credit cards, and, of course, incur no debt as the funds are automatically deducted from the bank account.

Debit cards are not a free ride for customers, however. Banks charge monthly service fees for using their checking accounts to which the cards are linked. Also, bank debit cards can charge from 25¢ to $1.50 for each transaction. Many Visa and MasterCard debit cards have an annual fee of $12 to $15. Though these charges may be less than what many people are already paying for interest on credit cards, they still add up.

Another disadvantage to the consumer is that debit cards are cash cards. When you make a purchase with a credit card or by check there is a period of time (called ‘float’ between the day a purchase is made and when the funds are deducted from the account, during which the consumer has the use of the money. Credit card users are also protected by the Fair Credit Billing Act, which confers certain rights to a buyer unhappy with goods or services bought with a credit card. Also, debit card purchases don't count toward building a good credit history — necessary for getting substantial loans like mortgages.

On the other hand, debit cards don't let you build up bad credit, the way credit cards can. Indeed, for people with bad credit histories or who just cannot get credit, but still want the advantages of carrying a plastic card instead of cash, debit cards are the way to go.
Each tick of the clock brings us closer to the new millennium, and that heavily advertised computer problem said to be lurking like a time bomb inside every major mainframe in the world. Most people's eyes glaze over when they hear the details, because they think the problem concerns only big firms. They should blink and think again.

In theory, unless they are fixed, all computer programs everywhere in the world could go on strike January 1, 2000. The impact would be unthinkable. No air traffic, no traffic lights, no lights in your company office. No production of goods. Elevators, fax machines, telecommunications, security and sprinkler systems — anything that is controlled by a microchip — could fail on that fateful day. That's why institutional computer users are racing against time to swat the "millennium bug" before it swats us, at a cost, according to computer consultants, of anywhere from $600 billion to one trillion dollars.

The "year 2000 problem," also known as "Y2K," is a result of two missing digits in the computer code used to keep track of the date in systems over a certain age. When computers first entered the business world in the late '60s and early '70s, they were very slow by today's standards and data storage space was expensive. Instead of the fast, high-capacity magnetic disks used today, data was typically stored in stacks of stiff cardboard cards with holes punched in them. Each card could hold only 80 characters of information. So, instead of writing a date as "10/10/1965," they economized and wrote "101065," saving four precious character spaces, and assuming they would never have to worry about years that begin with 20. When a computer reads 123199, it assumes it's 1999, but when it reads 010100, it will assume it's 1900—exactly 100 years off the mark.
To fix the problem, programmers must change the date codes. The problem is, they don't know where the date codes are. The original programmers — usually long-gone from the institution — were highly individualistic, if not downright whimsical, in the names they attached to the now deadly date codes. They have labeled date codes everything from “Bdate,” for birth date, to “Pookie” — for reasons known only to the programmer. Searching for these codes, buried within many millions of lines of instructions in the average program, is a hunt for innumerable tiny needles in a mountainous haystack, and thus very expensive.

The level of corporate anxiety over the problem varies widely. Some firms assume they can leave it for later, when some software breakthrough will ride in like the cavalry and save the day. But experts like Capers Jones, chairman of Software Productivity Research Inc., of Burlington, Massachusetts, say a universal easy fix is non-existent because every computer system is different, with custom-made software and hardware configurations in use at countless individual businesses. There are now, of course, hundreds of programs that claim to make computer systems “compliant,” or “year-2000 friendly,” but not one of these programs will fix everything, says Peter de Jager, who runs a web site called Year 2000.com (www.year2000.com), which is devoted to the problem.

For de Jager, doomsday and Y2K are one and the same — he's been screaming loudly about the issue since 1993, when he founded de Jager & Co. Ltd. in Brampton, Ontario, for the express purpose of advising firms on how to deal with the problem. Major computer users, however, may not be listening. In his surveys of visitors to the web site, he finds that only 18 percent of corporate information managers have completed analyses of just what Y2K will do to their systems; 11 percent don't even plan to make an assessment.

"Combat" Strategies

Among those who are listening is Elaine Brown, a consultant in Purdue University's information management division, who created a conversion program to solve the Indiana school's Y2K problem, without spending millions of dollars. Instead of expanding all of the date fields, Purdue developed a “sliding window,” that, rather than treating all two-digit combinations as belonging to the 20th Century, will create a “sliding” century, beginning 74 years prior to the current year, and ending 25 years later.

In 1998, for example, the sliding century extends from 1924 to 2023. The computer is instructed to place “19” before the years from “24” to “99,” and to place “20” before the years “00” to “23.” There is still room for error because Purdue's computer doesn't understand anything before 1924 and after 2023. Purdue's experts, however, don't expect this to be a problem, according to an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

IBM now offers technology to automate
Purdue's date-century windowing solution, using software called Millennium Language Extensions (MLE). The computer giant has set up a web site to answer customer questions (www.ibm.com/IBM/Year2000). This extensive site even contains a self-help program that allows customers to type in their computer product and model numbers, and find out if the product is Y2K ready. If it's not, it tells them what level of that product they need to get.

"By the end of '97, IBM didn't sell or make any product that is not year-2000 ready," says Ronald Beauchamp, Y2K coordinator for IBM Business Recovery Systems. "We had to safeguard our customers and make them feel safe in buying our products."

For some institutions, the Y2K problem is an opportunity to replace aging systems altogether, rather than performing expensive reprogramming. Villanova University, for example, has invested more than $2 million in new software and hardware over the past four years. The new systems solved the university's Y2K problem, and avoided "throwing good money after bad," to fix outdated, high-maintenance systems, says Karin Steinbrenner, Villanova's executive director of information technologies.

"Sooner or later these systems have to be replaced," Steinbrenner says, "Why invest resources to fix a programming problem and get the same basic system in return?"

For the most intensive users of critical computer systems, Y2K initiatives have taken on a life of their own. At Bell Atlantic Corp., Skip Patterson, executive director of the Y2K Program Office, is counting every minute leading up to the century's end. One year ago, customers weren't asking if Bell Atlantic's communications systems — essentially a network of powerful computers called switches — had Y2K problems. They are now, he says.

"Our very large customers, such as the federal government and the large financial institutions, want to know three things: What are you doing? When will it be done? When can we test?" Patterson says. "We can answer the first question, but we can't answer the others until we've completed the assessments of our own systems." The task is staggering. The big Baby

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Here is a partial list of Peter de Jager's top reasons (à la David Letterman) for not addressing the Year 2000 issue.

1. You're already in Chapter 11.
2. You're 95, on life support and haven't paid your electric bill.
3. You're planning to retire next year.
4. You're not using computers yet, you're waiting for the prices to come down.
5. You believe in the Tooth Fairy.
6. Government will pass legislation to roll back the clock to 1900.
7. January 1, 2000 falls on a Saturday and Monday is a holiday; you'll have plenty of time over the weekend.
8. You were planning to phase out computers anyway.
9. You're planning a vacation that week.
10. You can't believe two missing digits can cause that much trouble.
Bell has more than 90,000 computer workstations, along with the thousands of computers that make up its telecommunications network. And it has hundreds of network and business software applications with more than a quarter billion lines of programming code.

"We've built a world that's interconnected," Patterson says. "That's the nature of our business — connecting people and connecting business through our network. So if we're not millennium-compliant, it might mean trouble for our customers. If our vendors and other communications providers aren't compliant, that might mean trouble for us as well."

Is Your House Bugged?

Ironically, the computer systems that are most resistant to the millennium bug are sitting on desktops at home. Chances are, most home computers will sail through the millennium without a glitch, experts say. Apple Computer assures users that all its Macintosh computers will recognize dates up to 2040. In the Microsoft world, for machines that are less than two years old, the internal clock probably contains the correct date coding information. But older machines, even those running the Windows 95 operating system or one of its predecessors, could have a problem. The first time these machines boot up in the year 2000, the date could read 1980. However, experts say, the date can easily be reset with normal Windows or DOS commands.

Microsoft advises home users against performing any tests themselves, such as setting the computer to 11:59 p.m., December 31, 1999, shutting it down and waiting two minutes to see what happens. Such experiments could wreak havoc on application programs that have expiration dates built in. For users who are unsure about whether their internal clocks will stumble, the best bet is to contact the computer manufacturer and find out for certain if the software and hardware are Y2K compliant.

Despite the best efforts of the digital world order, it may pay to take a few low-tech precautions. Experts advise consumers to keep backup records of bank balances, credit card statements and utility bills on floppies and on paper.

Even the most prepared consumers cannot foresee if any systems that they depend upon, and that are beyond their control, might fail. For all the time and money spent preparing for Y2K, no one can predict what will happen, until it happens. Tick, tock, tick, tock ...
When media prophet Marshall McLuhan proclaimed, "the medium is the message," more than 30 years ago, the home computer was just a dream, the Internet was something out of a Star Trek episode and Matt Drudge couldn't possibly have been considered a journalist.

But today, during the post-technological revolution, McLuhan's assertion raises a nagging question: If the Internet is the new medium, what is its message?

New communication technologies and changing social expectations of the media are forcing a redefinition of journalism practices and a regrouping of media audiences. The journalism business and journalistic writing per se are changing in ways that may lead to an entirely new interpretation of the profession.

**New vs. Old**

The digital boom has transformed the media landscape. Once again, the old media are being forced into competition with looming new communication technologies. "When radio got introduced, they predicted the demise of the newspaper. When TV was introduced, they predicted the demise of the newspaper and the radio and none of these things has happened," says Melanie Huff, Career Services Coordinator of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. In her eyes, the emergence and the fast-growing popularity of the Internet are no threat to the conventional newspaper business. "I don't think the traditional media are going anywhere any time soon," she says. But her colleague, Josh Schroeter, Director of Strategic Planning at the Center of New Media at Columbia, sees the Internet as journalism's only life force. "Journalism is in the gutter today," he says. "Most people think it's irrelevant. Technology has the potential to save journalism."
More and more newspapers are going online. Almost every major print publication has its own web page, and while the digital readership is growing, especially among the young, the circulation of smaller newspapers is declining nationwide. "The idea of the distribution of information via dead trees is ridiculous and is going to die in the long run," says Schroeter. An advocate of the advantages of technology, Schroeter argues that only the smart companies will be able to survive the drastic changes the journalism business is facing. "As a newspaper industry The New York Times may die," he prophesies. "As an information industry it may flourish."

Even Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr., publisher of The New York Times, doesn't disagree. "I'm not in the newspaper business," he said in a conference on the topic held at Columbia last June. "The word paper doesn't define what it is I do, and what it is the people at The New York Times do. Paper is part of our heritage; it is part of our history. But fundamentally, it is a distribution system. No more and no less than that. What we are in the business of is collecting and editing the finest news report we can possibly create."

But what the finest means of distribution turns out to be will be the one that makes the most money. The Internet's success will depend, in the end, on whether it turns out to be lucrative. So far, it's mainly advertisers who are making money on the net—just as they do in traditional print media. But the Internet is even more appealing to advertisers because on-line information is seemingly free to the consumer and at the same time a huge audience can be reached. Strangely, newspapers aren't yet devoting much web space to advertising. "It is beyond my comprehension why the local newspaper in town, whether it's the Atlanta Journal-Constitution or Newsday on Long Island, won't own that classified market on-line," noted Steve Brill, founder of Court TV and American Lawyer magazine, in a forum held last September at Columbia. "I mean they should. They've got the brand name, and they can promote from their newspaper."

It may be too soon to tell whether the screen will replace paper, or where the money will go. Some experts still think paper has a fundamental advantage over the CRT screen. "There is something very wonderful about holding something in your hand and turning the pages," suggests Christopher Hallowell, Director of the Journalism and Business Journalism Programs at Baruch College. However, some say, mere nostalgia cannot impede the technological progression that is rewriting the rules of traditional media. "Soon you might be able to access your digital information even on the subway or in the bathroom," argues Schroeter.
In his 1994 book, *The Age of Multimedia and Turbonews*, Jim Willis writes that we are “entering the world of the great media blur, where print, electronic, and telephonic communications converge.” This media blur has resulted in an information overflow that has caused a profound change in the way we gather the news. The more information we are able to access, the more selective we should learn to be, proponents say. “Now, with the information overflow we are experiencing, you have to be a lot more discerning and make a lot more choices and to be sort of aggressive about the information,” says Michel Marriott, a reporter for *The New York Times*. “So, I don’t think we should complain. I have never heard anybody complain that there are too many hats in the department store.”

While proponents argue that the competition between the number and variety of different information providers has resulted in a more popular type of journalism, one dubious result is that it is often no longer the journalist who defines the news, but the market. The lines between news, reference and entertainment information are increasingly vague. Media critics don’t necessarily consider this to be a positive development. “People are probably getting more news, but less in-depth news,” says a skeptical Hallowell. “It is very dangerous to let the public dictate the news.”

It is easy for on-line publishers to determine what people want or don’t want to hear. Their decision about what is going to be news is based on the number of hits certain stories get each day. Most cyberspace journalists consider the growing interaction between producer and customer as one of the biggest advantages of new media. But advocates of traditional journalistic values regard this as a danger. Demand-driven news, some say, threatens the ability of journalists to carry out their civic responsibility to focus public attention on what is important for the health of a democratic society.

“I think that journalists have a privileged position in our society because they are the only things that keep us from totalitarianism,” Michael Bloomberg said at the Columbia forum last June. “But at the same time, journalists have to be held to a higher standard than the average per-
Technology has the potential to save journalism.

son, and they many times fail that test.”

Time will tell if and how new media will embellish or impede journalism’s social duty. So far, it seems that instead of producing original content, the on-line journalist rather serves the customer with recycled news on demand. “At this point, most of the web sites are tangential to an existing news organization product,” says Huff. “There are not that many venues that are doing original reporting and writing. Much of what people are called upon to do is re-purposing the reporting and writing that has been done by the reporters and writers at the primary news source.”

Embracing the Medium

As much as the Internet constitutes a challenge for journalism, it is also an incredibly useful tool. It is probably the biggest research library on the planet. “The main change that I note is the tremendous speed with which one can write an article, and often research an article, because a lot of research can be done on-line,” says Hallowell.

There is no doubt that there is a need to refresh one’s journalistic skill set in order to be a successful journalist in the digital age. One important responsibility of any journalist is constantly to stay on top of technological advances so that they can be used wisely. “Journalists need to be comfortable reporting in all media. They need to be technology savvy. They need to understand the uses and misuses of technology,” stresses Schroeter.

Technology has a different kind of impact on journalism, too, notes Marriot:

“As the world continues to get smaller, it gets more complex. As it gets more complex, more questions emerge. When there are more questions, then there is a hunger for answers. Then the demand for journalistic intervention into the world is going to grow exponentially.”

And no matter how exotic technology becomes, in-depth reporting and compelling writing will still have to be at the core of good journalism. "Story-telling has always been a human need—a need to tell and a need to listen," says Marriott. "And I don’t think those needs are going to change in the next thousand years."
Breaking the social barriers to working may be empowering, but perhaps not liberating — at least for women with children. While women have left the more traditional roles of homemaking and child-rearing to enter the workplace, men have not left the workplace in order to take up the work at home. Women are left with a double responsibility.

Census data from 1977 to 1993 shows that the share of men acting as primary care providers for their children has barely budged in 16 years, rising to only 15.9 percent from 14.4 percent. During that time, women significantly changed their roles in society; 55 percent of employed women brought in at least half or more of their family’s income, according to a 1995 study conducted by the Families and Work Institute.

“If women have to do full-time on all fronts (both home and career), then it’s a disadvantage. It’s unfair,” says Carol Muske-Dukes, a feminist writer and a professor at University of Southern California. She says that if things were equal, then men should be the primary care providers 50 percent of the time.
With either both parents or, increasingly, a single parent leaving home to work each day, some 30 percent of America’s children are in daycare centers, according to data from the Census Bureau. That is up from 15.9 percent in 1977. Some 10 million children under five were cared for by people other than their parents — that is a little over half of the 19.5 million nationwide, based on a population count conducted in 1992.

“Economically speaking, one parent staying home is very hard,” says Malcolm Williams, the Director of the National Resource Center of the National Fatherhood Initiative, a fatherhood advocacy group. “Yes, there was an increase in women in the labor force, but that has been a monetary necessity for the family. It doesn’t mean fathers have any more time to stay home.”

He says that although many fathers are staying home more in order to take care of children, sometimes even working at home, the percentage of involved fathers is declining nonetheless because of the rising number of divorces and out-of-wedlock births.

In addition, the disparity between men and women with respect to childcare is further reinforced by traditional social roles that persist despite the new bread-winning positions women have assumed in the household.

“People feel that the mother has the primary responsibility,” says Muske-Dukes. “A more sexist view is that men shouldn’t do it. You could be a Supreme Court justice and you’d still have to [be the pri-
ing a child to be cared for by another is not having any place to leave a child at all. Few workplaces have stepped in to make their workers’ lives easier by providing childcare, even though it would make the workers more productive. According to a survey by Bulk Consultants reported in last September’s Working Woman magazine, only 18 per cent of companies provide any form of childcare assistance to their employees.

Patricia counts herself lucky. An executive assistant to the CEO at WORLDCO, a Wall Street brokerage firm, her employer pays for her three-year-old son’s daycare; she gets no financial support from the child’s father. Patricia says that her employer has been very generous and does what it can to help. “I don’t know how I could afford to work if they didn’t,” she says.

There is no legislation or regulation pending that might push companies of a certain size to provide daycare assistance. And though some companies have reported great success with on-site daycare facilities, their example has not been picked up by others. Even Patricia’s situation relies only on the goodwill of her boss. That leaves working mothers griping.

— Maria Medina

mary care provider]. It goes back to toys. Boys are given planes and girls are given play environments that show they will be mothers,” the feminist English professor says.

Williams expresses a similar view, stating that workplaces do not provide much support for fathers to take care of children. Many of the fathers were unemployed or the families were otherwise struggling financially. When the economy picked up, the trendline returned to the mid-teens where it has languished for nearly 20 years.

“The 1993 data suggests that the increase in care by fathers was not the result of a growing

Even in the case of a divorce, he says that society emphasizes child paternity payments rather than the emotional involvement of the father. “We encourage fathers to go to work but not to take care of children,” he says.

The only exception to the overall trend has been in the period between 1988 to 1991, when the percentage of fathers providing primary care hit an all-time high of 22 percent. This was also the time when social trend for fathers to become more involved in the rearing of their children, but apparently the outcome driven more by the economy,” stated a Census Bureau report.

The pressing need for childcare on a national level prompted President Clinton to convene a White House Conference on Child Care in October of 1997. It was an attempt to find a working solution to the problem of inadequate childcare. Although the
government has guidelines about the proper care children should receive, few families can afford to follow them.

Differences in income result in starkly different emotional and educational experiences for children of different classes. The 1995 Census shows that the families of the poor — those making less than $15,000 per year — spend 25 percent of their income for childcare. Many of these children will grow up staring blankly at a television screen with little or no adult supervision, while children from well-to-do families will be in interactive educational environments where one teacher will be assigned to every three or four kids — making a crucial difference to proper cognitive development, according to child development experts.

To answer the nation's childcare needs, President Clinton announced a $5 billion childcare initiative right before his 1998 State of the Union address. “What could be more important than the future — than children?” asks Muske-Dukes. “We spend less [on childcare] than many nations.”

Yet, no matter how much increased government financing may help working parents, meeting childcare needs will continue to be a greater burden to women than men — as long as women continue to be the majority of primary care providers. “Government financed daycare makes it easier for both parents to stay in the labor force,” says Williams, “but does not help fathers to stay with their kids.”

"People feel that the mother has the primary responsibility; a more sexist view is that men shouldn't do it."
By Julie Christie

Downsizing” and “repositioning” are two of the newest euphemisms invoked by the managers of New York area voluntary hospitals to mask what might be really coming down the road: layoffs. In the National Health and Human Services Employees Union — nicknamed ‘1199’ for its local number — workers’ rights may slowly be destroyed by management plans to lay off thousands of workers over the next three years.

1199 has 120,000 members — the majority of whom are of the working class — staffing hospitals throughout the metropolitan area. The union is bracing itself for a showdown with 28 hospitals, including Mount Sinai and Columbia-Presbyterian, this spring. A contract covering some 50,000 workers at hospitals affiliated with the League of Voluntary Hospitals is scheduled to expire on June 30.

One potentially contentious point of negotiation is a job security clause. The provisions under the current contract protect union members hired before September 17, 1992 from being laid off. The union wants the date of hire for protected jobs moved forward. It is also seeking coverage for part-time workers, whose numbers have recently surged. Hospital negotiators, however, have fought these proposals. Their stance, union negotiators say, reflects management plans to increase the number of part-time employees. As of February, talks have been stalled over this issue, but negotiations are expected to resume before summer. When they do, the union expects to have a much stronger hand.

In January, 1199 president Dennis Rivera announced an agreement to merge with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), a move widely expected to greatly expand 1199’s financial, and thus its political, clout. “With the merger, we will have more money for politics, more money for organizing, more money for collective bargaining,” Rivera told The New York Times. Rivera says that the merged union will spend up to $3 million every two years on New York politics.

While 1199 has not always been such a strong player in electoral politics, its role as protector of workers’ rights, benefits and jobs dates back to 1958 when it first became a haven for hospital workers.

“In 1958, 1199 was a union of 5,000, mostly Jewish, drugstore workers,” says retired union
executive vice president Moe Foner. “Hospital workers were unorganized second-class citizens making $28 or $33 for a 48-hour week, with no benefits and no legal right to organize.” Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx was an early target of union organizers, says Foner. But when they signed up a majority of workers and asked for recognition from Montefiore’s trustees, they were refused.

However, 1199’s leadership had a proverbial ace up their sleeve: the late Dr. Martin Cherkasky — who was then Montefiore hospital’s CEO. According to Foner, Dr. Cherkasky’s longtime friend and colleague, the union organizers identified Dr. Cherkasky as a possible ally because he had led his fellow interns in a strike against Mount Sinai hospital in Philadelphia during his residency there in 1936. The 1199 organizers’ gamble paid off when during the organizing process, Dr. Cherkasky fired a Montefiore supervisor who had hired spies to report on pro-union workers.

In 1958 the union’s leadership, led by the late Leon Davis, wrote a letter to Dr. Cherkasky stating that if Montefiore hospital did not recognize 1199, the workers would strike. Dr. Cherkasky convinced Montefiore’s trustees to allow an election among the 900 service workers. Pro-union supporters won by a landslide. In March 1959 the workers received their union contract and significant wage and benefit improvements. “The union today exists, grows and prospers because of what its members in Montefiore did in 1958,” says Foner.

But hospital services have changed a lot in the last 40 years, and workers’ compensation should reflect that, union representatives say. In addition to wage and benefit gains, 1199 wants the hospitals’ management to recognize its representation in the fast-growing satellite and hospital-based home care sectors. Satellite clinics are stand-alone care facilities associated with hospitals, but based at different locations. Hospital-based home care sectors include nursing homes, and home care and nursing attendants.

The League’s management is reluctant to agree. In preliminary negotiations in July 1997, League president Bruce McLver spoke of the hospitals’ need for flexibility in a shrinking industry, projecting 10,000 layoffs in the next three years. “We disagree with your bargaining approach; your positions put us at risk,” McLver told 1199’s negotiating committee.

Rivera has called for a peaceful resolution of the differences, “to make our institutions healthy, up-to-date, cost-effective and efficient — in short, competitive.” However, Rivera warned that the union was prepared to take action if necessary “to impose the terms we’re seeking.”

“That would include the largest, most effective, disciplined, most militant strike in this city’s recent history,” Rivera said.
Moving through passageways beneath the streets, one hears the ancient pipes of the Andes, the sprightly rhythm of the Irish heath, the insistent beat of the drums of the Caribbean, the mournful wail of the blues and the harmonious a cappella of doo-wop. The sounds rebound off

Subterranean Culture
the towering mountains of our sky-scraping landscape and ricochet through its subterranean tunnels. This is an urban beat, the beat created by the buskers, the street musicians and performers who enliven our comings and goings.
They strike a counterpoint to the bleating of car horns, the ceaseless droning of generators and the jarring repetitiveness of overworked jackhammers.

Our photographers plied the city, following the distant hum of the music until they captured it for your visual perusal.
New York: Live Wire Underground Sounds

and we salute those who bring us audio and visual pleasure as we move through our often mundane existence.

Christina Gail
Soon or later, one way or another, we will be out,” says Rosa Lynn Suarez, a 30-year-old single mother of two young boys, gesturing toward her rent-regulated Brooklyn apartment building at 229 South Eighth Street in the heart of the Southside section of Williamsburg. Her next-door neighbor, Martina Seto sighs in consent. Like many low-income Latino residents of Southside, they are feeling the pressure of combined economic and public policy changes that are reshaping the neighborhood that they have called home for decades.

The contentious world of 229 S. Eighth Street is a microcosm of Southside. Welfare reform, immigration reform, educational decline, rent regulation and ethnic tension wreak havoc within its walls. Now there’s a threat from outside the impoverished neighborhood, too: a steady influx of young white émigrés from Manhattan who are attracted to Southside’s relatively low rents and its proximity to the city. Seto and Suarez suspect that the landlords of 229 S. Eighth Street are engineering a turnover of tenants that would leave them without a home.

These concerns, which have been festering for years in Southside, have increased dramatically in recent months with the news of two powerful forces of change. The first is Welfare reform, which among other cutbacks will eliminate a subsidy that pays more than half the rent for these women and scores of Southside households. The second is rent deregulation, which could allow landlords to raise the rent on apartments that become vacant, fanning fears that tenants will be harassed out of their buildings. The two issues have been discussed in isolation from each other in Albany, but their combined impact is not lost on the people of Southside.

The landlord of 229 S. Eighth St., Bob Stein, denies having a plot to chase out Latino tenants,
but he does not hide his hostility. “Look at how they live,” he says, disparaging his Latino tenants as drug users and Welfare cheats with multiple boyfriends. “They are all having a party. They are comfortable with that life. They don’t pay the rent anyway. Like every landlord, I would like to see the rent regulations ended. Any landlord who could get $600 for an apartment he now gets $300 for would do it. If I have to put some people out, why not?”

John Webber, who heads the 197-A Waterfront Committee, a local community board, notes that of the 27,000 people in Southside, 6,200 have been receiving guaranteed cash and other assistance through the core federal Welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The federal government has given control of this and other Welfare programs to the states, and decreed that no person or family in neighborhoods like Southside will receive federal money for longer than five years. Governor George E. Pataki has proposed cutting the size of those federal payments year by year as the five-year limit approaches. The results of the coming debate in Albany over his proposal will have direct consequences for the people of Southside.

In addition, 1,100 single childless adults in the neighborhood, ineligible for AFDC, receive money through Home Relief, a state cash assistance program that Governor Pataki has proposed to eliminate. For the last year, New York City has been requiring both AFDC recipients and Home Relief recipients to work for their benefits.

Another 2,400 Southside residents subsist on Supplemental Security Income, which is federal assistance for the elderly or disabled and is often used for medical care. Proposed restrictions on this funding will affect immigrants lacking citizenship and children who will no longer qualify under new definitions of disability. Food stamps will be eliminated for much of the welfare population: people who reach their welfare time limits, those who fail to meet the work requirements, and immigrants who are not citizens.

The supporters of this legis-
lation forecast a future in places like Southside in which residents, freed from the corrosive burden of welfare, will find work and independence. The local economy, they predict, despite short-term damage, will emerge healthy.

In the meantime, though, Southsiders relying on such funding don't know how they're going to survive. Gloria Rojas, for one, lives with her two children in a one-bedroom apartment on Metropolitan Avenue, and is wondering how, with the winter months ahead, she will be able to pay both her $650 rent and her heat and gas bills. There is no lock on the front door. The house tilts so badly that the living room couch is balanced by a two-by-four under one end. Welfare covers $250 of her rent, and relatives struggle to make the difference. With the laws changing, she says, "I don't know how I will manage."

The Governor has called for the reduction of the state's basic Welfare grant, which averages $577 a month for a family of three, by 10 percent after 18 months, and by significant increments after that. Further, his plan would eliminate a supplemental shelter benefit, the Jiggetts subsidy, that helps apartment holders facing eviction to pay their rents. Rita Dobryszanski, of the Rent Guidelines Board, said that of the current 27,000 welfare households in the city that receive such assistance, close to 200 live in and around Southside.

The exact number of rent-regulated apartments in Southside is hard to determine. According to the 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey, two-thirds of the rental apartments in Williamsburg and nearby Greenpoint are rent-regulated in one form or another. Joseph Garcia, a Southside activist fighting for Latino rights, says, "No one really expects complete deregulation to occur. But even minor changes loom large for a neighborhood where small bumps in rent can have great consequences, and where there has been a long, angry history of landlord-tenant conflict."

Seto is already feeling knocked around by those bumps. "I don't know what exactly the landlord will do if there is no more extra Welfare money for rent and there are no more restrictions on what he can charge," says Seto, who receives a $130 Jiggetts subsidy monthly to pay her $416 rent. "I know, though, I won't be able to afford it."

Meanwhile, there is an abundance of potential tenants who can afford twice what Seto pays, many of them
spilling over from Williamsburg’s gentrified Northside. Discovered by the city’s artistic community in the early 1980’s, and now absorbing its second wave of artists, the area has rapidly acquired a reputation as the next trendy Bohemia. The neighborhood’s increasing popularity makes wiping out or relaxing rent regulations an even more explosive concern in Southside than in other Welfare-dependent neighborhoods.

According to Suzy Kline, owner of Kline Realty, newcomers can find one-bedroom apartments starting at $800 a month, and two-bedroom units starting at $950. Rents were about $200 less as recently as late 1996.

As demand has begun to exceed supply in Northside, would-be Williamsburg renters look toward the Latino sections of Southside. So do the area’s Hasidim, in search of housing for their growing population.

The likely result of all these changes, warned Williamsburg’s Assemblyman Vito J. Lopez at a community meeting last spring, could be “the significant displacement of the Latino population of Southside.”

Seto and Suarez, and their Latino neighbors, observe the changes warily. Like other long-time residents, they can tick off the buildings on Grand Avenue that have become occupied by Manhattan émigrés. Each purchase by Hasidim of a building inhabited by Latinos is fodder for debate — and for mounting tensions.

And the discussion has bred action. Rent strikes are under way on numerous blocks. More than 1,000 Latino residents marched through the streets of Southside last year chanting, “Hell, no, we won’t go.”

Garcia says that the city is attempting to relieve tensions and increase housing by making a firm commitment to a multi-million dollar plan to clear the way for more affordable housing for both Latinos and Hasidim.

Rabbi David Neiderbaum, a Hasidic leader who is also active in the 197-A Waterfront Committee, says Welfare-dependent Hasidic residents would be just as vulnerable as Latinos to the combined effect of Welfare reform and rent deregulation. “I hate when every issue goes the route of having the supposedly wealthy Hasidim set against the Latinos,” he says. “Don’t we all have the same common enemy: being poor?”

“Don't we all have the same common enemy?”
O
n a clear autumn day, the bronze hors-
es atop the recently regilded Maine
Memorial at the southwestern corner
of Central Park gleam in the sunlight, rearing high
above the crowds in the new pedestrian plaza
below. Beyond several lanes of rushing traffic,
and surrounded by a mass of magenta-blooming
bushes just beginning to fade, a statue of
Christopher Columbus looms over the circle that
bears his name. Across the park at Fifth Avenue,
the Pulitzer Fountain, graced by the serene and
elegant bronze form of a bathing woman
(although neither her serenity nor her elegance
impresses young boys nearly as much as her nudi-
ty), holds down one half of Grand Army Plaza,
while General William Tecumseh Sherman and his
winged companion guard the other. Central Park
sweeps uptown from there; on its northeastern
edge a lone man contemplatively sips coffee on the
brick steps of the new Duke Ellington Circle,
oblivious to the nine naked women holding
Ellington and his piano aloft.

But the park’s fourth corner, a spot named in
1950 for one of the most famous African
Americans in history — a man who escaped slav-
ery and went on to become a publisher, writer,
orator and statesman — has no statues, no new
bricks or granite, no splashing water, no bushes
or trees. What marks Frederick Douglass Circle
is nothing more than a few scraggly cement
islands in a ramshackle intersection with some
scruffy weeds growing up through the cracks.

All that will change if an ambitious and pio-
neping plan goes through. Already four years in
the making, the plan has yet to repair a brick or
plant, or even to receive approval or funding.
But if and when the new Frederick Douglass
Circle is built, it will represent the vision of a
community as well as of a new way of doing
things. It will be the pride of a neighborhood,
We had talked long enough; we were ready now to move; if not now, we never should be; and if we did not intend to move now, we had as well fold our arms.

—Frederick Douglass

proof that even in New York, that most contentious of towns, and even here at this cultural dividing line, cooperation works. Involving the community works. Treating people as partners in their own future works.

**A Communal Vision**

Involving average citizens in the planning decisions that shape their communities has hardly been the American norm, even less so when the question of transportation enters the picture. Typically, it's developers, politicians, urban planners, engineers and architects who have decided when families can be displaced, bus depots can sit next to schools, sewage treatment plants can be called parks and highways can slice through cities and fragment neighborhoods. But there is a growing movement to bring communities into the planning process, and the project at Frederick Douglass Circle is touted by many who have been part of it as a shining example of community-based planning at its best: including all who would be included, making partners of potential adversaries, keeping a constant stream of information flowing and giving people a chance to understand all the issues on the table.

The Frederick Douglass Circle project is hanging at least some of its hopes of completion on the federal transportation law called ISTEA (pronounced "ice tea"), the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. ISTEA, too, is heralded as a model of new-age innovation. Since its passage in 1991, it has required public participation in transportation planning, allowed greater flexibility in the way transportation dollars are spent, and directed that money be spent on alternative transportation methods, community renewal and local air quality improvement.

But that's on paper. In reality, especially in New York reality, very little ISTEA money has actually been spent on improvement projects. Still, the Frederick Douglass Circle project may just be in a prime position to break the pattern.

In 1993, residents of Towers on the Park, twin high-rise cooperative apartment buildings on the western edge of Frederick Douglass Circle, asked the Central Park Conservancy (the private, nonprofit group responsible for restoring Central Park over the past 17 years) about taking on the rehabilitation of the circle. When the Towers were built in the late '80s, homeowners were told that the circle was slated for rehabilitation by the city. Instead, they watched it disintegrate. In addition to being an eyesore, says Tim Dugan, a Towers resident, the circle is dangerous to pedestrians and has become a haven for drug dealers.

In early 1995, after 18 months of study, meetings and community outreach, the Conservancy launched a planning and design process dubbed "Help design! Frederick Douglass Circle." It boasted a steering committee of community members, a professional advisory committee, an additional advisory group of residents, artists and design and planning professionals — and a professed commitment to bringing as many people into the process as possible, every step of the way.

**Gateway to Harlem**

Frederick Douglass Circle is really not a circle at all, just a four-way intersection, but it is a crossroads of a grander scale in terms of the communities it connects — or divides. One-hundred tenth
Street, called Central Park North to the east of the circle, and Cathedral Parkway to the west, is the unofficial dividing line between black Harlem and the predominantly white Upper West Side. Central Park West enters the circle from the south, but becomes Frederick Douglass Boulevard by the time it emerges on the other side and heads north — metaphorically following Douglass's own freedom trail. The circle itself, both symbolically and in reality, provides the gateway to Harlem — arguably the most well-known and historically significant black neighborhood in America.

So it came as no surprise that there were competing visions of the form the redesign should take: Should the memorial be an abstract expression of the values Douglass stood for, or a figurative statue in his likeness? Michael Adams, an architectural historian and preservationist, and a member of the steering committee, was firmly in the figurative camp. One of the reasons monuments and memorials are so meaningful, says Adams, is that they provide a snapshot of the past — one that people look at and see themselves as part of. "But in American culture, African Americans look and we don’t see ourselves," he says. "This memorial won’t change all that, but it will be a start."

To other participants, too, the disagreement was more than aesthetic. "Constituencies in this area are drawn along racial lines," notes Karen Phillips, executive director of the Abyssinian Development Corporation (an arm of one of the most powerful churches — and political forces — in Harlem) and a member of the project’s core advisory committee. "People who’ve been in Harlem a long time don’t feel as powerful as newer residents." What was most significant to longtime residents, says Phillips, is "the perspective of the circle as the gateway to Harlem, and having a fitting memorial."

Though the art world tends toward the interpretive these days, according to Carolyn Kent, a member of Community Board 9, which represents the residents of Morningside Heights, the community that lies between Central Harlem and Columbia University, "The more the process went on, the more the man himself became so important. It became clear that there was nothing amiss in choosing a figurative sculpture. The process [created] a desire to celebrate the very person and melted away a sort of reflex, aversive reaction to [a traditional statue]."

The very person being celebrated was born into slavery in Maryland in 1817 (as best he could recall), escaped to the North in 1838 and published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845. In 1847, after friends paid for his freedom,

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those of us who profess to favor freedom yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters...this struggle may be a moral one or a physical one, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without demand. It never has and never will. Show me the exact amount of wrong and injustices that are visited upon a person and I will show you the exact amount of words endured by these people. These wrongs and injustices may be found with words or with blows or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.—Frederick Douglass
Douglass began publishing the North Star and continued to use it for many years as a platform from which to advocate abolition. He later went on to advise President Lincoln and served as ambassador to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It was Douglass's conviction, says Kent, that “reading is the absolutely key weapon in the arsenal of democracy.”

**Making It Work**

Help design! Frederick Douglass Circle began with an open house in February 1995 to inform community residents about the project, and a “user survey” to learn what people felt were the most important issues to be addressed by the redesign. (Appearance, drug dealing and lack of lighting in the area were the top three.) Design symposia focusing on issues of public art and memorialization, transportation and urban design, and how best to use the space to suit the various needs of the community were held in March.

In April, an all-day design workshop was held at City College, where residents, local businesspeople, designers, planners, artists, historians, students and government representatives worked in teams to develop design proposals. The next-to-last step was a two-month exhibition of the results of the community design process in the spring of '96.

Then, in the summer, the Conservancy formed a committee to choose the final design. With so many participants, how do all the different ideas get boiled down to one that everyone can agree on? They don’t, says Karen Phillips, but “in the end, if people know their idea was considered, it’s a lot softer blow if they don’t get exactly what they want.”

Softened or not, some of those involved still winced at the blow. “The Conservancy is excellent at seeming to want everyone’s input,” maintains one participant. “But in the end, the outcome is predetermined. Not absolutely so, but it
can leave you saying, ‘Why was I involved?’"

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of people involved have responded favorably to both the process and the final design — a synthesis of elements from many of the designs produced at the workshop, including both a statue and portrait of Douglass, as well as lines of his text etched in the pavement. The design has not yet been officially presented to the community.

**Finding the Funding**

The Conservancy received a grant of $140,000 from the U.S. Department of Transportation for further design development, but no work can begin until two things happen. One is the approval of the New York City Department of Transportation for the new traffic configuration. The Conservancy’s traffic consultant doesn’t see any reason why the plans won’t be approved, says Margaret Walton, associate director of community and governmental affairs. Still, it may take some time. Says Walton, “I think they’re gun-shy about changing things. DOT is very vehicle oriented.”

The second requirement is nearly $7 million, the estimated cost of the monument, lighting, traffic signals and water, sewer and road work. The Conservancy has applied for an ISTEA grant of $5 million, and will seek private donations for the rest.

But snagging that ISTEA money might not be so easy. While ISTEA is a federal law, nearly all of the money is given to the states to spend on their own projects. According to Brian Ketcham, a transportation consultant who works primarily for the city and state, most of the money in New York gets thrown into one pot, leaving small projects like this one to compete with giant infrastructure needs like the repair of the Gowanus Expressway and the Manhattan Bridge.

And while there are public participation requirements every step of the way, the process hasn’t worked very well in New York City, says Rich Kassel, an attorney for the environmental group Natural Resources Defense Council. “Yes, they have public hearings,” he says, “but nobody knows about them. They’re held during the day in the World Trade Center, and if somebody from the community manages to find their way into one, they come up against a wall of gray suits talking about ‘tips’ and ‘nimble.’” [TIP and NYMTI are acronyms for government projects.] In addition, any proposal for ISTEA money must be sponsored by an official city agency.

Still, the Frederick Douglass project could go through, says Ketcham. “ISTEA has a huge amount of flexibility. If the city wants it, if the Mayor wants it, they can get it.”

According to Margaret Walton, associate director of government and community relations at the Conservancy, the group has yet to be notified whether its grant application has been approved. And a search of the current New York City area Transportation Improvement Plan comes up with only a mention of Frederick Douglass Circle as part of a grant for the larger Harlem Gateway Corridor (110th Street from Frederick Douglass Circle to Duke Ellington Circle), and that grant — mainly for new lighting and sidewalk repairs — is only $1.2 million.

If Frederick Douglass Circle does become a reality, not everyone will celebrate. Landon
Wickham, a Towers resident since the buildings opened and owner of a bike store on the ground floor, is afraid the circle will draw disruption to the neighborhood, especially late at night. “They should just clean it up, fix the bricks, put the traffic signs up,” he suggests. “I’ve been trying for a year and I can’t get them to put up the ‘No Turns’ signs that are supposed to be there.” To Wickham, the redesign is gentrification, not beautification, and has more to do with real estate values than cultural values.

But even Wickham recognizes that he’s in the minority and admits to admiring the way the process has been handled. “Working with the Harlem Hospital Injury Prevention Project renovating neighborhood parks,” says Wickham, “I’ve learned that up here, you have to work with the community; you can’t just take on a project as some glorious gesture. The Conservancy did a lot of outreach.”

Indeed, in the end, perhaps one of the most important designs to come from Help design! Frederick Douglass Circle is a blueprint for other community-design processes. “This belies the commonly held point of view that working class people aren’t interested in improving their communities,” says Vernice Miller, director of environmental justice for the Natural Resources Defense Council and a longtime West Harlem activist. “If you create a process that’s inviting, you can’t keep people away.” And according to Lance Brown, a professor of architecture at City College and a member of the Help design! Frederick Douglass Circle core advisory committee, “A great many people within architectural and planning circles have gained an ability to work inside the community participation process.” Karen Phillips agrees: “In the past, people would have said ‘I don’t want to do a public process, it’s too contentious.’ But now they’re recognizing that through this process they’ve built a constituency for their plan.”

While it has been decided that the monument to Frederick Douglass, when at last the ball gets rolling, will be lifelike, exactly how Douglass will be portrayed remains a mystery until a sculptor is selected and submits a design — perhaps even until the statue is unveiled, as sculptors are notorious for presenting finished artworks far different than the ones they proposed. But one thing is certain: it will be made of metal. Which is lucky, because the weight of a lot of hopes and ideals will be resting on those shoulders.
jay-walking and ignoring traffic signals like a New Yorker, Annika Dolve, a Norwegian tourist, spends the day after Thanksgiving on a guided tour through 42nd Street. Every Friday at noon, the Times Square Visitor Center sponsors a free tour through the Broadway theater and entertainment district. The group of 13 sightseers is being chaperoned by peace officer R. Torres, one of 44 unarmed but fully trained safety personnel hired by the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID), which supplements city services with funding from local property owners. As the group weaves through the human traffic along Seventh Avenue, they pass a private sanitation crew busily removing trash and other souvenirs left behind by absent-minded gawkers. A few years ago, Times Square’s reputation for pickpockets and muggings of tourists would probably have kept Dolve away. But on this rainy day she is more than happy to be here. “I came to see the billboards and the stores. I heard about them even in Norway,” says Dolve, referring to the 12,000 lightbulbs, bright neon signs, towering electronic billboards and the famous Sony JumboTron TV that, by city ordinance, will forever illuminate the Great White Way. “I came to Times Square partly because I heard it was safer and cleaner.”
Amid the most controversial development project in decades, Times Square is seeing a new era of vitality, a persistent and tenacious change that is determined to replace the sex-den and crime-ridden image for one of family-oriented entertainment. Morgan Stanley, Conde Nast publishing, law firms, restaurants and movie cineplexes are scheduled to begin, or have already begun, construction in Manhattan’s rekindled hot spot. The tri-level Virgin Megastore—the largest record store in the world—and The Gap are replacing sex-shops and X-rated cinemas. Crime throughout the “Deuce” is down by as much as 47 percent since 1994, according to the BID. But at the same time, residents of the neighborhood, sex-shop customers and ordinary New Yorkers are crying foul. They point out that this shiny new glitz comes at too high a price: legitimate small businesses—including many that support the theater industry—have been driven out of the neighborhood; thousands of employees who have difficulty finding work anywhere else and artists evicted from their studios in the area, have been forced to make way for Disney and big business.

The winners and losers in Times Square’s identity crisis are not always clear cut. On one hand, the estimated 20 million people who visit 42nd Street annually are greeted with safer streets, packed Broadway theaters and a hi-tech amusement playground.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the city’s zoning laws—which make it illegal for “adult” establishments to operate within 500 feet of each other, a school, day-care center or a religious place of worship—have caused hybrids of Times Square’s sex industry to sprout in the nearby neighborhood of Hell’s Kitchen (or Clinton) and further afield into Brooklyn.

“Forty-second Street, you’re building a beautiful Disney World and we’re getting the prostitutes and everybody else in Brooklyn,” said Brooklyn borough president Howard Golden at a 1995 board meeting. “This isn’t a city, it’s Manhattan against the rest of the world.”

The zoning measure alone, which came into effect in 1995, caused 42nd Street’s sex shops to dwindle from 46 to 12, and its peep-shows—live nude dancing girls—dropped from 120 to

Polishing the Great White Way.
18. And the numbers are still declining.

But 42nd Street’s good fortune brings no solace to the residents of Clinton or the Brooklyn neighborhood of Greenpoint, who believe City Hall only concerns itself with the elite of Manhattan society. What’s more, as redevelopment marches toward Eighth Avenue’s residential hub, they say, the character of that residential neighborhood is being transformed from a community to a commercial strip — with the hike in rents and congestion to boot.

**THE DAWN OF PORN**

The face of Times Square, if anything, has always been one of evolution. And from its beginnings, Times Square and business have shared a symbiotic relationship. In the late 1800s, the area was known as Longacre Square and was the home of horse stables and carriage makers. At the turn of the century, the city wanted to attract new types of commerce into the area and asked *The New York Times* to relocate its offices, hoping that it would be a magnet for other commercial enterprises. In 1904, it did and it was. The Times building left Park Row and headed uptown to its new address, Times Square — the city square named after the newspaper — which provided the economic impetus city authorities were planning on. During this period, the blossoming theater district was located near Bowling Green, and as money and interest in the theater grew, the “Great White Way” crept up to Times Square and took the name of its famous address, “Broadway.”

By the 1930s, as the nation was reeling from the Great Depression, theaters started to give way to movies and many great theater houses were converted into cinemas or reopened as Burlesque halls. Two decades later Times Square had already gained a reputation for its nest of seedy
establishments, but it was an event in the 1960s that would forever associate the word “porn” with 42nd Street.

A man named Martin Hodas came up with the ingenious idea of outfitting nickelodeon machines with pornographic movies. The idea would gain him millions and lead to a federal obscenity conviction in 1984, but his seeds had already been planted. His idea was enough to spark the beginning of Times Square’s modern sex industry.

**Land Rush**

As Times Square sunk deeper into urban decay, the City tried different plans to clean up its image and return it to its former tourist-dollar-drawing glory. Since the late 1970s, under Ed Koch’s reign, City Hall had envisioned a theme-park-like motif for Times Square, but subsequently opted for professional offices as the only cure for the area’s seedy reputation. A sluggish property market in the early 1980s, the absence of any major investors, and the public outcry of citizens groups — who saw plain, stoic office buildings as a threat against Times Square’s advertising and entertainment traditions — however, forced the city to rethink its version of what the Deuce should be.

For years, the city tried to entice the Florida-based Disney Corporation to do business in Times Square. In 1993, Disney’s chairman Michael Eisner bought the New Amsterdam Theater — and spent $34 million to renovate it — as a venue to stage Disney shows.

Eisner, however, demanded some assurances before he expanded Disney’s presence in the area. First, he told City Hall to find two other entertainment companies that would promise to do business in Times Square. That wasn’t difficult. In a 1997 interview with the *Washington Post,*
Robert Milliard, president of the New York Development Corp., said that Disney’s investment “gave other investors and developers more confidence [in the area].” Eisner also demanded that the city get rid of the area’s remaining sex industry.

That was already in the works. The city had been buying up condemned property since 1982, and now controlled 13 acres of land between 45th and 50th Streets, but it could not proceed until the sex-industry was effectively destroyed.

So in 1995, the city created the zoning ordinance that shut down most of the sex-shops in the area — forcing the closure of an industry that generated $50 million in legitimate business — and wiped away jobs for college students, immigrants and mothers who survived on wages from the industry.

Many people, if given the choice, would gladly embrace the idea of a theme restaurant as opposed to a strip-club, which is believed to attract criminal activity. But according to a study conducted by the Department of City Planning, there is no connection between adult establishments and crime. And Officer Torres admits that the remaining sex-shops in the area do comply with city guidelines and don’t “cause any trouble.”

But the removal of 42nd Street’s sex-shops is only a fraction of the concerns among local residents and small business owners. Since larger companies have moved into the neighborhood, land values have soared. Electronic and souvenir shops, mom and pop stores — unable to pay the higher rents — and tenants on fixed incomes have been forced out. How expensive is the land around Times Square? A major player in Manhattan’s sex industry for over 20 years, Richard Basciano, was paid triple his investment when the city bought one of his properties at 210 West 42nd Street for $8.4 million. Two other properties that cost the 72-year-old “King of Porn” $1.7 million a decade ago, went for $2.9 million. And One Times Square — the Times office building before it moved to 43rd Street — is now worth 300 percent more than it was during the 1980s.

**Porn House or Mickey Mouse?**

Today, the neon lights of the Peep Land sex emporium, with its impressive collection of European and homemade porn movies, are dwarfed by the garish, bright lights of the Disney Mega-store, a mere 180 adult steps away.

With the infusion of money and a uniformed presence (the BID’s privatized peace force) throughout the Deuce, Times Square’s other wholesome attractions are thriving.

Broadway is making a comeback. Along with the New Amsterdam, the Palace (the venue for Disney’s blockbuster “The Lion King”), the Nederlander, the Empire, the New Victory (home of children’s plays and workshops) and 34 other theaters are being renovated, relocated or reopened.

On a cold rainy day, hundreds of people line up in Duffy Circle for a chance to get discounted tickets for one of the numerous theatrical performances.

Meanwhile, at community board meetings and on the Internet, residents of Hell’s Kitchen are shedding a different light on the new vibrancy. They can hardly dispute that Times Square is more attractive to tourists like Dolve from Norway. But, they wonder, what about the people who live in the neighborhood?
LOOKING BACK

Years of Dollars & Sense

An Editor Remembers
By Deborah Erickson

Dollars & Sense. Whenever I hear those words, that title, I can’t help but think back with a smile to the time in my life when I was managing editor, a part of the team producing Dollars & Sense, The Baruch College Business Review in 1985 and 1986. We worked out of the white and windowless newsroom on the 10th floor of 360 Park Avenue South. It was our hang-out, our clubhouse, the place we’d bring our cups of coffee and sandwiches from the Aristotle diner—as well as our ideas about what this magazine should be, how good it could be.

At the time, I thought of the newsroom as action central; now I realize it was an incubator of learning and friendship that changed my life, and the lives of many other people, profoundly for the better. I will always remember sitting at the long work counter next to Professor Roslyn Bernstein, the founder of the magazine and its editor-in-chief, as she taught me to edit by saying, “Listen to your ear. Listen to the rhythm of the language.” I wasn’t the only student Professor Bernstein taught so gently yet intensely. She encouraged all the staff members to trust our instincts, to express our
visions in words, photos, graphic design — whatever our métier — and to enjoy the creative act of putting out a magazine together.

The fun we had, the friendships we established, and the confidence we gained were every bit as important as the professional skills we developed. Through the seasons and the cycles of the magazine’s production, we came to know ourselves as talented, capable members of a delightfully diverse team. In Dollars & Sense, we had a vehicle to reach beyond the ordinary, beyond the good-enough, far beyond class assignments and term papers. We students were creating a magazine from scratch — standing on the shoulders of giants, of course, and with the guidance and help of a few dedicated professors. But this baby was ours; we could make it whatever we wanted.

What a wonderful opportunity we met in that newsroom. We could show the world — everyone from our fellow Baruch students to the business leaders and professional journalists on the magazine’s mailing list, to prospective employers — what we thought business journalism should be. We envisioned Dollars & Sense as an observant, intelligent, dynamic publication that would also be aesthetically beautiful. We worked hard to make that vision a reality, and the effort was exhilarating.

I remember driving out to
catch the sunrise at Coney Island one winter morning with our photo editor Joe Spasiano, to shoot the 1985 cover illustration that would accompany my story on real estate development and banking in that area. The dawning day was fiercely cold. We clapped our hands and ran in place to stay warm as Joe set up his shot: an abandoned roller-coaster behind a decrepit metal fence bearing a sign saying “Property for Rent.” The sun came up pink, reflecting the hope that the neighborhood was coming out of its dark times. Later, our art director Jo Marie Fecchi, would hand-tint Joe’s black and-white photo, set it in a jet-black border, and create one of the most striking magazine covers I’ve ever seen.

Dollars & Sense was infinitely more than an extra-curricular, school-sponsored activity. It was for me, as for many Baruch students, my first experience working on a team dedicated to creating an outstanding journalistic product. The process showed me that I could be a professional journalist of high caliber, and yielded a magazine that gave potential employers some proof of that. But most important, Dollars & Sense let me experience first-hand the pleasure of working creatively to satisfy practical goals. I’ve enjoyed an exciting career ever since graduating Baruch—emphasis on the joy. When I count my blessings, I always give thanks for Dollars & Sense, and the woman who created it. Happy 20th Anniversary!

Deborah Erickson (’86) currently writes about corporate strategies and cutting edge technologies for IN VIVO: The Business and Medicine Report, a leading trade journal read by top executives in the health care industry. She has previously served as a staff writer and member of the board of editors for Scientific American magazine and as a deputy director of the Institute for the Future, a non-partisan think tank.

Imagine You’re Writing for a Magazine...
By Yury Mashkovitch

As an exercise during her Fall ’78 Business and Financial Writing class, Professor Roslyn Bernstein asked her students to imagine that they were writing for a magazine. After the students submitted their stories for the “pretend” publication, they wanted their work to be published in a real one. Professor Bernstein responded by obtaining $500 in funding, and the dream became reality when 750 copies of the 16-page premiere issue of Dollars & Sense were printed in May 1979.

In its infancy, Dollars & Sense was put together on Professor Bernstein’s dining room table. This was before personal computers and word processing, so mistakes had to be corrected by hand. Over the years, the magazine’s print run grew to match its increasing popularity among students, faculty and people outside the college.

Professor Bernstein instilled her students with a passion to become the very best. Her words of inspiration still echo in the hearts and minds of former students: “Don’t think of the project as a student publication.” “Pretend that you are competing with Business Week and Fortune.” “Assume that you are a professional.”

Dollars & Sense now boasts a print run of over 7,500 copies, and is backed by support from the Reuter Foundation and the Baruch College Fund. Professor
Bernstein is proud of the growth of her baby: “We’ve come a long way from the dining room table to delivering it on a disk to the printer, but the heart and soul of the magazine remains the same — bright ideas, brilliant writing and creativity that is student-driven.”

Where Are They Now?

By Yury Mashkovitch

Ever since she was a child, Rebecca Herman ('79) loved to read. Noting her love of literature, her parents and teachers encouraged her to develop her reading and writing skills. When she arrived at Baruch, she still didn’t know what she was going to study or pursue in life, but, she recalls, “I always knew that I would do something with words.”

Joe Spasiano ('86) lives and works as an English teacher in Wakayama, Japan, a city of approximately 400,000 residents, about 100 kilometers south of Osaka. “I decided on this career quite by accident,” he says. Spasiano went to Japan seven years ago for a six-month trip with the goal of improving his photography
portfolio. He started teaching just to make money, “I thought of it as waiting tables or working part-time in a department store,” Spasiano says, “but I loved teaching, and my six months kept stretching out longer and longer.” Looking back on his days of working for the Baruch College Business Review doesn’t quite explain how he ended up in Wakayama, but he does credit the experience with encouraging an open mind and an adventurous spirit. Emphasizing teamwork, he says, “We were able to put out a publication that, in my opinion, was beautiful and informative.” As the Dollars & Sense photo editor, Spasiano recalls how working closely with others improved the quality of the magazine, and changed some of his beliefs — chiefly that the creative process was an individual one. He remembers how the process of putting together Dollars & Sense was enhanced by speaking to a writer, reading his or her article, and brainstorming with the writer to “create a photo and story that were able to complement one another fully. It was almost a microcosm of a real publication, or in fact any business.”

Journalism has always been my calling since I was four,” says Pamela Smith (‘83), marketing manager for the New York Times Magazine. Citing positive influences from her internships at The American Banker, CNN, and The Wall Street Journal, along with her professors at Baruch, she pursued that calling. At Baruch she found herself on the staff of Dollars & Sense, which, she says, “gave me an opportunity to be published in a glossy format.” Smith remembers, “The overall experience was quite rewarding because it enabled me to see a product develop from start to finish.”

Dollars & Sense took up most of my days and nights,” says Antoinette Coulton (‘96), recalling her two years on the magazine staff, serving as editor-in-chief during the second year of her involvement. Today, as a business reporter at American Banker covering the credit card industry, she says, “Dollars & Sense prepared me for what I’m doing now, but now I do more of what I like: I get to travel, meet people and make contacts.”
The student magazine may not have been as glamorous as her current job, but, she says, “It was one of the things that helped me get my present position because it showed my employers what I was capable of doing.” Remembering the individualized attention she received from the professors involved with Dollars & Sense, Coulton adds, “Students can make mistakes and then learn from them.” The magazine gave her the opportunity to choose her own subjects. She says, “Dollars & Sense gave me the freedom to write about what I wanted to write about. This is something that you don’t necessarily get in the real world, where editors sometimes tell you what they want you to do.”

After working as a copy editor and writer for such publications as The Economist and The Palestine-Israel Journal, and as an information coordinator for the International Rescue Committee in Central Africa, Björg Pálsdóttir ('94) still says, “To me Dollars & Sense was a very important experience.” Along with the opportunity to practice and develop her skills, the magazine gave her “a sense of what working on a magazine was about.” While on assignment in the former Zaire, at that time in the midst of a civil war, the freelance writer was sometimes disappointed with journalism and the media, particularly the television media. Pálsdóttir found that relevant news developments were often neglected in favor of stories that were comparatively trivial, but that could produce a desired effect. “Seeing how the world media covered this was a little disturbing sometimes. Sometimes the quality of the reporting tended to suffer,” she says. “There were certain political and monetary interests at work.” Pálsdóttir says this was a “sobering and humbling experience that should make us question every article we read.” With a wealth of real-life journalistic experience behind her, Pálsdóttir regards her time spent as a Dollars & Sense staffer as an important contribution to her success.
Linda died from ... a heroin overdose. Linda’s father, Robert, told me over the phone. I could hear him crying as I stood with the phone in my hand and no words coming out of my mouth. I was too shocked to even shed a solitary tear. I had just heard the worst news possible. My ex-girlfriend was dead. She was only 19 and I would never see her again.

Linda shouldn’t be dead. She should be chilling with me, drinking a 40-oz. like we did in the old days. But like so many others — from movie stars such as River Phoenix to the nameless people on some government statistical sheet — Linda’s life was cut short from drug abuse.

Every year the media is filled with stories about thousands of ordinary people who die from drugs or alcohol related accidents. But with all the deaths attributed to drugs, you still think it could never hit close to home. I never paid any attention to the numbers because I didn’t know any of the victims. They were fools to let drugs take over their lives. But Linda wasn’t a fool and she was more than a statistic to me. If she could die, then how long would it be before one of my other friends went too far? What if, next time, it was me? As I stood with the phone, in disbelief, I remembered all the wild times we shared.

In my neighborhood, Morris Park, drugs and alcohol are as popular as basketball and hockey, so it...
isn’t surprising that I picked up the habit. I met Linda when I was 13; she was my first real girlfriend. In fact, she was involved in many of my firsts. She even introduced me to my first 40-oz. Her father owned a deli on Allerton Avenue and he would let her take 40-oz. Budweisers whenever she wanted. He was a really cool father, maybe too cool. If he had taken a real interest in what she was doing with her life, maybe he could have stopped her before she really got into trouble.

After a while, drinking a 40-oz. became nothing to us. Linda and I would get together once a week with some friends, sit on the stoop of her building and guzzle our beer as fast as possible — looking for the best buzz we could get. We always had a great time, coughing from the smoke and laughing up a storm. But it didn’t take long for adolescent curiosity to discover that marijuana, while more expensive, would give us a better high without the big stomachaches we always complained about from the beer.

By the time I was 18, Linda and I had already broken up, but we always kept in touch. I found another group of drinkers and smokers and I continued from where I had left off with her. During this time, marijuana had become less pure and more dangerous; it was now laced with other stuff like heroin, PCP, and even Raid. Every time I smoked some pot, I would forget everything that happened to me. I promised myself over and over again that, even though I had fun, I wouldn’t smoke for a week. How many times did I wake up headfirst in the flower pot outside my house, or lie in my friend’s alleyway begging for him to let me in, or feel as if I would pass out unless I exerted all my strength to stay conscious — even though my body was twitching? When I abused alcohol and drugs, nothing ever phased me. Depression was my only enemy and to fight my enemy off, I went to the only two friends I could trust — Budweiser and marijuana.

As I was grappling with my own demons, I continued to hear things about Linda. While I went to school every day, concentrated on my studies and got blasted once a week, Linda finished high school and went on an extended vacation where drugs became part of everyday life. I would soon find out that her taste in drugs had also graduated. Marijuana had given way to acid, but more frightening than this — as I would find out one week before she died — Linda stopped using acid and began experimenting with heroin.

On the last night I saw Linda alive, she stood outside my open window and shouted for me to come out. When we saw each other, it was like nothing had ever changed. We kissed like we did when we were a couple, we talked, joked around and hugged. As I held her hands in mine, I noticed the track marks on her arm for the first time.

Heroin was something I could never see myself doing, mainly because I hate needles. Seeing her scars and thinking about her using heroin freaked me out so much that I began to preach to Linda, as if I had never smoked a joint or drunk a beer in my entire life. I told her I wouldn’t talk to her again until she got help. I told her she was screwing up her life, not knowing I was doing the same, only taking a
ROOM FOR RENT

Hi. My name is Mark. I’m calling about your room-for-rent ad.

“Oh, yes. Well basically, I’m looking for a Caucasian like myself. Are you Caucasian, Mark?”

“No. I’m from Trinidad.”

“Where is that?”

“It’s in the Caribbean.”

“Oh, that’s nice. Well, sorry. Goodbye.”

Click.

I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. I was definitely surprised, but the one thing I wasn’t feeling was anger. On a subconscious level, I had learned to accept that my accent identifies me as an immigrant, or what the U.S. government refers to as an “alien.”

I don’t have bug eyes, tentacles, or webbed-feet. But I was born with dark skin and come from a foreign country.

“What language do they speak in Trinidad?” I’ve been asked countless times.

“We speak Martian,” I want to say, but what I really answer is English.

“But you have an accent?” they respond genuinely confused.

“Don’t people in Kentucky and Texas speak English?” I quickly answer back.

“Ohhh,” they reply, understanding my point that accents have nothing to do with language and everything to do with region.

In many respects, America is a lot like the Caribbean. The indigenous peoples were displaced by Europeans, and we had slavery. We have a democracy, immigrants, mini-malls, cable TV and basketball. The one thing we differ on, however, is the practice of judging a human being according to his or her race and place of origin.

When that person heard my accent and asked me where I was from, what he was really trying to determine was the color of my skin. Since I’ve been in this country, people have mistaken my accent for Jamaican, British, Indian, and French. On hearing my disembodied voice over the telephone, it was no wonder I was asked to identify myself by my country of origin — he couldn’t place my accent.

In America, a person is defined by race, but in most other countries a person’s identity is defined by nationality. I consider myself Trinidadian, but if you asked me about my heritage, I would have to answer African, French, and Portuguese. I called another ad and hoped the next person would be kinder.

“Hi. My name is Mark. I’m calling about your room-for-rent ad.”

“Do you have a job?” said the person with a suspicious voice.

“Yes.”

“How much does it pay?”

I told him.

“Sorry, you don’t make enough,” he said.

“But I earn more in a week than what you’re charging for a month’s rent?”

“I said you don’t make enough.”

Click.

Finding a place to live in New York is hard for an immigrant. It doesn’t matter if I had a college

— Jon Minners
education, a job or planned to become the next president of the United States. For many people, I'm either here illegally or I'm out to steal American jobs and women. Immigrants are only accepted when they stay in their own communities or own a deli.

I began to wonder if my approach was all wrong. Maybe if I changed my voice, people would have trouble labeling me.

When I saw an ad for a room in Brooklyn Heights for only $350, I decided to give it another try using another voice.

"Hi. My name is Mark, I said in a voice that sounded like a cross between Carlton, from the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, and Hugh Grant. "I'm calling about your room ad."

"Great. I just put it in yesterday."

"Really. Does the rent include utilities?"

"Yes it does. It's a two-bedroom apartment. You'll have full use of the kitchen and the bath and we'd share the phone and cable bill."

"Sounds great. Can I come and see the place?"

"Sure. How's Wednesday?"

"Perfect."

"O.K. then. I'll see you Wednesday."

"What's your name?" I asked. This was the furthest I'd gotten so far.

"It's Jeff."

"All right, Jeff. Goodbye."

This sounded promising, I thought to myself. Brooklyn Heights is one stop from Manhattan and the neighborhood's nice; two things I was looking for in a new apartment.

For over two months, I had answered ads for a room about the size of a closet and renting for $400 or more. I prayed to God that Jeff was open-minded.

Wednesday couldn't have come soon enough. As I made my way up the steps of Jeff's apartment building, I said a final prayer before buzzing his apartment.

"Yes," answered a static-filled voice.

"It's Mark."

"Come on up."

I could hardly contain my excitement. I had fallen in love with the neighborhood and it was only twenty minutes from Union Square. The only thing left to do was to make a good impression. I put on my glasses to look non-threatening and fixed my tie to look professional; I held a magazine in my hand to look cool. I neared his door, my door, I hoped, and rang the bell.

When he opened the door, I knew the room wasn't going to be mine. He didn't hide his shock fast enough. His eyes widened and the smile that was ready to greet me slipped an inch before coming back into place.

"Hi," I said, as I extended my tentacle. "I'm Mark."

"Hi. Hi," he said, trying to keep up appearances. I didn't know it at the time, but my human mask was slipping down my reptilian face.

"This is the apartment," he said making a sweeping gesture with his hands. "The kitchen's over there and over here is the bedroom."

"It looks good. How's the heat in
the building?"

"I've lived here for two years with no problems," he said.

We exchanged questions for a while, both knowing it was a waste of time. He was obviously uncomfortable and I wanted to leave.

"How soon will you make your decision?" I said finally.

"Oh, by this weekend, I think."

"Great. I hope to hear from you," I said.

"O.K. Thanks for coming. Bye."

"Later."

The following night, one day before the weekend and not nearly enough time to choose a roommate, I returned home to find a message from Jeff.

"Hi, Mark. What's up? It's Jeff. Listen, I'm calling to let you know that I decided to rent out the room to someone else. I'm sorry. Good luck in your apartment hunting. Bye."

Click.

I was surprised he even bothered to call. I erased the message from my answering machine and picked up the paper to look at the other ads. But this time, I only searched for places in Caribbean neighborhoods.

— Mark Stephens

KINDRED SPIRITS

Sometimes around noon on a Saturday or Sunday, the hallways of my building fill with the sweet scent of broiling beef short-ribs and sesame-fried zucchini. I know the mouth-watering smells come from the apartment of Kiki, an old Chinese lady who is passionate about cooking. Kiki is the only person in my apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan whom I know. Beyond the footsteps I hear going up and down the stairs outside my door, she is the only person who lets me know that there is life in the building.

The first time we talked was three years ago when I came back from running in Central Park. I saw her carrying big bags of fruit. She was walking slowly. The expression of pain on her wrinkled face told me that her legs hurt. I offered her my help and she accepted it with a warm smile that showed her white front teeth. Though she was 85, her hair was black in stiff curls that made me think she had recently been to a beauty parlor.

Carrying her bags, I followed her up the stairs and along the hallway. This was the first time I had explored one of the floors above my own. When we came to her bright red door, I assumed that it would open into a bright and airy apartment. She turned to me and said apologetically, "My apartment is very small" — her soft voice leading the way into the darkness. A huge black wall with a closed door faced us, which made the room appear even smaller than it was. I always thought old people preferred small places.

She left me as she went into the kitchen which was too small for even one person. I looked around. Big photographs hung on the black wall. She was in all of them posing like a model. In one, she was hugging Fidel Castro. She had been an actress, she told me later. Those were the days, she said, when her beauty gave her fame and money. I could still see the beauty in her small green eyes, through her tired look.

"Cake?" she asked. "Pie? Cookies?"

"Anything," I answered, trying to make it easier for her, but I did not taste whatever it was she gave me.

I sat on the sofa, facing the door. She began to tell me about her days as an actress. As she talked, her eyes grew bigger, recalling those moments in the theater. Her body moved gracefully as she talked about dancing and acting.

After this meeting, Kiki and I became friends. Now, she often complains about her sons. "They hardly come to see me and when I ask them what they are doing, they tell me that it is none of my business." I never like to hear her talk about her suffering, but I know that it helps her cope with her anger. I am her only friend, her "curly hair," as she calls me. "I've lived here for 20 years and I've never seen another old lady in the building. Just me trying to survive." Often we have lunch together in her apartment: roast chicken, grilled sardines, baked potatoes.

We listen to the sounds of the neighbors. "There is life in this building," she affirms. She believes that the steps we hear, the whispering in the hall, and the music are all signs of life in this building.
I do not talk to my neighbors like I talk to Kiki. In the hallway, I rarely exchange greetings with them. I do not know who they are, what they do, or where they are from. But on Saturdays, I know that the loud music comes from the handsome young men on the fourth floor. The smell of flowers comes from the third floor and the smell of Chinese food comes from Kiki’s place. The soft slam of the front door echoes from my neighbor’s apartment on the third floor. Loud laughter rings from the girls on the fourth floor. We are strangers sharing the same hallway, the same laundry room and the same front door.

Kiki knows these sounds and smells as well as I; she does not talk to these people either. When she hears girls screaming, she non-chalantly says, pausing every other minute, “The guys on the fourth floor are Casanovas.” She recognizes all these sounds. Her ears are very sensitive. Both Kiki and I have learned to keep contact with our neighbors by listening to their sounds.

Recently Kiki has been telling me about her new chocolate recipes. I sat with her tasting her wonderful strawberry cake and listening to the silence of her room — a silence that is herself. She has learned to identify people by their sounds so well that she is no longer concerned about people’s names. We have known each other for three years and only recently, she asked me for my name.

“Curly Hair, what is you name?” Kiki said.
“Ana,” I said. “My name is Ana.”

— Ana M. More

THE SECRET

I guess you have been wondering about my sexual preference.”

It was a statement, really, spoken by Jeffrey, my friend and co-worker of a year-and-a-half. We were walking one cold December night down Madison Avenue, after getting off our overtime shift at the studio production house where we work.

I had had a feeling that something was on his mind that whole day. I didn’t answer him immedi-
ately, my own thoughts reeling away. But I managed to give him a sideways glance.

At 26, he still carried his I.D. to bars or any other places that require proof of age. Short cropped hair, along with droopy eyes and protruding ears added to his impression of an innocent boy. He didn’t look at me, his face pale and somewhat devoid of emotion. But I knew better, and I braced myself for what was to come.

“Well, I’m gay.”

I hate to admit it, but a shiver ran up my spine. So it was true. For months now I had suspected as much. But I hadn’t been sure. Now, as I watched the seemingly empty streets, I felt a sense of loss, the loss of a friend, because I didn’t know Jeffrey any more. I was in a tailspin. All the hints, all the little incidents at work with him came flooding back to me. The way he looked at me, the times we worked closely together, moments of closeness I perceived as comradeship. Who was this man walking beside me?

“It would really help if you would say something,” he said in a tight voice.

We came to the corner of 35th and Madison and waited for the light to change. The wind was cold and biting, easily penetrating our jackets. I looked at Jeff fully at last. Our eyes met briefly, then our gaze flattered away like our breath. He was studying something across the street, while I concentrated on the blinking DON’T WALK sign. I realized that I was standing farther away from him than I usually would. A steady stream of yellow submarines—as Jeffrey humorously referred to the cabs—sped by us, trying to beat the changing light. We crossed the street and continued down Madison.

“I want to say the right thing, you know,” I began slowly. “But I just don’t know where to start.”

“You can start by telling me how you feel.”

“How do I feel?” I asked softly, almost to myself. For a year-and-a-half, I had come under his wings of influence at work, where he taught me the ropes and the finer details of being a studio artist. He guided me through my mistakes on the job. He was always patient and understanding. He put in a good word to my boss, and treated me with respect. It was obvious to me that Jeffrey had become a good mentor and friend. Again, guilt worked its way into my heart.

“I don’t know,” I said. “What do you want me to say? That everything is okay, that everything is the same?”

“Is something different then?”

“Hell, yes, something is different!”

“All right. What?”

“That you’re gay, that’s what.”

The words came out of my mouth before I could stop them. We walked on in silence. I could feel his presence next to me, and without looking I knew he was disappointed.

“Why did you tell me now? Why not a month ago, or a year ago when we first met?”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have told you at all.”

“I didn’t mean it that way.”

“Yes, you did.” With that, he walked off and crossed the street. I didn’t even bother to call out after him.

The next morning, when I got into work, I saw him sitting at his normal place, hunched over the work station like he usually does. He didn’t look up. It was a miserable day. The studio seemed more confined than it really was—almost suffocating. I felt awkward and uncomfortable. All around us, co-workers chattered as they went about their jobs, oblivious to the tension between Jeff and myself. I felt out of place, and altogether surreal; I was looking at everything through a filter. We didn’t exchange conversation—we didn’t even make eye contact. The night before, sleep had evaded me as I questioned my behavior. There shouldn’t be any reason for me to look at him differently, I had whispered to myself. He was still a friend, I reasoned. But no matter how hard I tried, I still couldn’t look past his homosexuality. So what do I do? I couldn’t continue to go on this way.

As the day came to an end, I purposely waited to get into the elevator with Jeff alone. Everyone else had already left. The elevator door jerked open to receive us, then jerked to a close. There was a jolt before it began to move. Above us a fan too small to provide any ventilation whirled away pointlessly. I glanced quickly at Jeff, who stood rigidly with his hands in his jacket pockets. He was studying the blinking lights of each passing floor with uncommon interest.
"Is that really that interesting?"

He didn’t answer. But something about his body language told me that he wasn’t angry. He was just pretending to be stubborn. If I knew him at all, he was probably waiting for me to do the talking. So I continued.

"So, ah, do you find me attractive?"

He grinned for the first time that day. But he still remained rigid and unyielding. When the elevator stopped on the lobby, we didn’t get out. Jeff finally turned toward me. He was studying me as intensely as he had been studying the blinking lights.

"Look, Jeff. Just give me some time."

"I never said I expected you to accept me right away."

"Yeah, I know. I’ll be honest, I can’t promise you anything. I can’t even say that I will be able to accept you in the future. I don’t know; I just need time to digest this, time to..."

"Time to what? To see if I’m normal? To see if I’m coming on to you?"
I was silent. He said it. His insight into my dilemma was right on the mark. It was my turn to smile. I felt foolish.

"You're right," I said.

"Look, take all the time you need."

"It won't be the same, you know."

"Maybe."

"But I'll try."

"All right." Jeff sighed. "I don't plan on staying in the elevator tonight. Shall we go?"

"So, do you find me attractive?"

"Don't flatter yourself, lgg."

— Ignatius Low

DANGEROUS NEIGHBOR

At night I heard him strumming on his rock guitar and howling terrifically high notes into the still night. I would peep through my bedroom curtain and see his silhouette moving to the rhythm of his tunes. The passion with which he sang was fueled by the drugs in his system, for he only sang like this when he was high. He was a drug addict; everyone knew that he was. I knew because I heard the adults in our small neighborhood whisper about him behind his back. In our suburban tranquility and complacency he was an aberration. We thought that we were far removed from the drugs, the crime and other social ills of larger society.

I heard that he went to one of the most prestigious Catholic schools in the nation; and it was the same school my brother was attending at the time. He had decent, honest folks, divorced but still civil to each other. The house in which he lived was actually his father's, but I never heard his father utter a single word. He seemed a quiet gentleman. I would see him mornings on his way to work, and afternoons on his way back. I never saw my parents speak to him, in fact I never saw anyone from my neighborhood speaking to him. He was known to everyone as "the man with the crazy son," and no one dared to intervene.

One night, the sound of angry voices crashed through my window. As usual, I peeped through my curtain. This time, there were two other people on the patio — an older man and a young woman who looked around the addict's age. On closer look, I recognized her as my friend's sister who lived only a block away. She turned out to be the addict's girlfriend. She had a suitcase with her and every intention of moving in with him.

I heard her spitting out some foul and abusive language. Then the older man gave her a wicked slap across her face and dragged her away from the house. That was the last I saw of her.

A week later, the addict son left. Everyone in the neighborhood breathed a sigh of relief. But he returned a few months later. This time he played his guitar at any hour of the day, oblivious to his neighbors. He struck the chords angrily and his music sounded more erratic than before. His singing was like blood-curdling screams for help. At times, I heard him screaming at his father telling him to "shut the f— up!" Never once did I hear his father respond, not even a whisper. Perhaps because his own father was silent and afraid of him, everyone else chose to remain silent.

Within the silence his father moved away. I noticed that his car was no longer in the driveway, and blades of tall grass and weeds began to grow where there once was a well-kept lawn. Soon, my neighbor began yelling phrases that made no sense. Everyone thought that he was dangerous and criminal-like. But no one did anything.

He took to lying on his patio, half-naked, while talking and cursing to an invisible audience. One day he caught me looking at him from my yard. His hair was long and uncombed, and he wore a huge untamed beard. He stared at me from his window with eyes that were crazy and bloodshot. He didn't curse me but I still ran away. After that incident, I was petrified. My family banned me from my own backyard.

One day, he did turn violent. His mother visited him, and he pushed her down the stairs. Despite bruises on her face and legs, she proclaimed that he was "still a good boy." The neighbor who took the addict's mother to the hospital for her injuries decided that it was time to take action. The next day, the police and medical authorities
knocked on his door. When they confronted him, he violently resisted them and started running for the street like a madman. Howling at his pursuers, he threw stones at car windshields and raced through the streets. He had nearly circled the block when the officers, with the help of a police dog, caught him. They beat him until he was a weak lump on the ground. Everyone came out to watch — from behind their fences and walls, of course — and we were all glad that the block would be soon rid of him.

About a month later, his father returned. Soon the grass was cut, and the walls of the house were repainted. One day, when my dad was in the backyard, the addict’s father offered him some fruit, which he gladly accepted. We all knew that his son was in a mental institution. “So how is your son doing?” my father asked. My neighbor answered that even though the detoxification was hard for his son, he was doing much better. He then added that his son would be back home within six months, if he continued to improve.

To this my father answered, “Yeah. Well, I’m glad to hear it.”

I’m not sure that my father meant what he said; nonetheless, that was the first time I ever saw these two neighbors talk.

— Khadine De Paiva

LEFRAK BUST

FREEZE! Don’t you move, boy! I’ll blow you away! Why are you running from me?”

The tall officer looked flustered. He approached with his gun ready to explode.

“Get down. Face down. Put your nose on the ground and put your hands behind your head.”

I thought he was going to shoot. It was 8:45 in the morning. I was late for my internship in Manhattan. Terrified, I ducked behind a dusty old Ford Taurus coupe. I stayed there, motionless.

A few seconds later, two figures bolted from a building and were forced face-down onto the cold, hard sidewalk across the street. The cop hurried over to the action. Dozens of detectives and S.W.A.T. team officers poured from the 18-story building in LeFrak City, Queens. Draped in black combat attire with bright yellow and white reflector letters across their backs carrying huge guns, and wearing body armor and face shields, they swarmed through my block. Other police in regular uniforms darted out from crevices between the
buildings behind me. Ambulances and undercover police cruisers sped up the avenue and screeched to a halt down the street. With every breath, I became more nervous. The calm, cool atmosphere of my normal early morning commute had suddenly become extremely dangerous.

Raising my head enough to see through the dew-covered rear passenger side window, I saw the face of a little boy I used to know. Schey was one of the small-time local hood rats who never grew up. He scurried around every day and every night in rain or shine hustling his cheap dried-up nickel bags of weed. Somehow, I felt sorry for him. Maybe it was because Schey and I were former classmates. Over ten years ago in I.S. 61 — the Leonardo Da Vinci Intermediate School in Corona Queens — we both learned that electrons crazily gyrate around all oxygen atoms. Until the moment he stopped running from the semi-automatic, gun-wielding officers of the local precinct, Schey lived like an electron. Luckily I never became close to Schey, but for years I knew of him. Strangely, I admired him.

Ducking again, I reminisced about those moments 10 years ago. Schey was always the first in our class to get the new Air Jordans. He always had more money to play with and always wore the clothes that made all the local boys envious. At the time, I had about 45 cents to my name and a stable home. Schey was on top of the world then.

A loud, low-flying helicopter sent every piece of paper and every leaf fluttering in the damp, curbside ditch where I kneeled.

“FREEZE! Don’t move! Stand up slowly and put your hands where I can see them.”

Two or more voices echoed similar commands. I obeyed in perfect concert. At that moment, I was grateful for many things. First, I was not bleeding from a bullet from an anxious cadet. Second, I was allowed to stand rather than to have my nose forced into the 57th Avenue pavement. And finally, I had done nothing wrong. I was confident that in a court of law all of my good friends would testify to my estimable stature. I did not think about my internship for which I was late or about my swollen knee. Rather, I thought only about my freedom.

“Walk backwards towards me,” a deep voice bellowed.

Shaking, I responded faster than a light bulb to a switch.

“What were you doing down there?” the same voice echoed. Before he could put the question mark on his sentence, I was pleading for my life.

Surprisingly, it did not take much to sway the officer. I was freed and ordered to leave the scene. I collected my house keys and some change that fell onto the pavement. I slowly started my trek to the train station. Schey lay there at the scene with his nose and lips pressed against the ground, his hands on the back of his head, and a large knee between his shoulder blades. I can thank him from a distance for the knowledge he has given me.

— Alec Turner

A REAL FRIEND IGNORED

We were friends, he and I. We hung out, every Friday and Saturday night. Movies, clubs, it didn’t matter what we did because he always knew where the fun was and I was a willing participant. We had met on the train. He started talking to me about school and we hit it off and since then we were friends. Then things started to change. First, our Friday and Saturday nights out stopped with no explanation. Then, whenever I called him at home, he was never there. One day I went over to his house hoping that I would see him, but he wasn’t home. His mother didn’t know what to tell me. She didn’t know why her son had stopped calling or hanging out with me. She told me that she would tell him that I had stopped by.

The turning point came when I saw my friend in the Village. He was with a group of guys whom I had never seen before. I went up to my friend and said, “Hey stranger, long time no see.” He just looked at me and didn’t say a word. At first, I thought that I was mistaken, that it wasn’t my friend, but it was him and at the same time it wasn’t. He had lost a lot of weight. His clothes, dirty and worn, just hung on his
skeletal frame. His eyes were bloodshot and sank into his face. They were empty — no feeling or expression. He kept sniffing and wiping his nose. I glanced at his companions and saw that they looked exactly like my friend.

As one of the guys turned towards me, something fell out of his pocket onto the sidewalk. The guy tried to conceal it but he wasn’t fast enough because I saw what it was — a small plastic bag filled with a white powder. The way this guy was acting, I knew that it was drugs, most probably cocaine. I couldn’t believe what my eyes were telling me.

I turned to my friend and stared at him before saying, "What are you doing to yourself? Does your mom know that you’re using?" Before I could get into a tirade, one of his companions said, "Why don’t you mind your business. This has nothing to do with you." He motioned to his fellow users that it was time to go. My friend just brushed past me, without saying a word or a look in my direction, and followed the pack down the block.

For two weeks following that incident I debated whether I should go and tell his mother. In the end, I did. I think that she already knew what I was going to say before I actually said it. And when I said it, she just sat there and stared off into space. "He came home about a week ago," she said. "I was so happy to see him. He didn’t stay for long, just said that he came to get some things. When he left, I couldn’t find my gold rings. I thought that I had just misplaced them, but now I know better."

I didn’t know what to say. I tried to give comfort, but I don’t think I did a good job.

"I tried to be a good mother to him after his father deserted us and I thought that I had succeeded. How could this have happened and what will I do?" As she said that she turned and looked at me, but I had no idea what she could do. I decided to go home and told my friend’s
mother that I would check on her in a few days.

As I had promised, I checked up on her. She put on a brave face and told me that she was going to forcibly put her son into a detox center. She had friends looking for him on the street and asked me if I would keep an eye out for him. I said yes.

My friend’s body was found in an alley with a needle stuck in his arm. They said that he died from an overdose. He was only 24. His mother had to be heavily sedated after she was told the news. The funeral was a depressing affair. None of his companions came, but that didn’t surprise me. Besides, I highly doubt they would have been welcomed. I continue to check up on my friend’s mother from time to time to make sure that she’s okay.

To this day, I don’t understand what caused my friend to start using drugs. Maybe it’s something that just happens and can never be explained. I only wish that instead of turning to cocaine, his false friend, he had turned to me, his real friend.

— Julie Christie

LIVING THE DREAM

Eight years ago I walked into my parents’ room and discovered my father crying in front of the television set as he watched the evening news. This was the first and only time that I ever saw him cry.

“What’s the matter, Pop?” I asked with innocent concern.

“Our lives are better now,” he merely said, holding his tears back from my view.

On that eventful day in November, 1986, President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act that made illegal immigrants who had been in the country continuously since 1982 eligible for legal status. My family and I, having come to the United States in 1979, made the cut. The landmark bill enabled millions of people who came to this country as economic refugees to find a better way of life.

At the age of 10, I was unaware of the significance of the new law. I was also unaware that my family had been hiding in the shadows as illegal aliens for over seven years. I just thought we were living normal lives in America.

Now, as an adult, I can fully understand the emotions my father felt when President Reagan finally signed the bill. My father was a little older than I am now when he brought his family from the poverty and political turmoil in the Philippines to the opportunity and freedom of the United States. With dreams as vast as the ocean he crossed to get here, my father envisioned a better life for his family in America.

As a young couple, my mother and father struggled to put food on the table in a strange new environment. They lived humble lives and constantly feared deportation. Both worked long hours at their jobs to provide the best for their children. To this day, I can still vividly remember my father leaving our house at six in the morning and returning from his second job at a Bennigan’s restaurant at midnight reeking of food. Their hardworking ways left an indelible impression on me.

My father’s tears that day were a culmination of all the hardships he faced to be an American. Despite living humbly and laying low for seven years in a mysterious new world, working and slaving over 12 hours a day to make a living, and seeing the bill vetoed every year, my father remained positive. He was both the perfect parent and role model. His love for life and for his children was never affected by the difficulties he experienced.

Like the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves in 1865, the Immigration and Reform Act released my family from the shackles that bound us to a menial existence. Now, the dream my father envisioned as a young man in the Philippines is a reality. We are Americans.

— Carlos L. Gomez

MY VOICE OF REASON

The only thing keeping me from hurting someone is I don’t want to go to jail. And the reason I don’t want to go to jail is I like “Me” too much. Me just doesn’t like the idea of becoming someone’s wife in a cell block full of criminals, and I owe him too much to make him unhappy.
When the stress of New York life becomes so great that I feel like shouting at the person in front of me to walk faster, Me says that I should take it easy.

"They're just tourists or lost," he tells me and I listen.

When my boss tells me to cover her ass by saying I didn't do my job, Me whispers in that secret voice of his that she probably doesn't have much longer to live. His voice is soft and full of wisdom.

I first discovered Me some months ago when I worked a midnight to 8 a.m. job. It was the beginning of the new year and I needed the money because I had quit my previous job three weeks before. I knew it was going to be tough, but I always considered myself a hard worker.

I was hired to be a floorman at a 24-hour print shop in Manhattan. A floorman is supposed to sweep dusty floors, move wooden crates, neatly pack paper into straight, towering piles, and suck paint fumes and chemicals into his lungs. I didn't mind working for my money, and I still don't, but when I saw young kids wearing expensive brand clothing on their way home from late-night parties — when I wore greasy jeans and smelled of paint — I knew they hadn't earned the money to buy the clothes, and I began to hate them for it.

I almost quit my job a thousand times, but something always held me back. It had nothing to do with pride; I just wasn't meant for manual labor. Nights took on an incredibly slow pace and I spent most of the time picking splinters out of my fingers. Then, just when I was about to walk off the job for the one thousandth-and-one time, Me spoke. "It's only for a short time." The voice was so clear that at first I thought it was my friend, Jose, speaking.

"What did you say?" I asked him.

"Nothing, college boy, get back to work."

Me spoke again, but this time he only said one word: "Wait."

Our relationship went on like this for months. I would get angry at somebody for something stupid, and Me would remind me that I never used to act this way before coming to New York.

"Just forget it," he said one time when a woman sitting next to me sneezed in my face.

"But I really want to tell her how rude she is," I screamed inside my head. "Not saying 'sorry' is worse than laughing in my face," I told him.

"She's probably too embarrassed to look at you," Me said, so I kept quiet and wiped cool, slimy fluid off my face.

Once again, Me had saved me from doing something rash. I forget that people in New York never look at strangers. People are too afraid they might get shot, or worse, be recognized by somebody who just wants to say "hello."

I don't think I'm crazy, and I don't think I'm hearing voices. But I do think I hear my inner voice and it keeps me from going insane. Before coming to New York three years ago, I was happy with life and it with me. The Caribbean is a wonderful place to grow up with its year-round sunshine and people who give you genuine smiles.

Don't get me wrong, I love New York ... sometimes. The city has a way of building character in a person. I just wish I didn't have to take the sweaty bodies rubbing against mine in the subway.

Luckily, though, when I get that psychotic feeling, Me fills my head with pictures of my present life. He shows me my college, my higher-paying job, and my girlfriend who loves me. And on those rare occasions when I find it hard to go on, Me just says one word, "Wait."

— Mark Stephens
Inmaculada Barrero (Art Director/Designer) has a degree in Marketing from Spain. She is a graduating senior majoring in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication and is currently interning at Dollars & Sense.

Irene Bellas (Designer/Writer) is a junior majoring in Marketing and Graphic Communication. She is a treasurer of Gen X Graphix.

Kathleen Berry (Designer) is a junior in the CUNY B.A. program with a dual concentration in Graphic Communication and Computer Information Systems.

Bianca Dieckmann (Senior Editor/Writer) is a junior majoring in Journalism/Creative Writing. She does freelance writing for several German publications.

Khadija Faion (Designer) is a senior majoring in Marketing Advertising with a minor in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication.

Christine Gant (Designer/Asst. Photo Editor) is majoring in Graphic Communication. She is currently the Secretary of Gen X Graphix and is interning in the Graphics Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

Michiko Hisamoto (Designer/Photo Editor) is majoring in Marketing and minoring in Graphic Communication. She is interning at Asahi Shim bun International Inc.

Ivette Jimenez (Designer/Illustrator) is a graduate who majored in Graphic Communication and minored in English. She interned at Marvel Entertainment Group and The Knot.

Yuri Mashkovich (Senior Editor/Writer) graduated with a major in Business Journalism and a minor in Biology-Chemistry. He has interned at WCBS Newsradio 88.

Chan-joon Moon (Editor/Writer) is a senior who is majoring in Journalism/Creative Writing. He is a news editor for The Ticker, Baruch College's student newspaper.

Francine Phillips (Editor/Writer) graduated with a major in Business Journalism. She was Editor-in-Chief for The Reporter, Baruch's evening student newspaper and has interned at 20/20 magazine.

Gabriel M. Reina (Illustrator) is a senior majoring in Business Communication, specializing in graphic communication.

Cindy Rivera (Asst. Art Director/Photographer) is a senior majoring in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication. She is currently interning at Dollars & Sense.

Lois Shellie (Senior Editor/Writer) is a junior with a double major in Creative Writing and Literature in the CUNY B.A. program. She is currently an executive assistant at the Environmental Defense Fund and is the Editor-in-Chief of its internal newsletter.

Mark Stephens (Inside/Out Editor/Writer) is a graduating senior majoring in Business Journalism. Last summer he reported for the trade magazine Business Travel News and is currently interning at The New York Times Syndicate.

Tia Sutresna (Production Manager) is a senior majoring in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication. She interned at Leo Burnett in Jakarta (Indonesia).

Harold Velarde (Art Director/Designer/Writer) is a junior majoring in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication. He is currently interning at Dollars & Sense.

Brett Wilker (Editor-in-Chief/Writer) is a junior majoring in Journalism/Creative Writing. He has written for The Village Voice.

Leah A. Williams (Web Master/Asst. Production Manager/Designer/Photographer) is a senior majoring in Computer Information Systems and Business Communication. She is creating a website for Dollars & Sense.

Sylvestre Zawadski (Illustrator) is an upper junior majoring in Psychology with a minor in Business Communication, specializing in Graphic Communication.