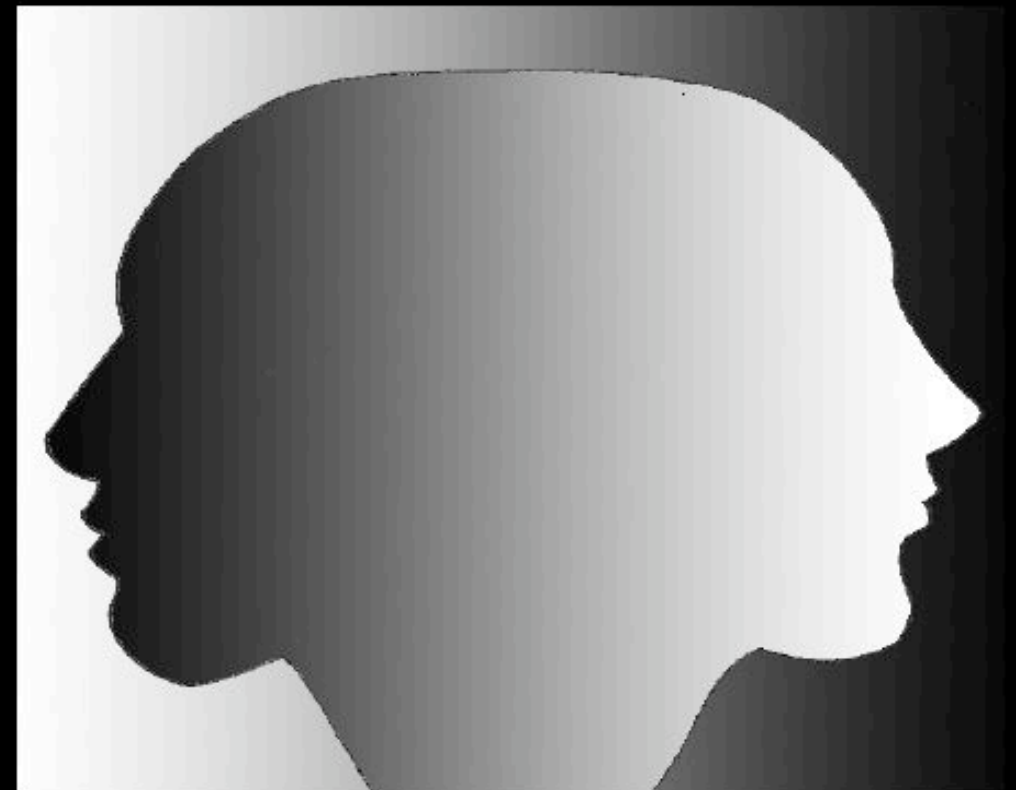


The Princeton University

PRISM

Diversity, Dialogue, Difference



May 2004 Issue

**“What does the word
‘Minority’ imply?”**

What does it feel like to
be called a minority for the
first time?

Also: Poetry and artwork

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Letter From the Editors

Dear *Prism* readers:

In a society that so often idolizes the *brotherhood of mankind* and preaches the belief that "all men are created equal", one would think that looking beyond the "external accidents" of its individuals would be second nature. However, due to the deep-rooted history and the complex nature of our society, one's own status is affected by qualities as, disability, class, education, race, gender, and sexuality. Are these merely *labels*? Or are they meaningful traits that are indicative of an individual's existence?

As a non-disabled, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian, African American male, my labels bequeath me with both advantages and disadvantages. And though my race has been the most disadvantageous facet of my being, I am willing to acknowledge that other aspects of my status have offered me privileges. In recognizing these privileges I am given the opportunity to whole-heartedly weaken the *concealed* system of advantages, abolish my prejudices and ease my tensions amongst persons of other categories. With that said, I vow to make strides to earnestly take the point of view of those not in the unstated norm. After all, the group in the majority is just as different from the minority as the minority from the majority. Moreover, those affiliated with a minority group may not be as abnormal as the majorities' perception, but may present more diverse and broad ideas of normal.

It is our desire that in this edition of the *Prism* that an examination of the effects of labels will inspire thought and conjure dialogue amongst the students of Princeton. From articles about 'being Jewish in Spain' and a 'statistical minority' to poetry about 'how our differences are exceptionally similar' we provide an introspective look into the consequences of categorizing individuals. So, while reading this edition continually think about your labels, how they have affected you, and their ramifications. Lastly, enjoy your read!

Best wishes,

Ronne Baldwin
Co-Editor-in-Chief

the PRISM

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Cover by Mayet Bell

MORRISON AND LANI GUINIER: READING LITERATURE THROUGH CIVIL RIGHTS

By Gladys Um (GS)

In Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a little girl, Pecola Breedlove, gets raped by her father and consequently goes insane. The incest scene is the culmination of a series of episodes that read like a case study in domestic dysfunctionality: an alcoholic father, a mother who neglects her children, and spouses who inflict brutal physical violence on each other. Flashbacks to the horrific childhood of Cholly, Pecola's father, provide a genealogy for the violence of the

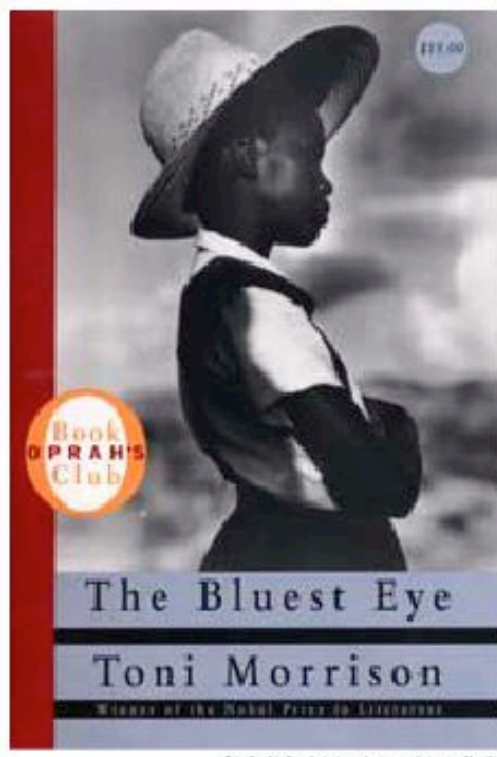
"Morrison's novel is at once an exquisite literary artifact and a cogent sociological document"

Breedloves, who seem bred to hate. Born fatherless to a woman abandoned by the man who had impregnated her, Cholly in turn is abandoned by his mother four days after birth and raised by his great-aunt. After his great-aunt's death, the teenaged Cholly seeks out his father, who repudiates him. Race and class provide further context for the struggles of this young man who grows up without any models of marriage or fatherhood. He is born black and impoverished in the South at the turn of the twentieth century, just a generation removed from slavery.

Morrison's novel is at once an exquisite literary artifact and a cogent sociological document. In terse, poetic language that recalls a gem polished to a high sheen, the novel reflects on important social issues that have not received widespread literary attention, lifting the veil of taboo from such subjects as domestic violence and incest. Its social insights are as relevant today as they were when the book was first published 34 years ago. Its perspective on domestic abuse complements the current discourse.

There is a tendency in contemporary discourse to treat domestic abuse primarily as a mental health

issue, a psychological malfunction in the same category with manic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and attention deficit disorder, which can be kept under control through a combination of medication and therapy. It would be safe to say that clinical remedies alone would not suffice to solve Pecola's problems, even if the Breedloves, whose sole financial provider is the mother who slaves away as a maid for a white family, could afford to pay for Prozac and counseling. The Breedloves' story suggests that domestic abuse is more than just a mental health issue; it is a structural issue that cannot be dissociated from the social, political, and economic context. The dysfunctionality of the Breedloves is a symptom of deep structural problems of a society that denies men like Cholly the opportunity to learn how to function as a husband and father. It follows that any attempt to address domestic



abuse that does not address structural factors would be akin to providing temporary relief for the symptoms without curing the disease.

"The suffering of marginalized racial groups can serve as an indicator of fundamental social problems"

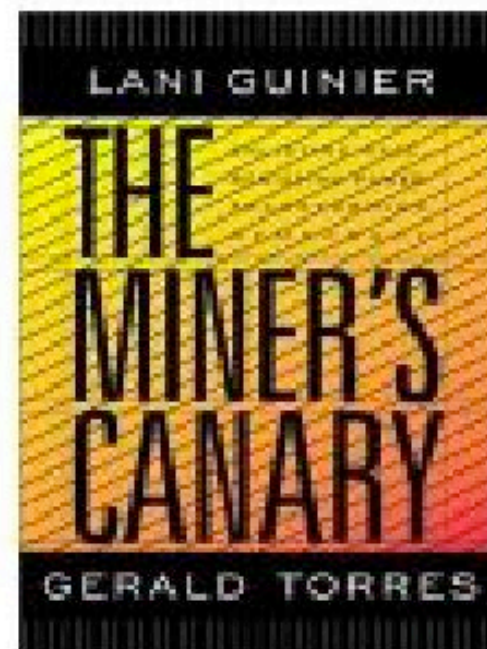
The sociological insight of *The Bluest Eye* is mirrored in the book *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (2002) by law professors Lani Guinier (Harvard) and Gerald Torres (University of Texas). The thesis of *The Miner's Canary* is that racial inequality is a symptom of deep structural problems in society that cut across racial boundaries. Guinier and Torres invoke the canary in the mine as a metaphor for the marginalized racial group in society. Miners once used canaries to gauge the atmospheric safety of mines. If the canary died, that would alert the miner to exit the mine and its toxic atmosphere. Just as the canary's death served as an indicator of pollutants in the mine, the suffering of marginalized racial groups can serve as an indicator of fundamental social problems.

At a conference she gave at the Woodrow Wilson School on October 7, 2003, Professor Guinier characterized the "canary" as "a diagnostic tool that enables us to see relationships between various structures within society and in particular, relationships of power. The idea is to change our thinking from pathologizing the canary to heeding the lessons of the canary."

An overarching theme of her presentation, which Guinier delivered with deep ethical conviction, buttressing her arguments with statistics and case studies, was how we can work toward creating a society in which demographic factors such as race, gender, and family background do not prevent people from achieving to their full potential. She brought attention to a fundamental flaw in American attitudes toward achievement. "We claim that the American Dream is awarded to individuals who work hard and play by the rules," she said, "and that therefore, when people are successful, they have a right to be personally satisfied because they have achieved as individuals. What about people who do not succeed? Those who fail are

individually responsible for their failure."

The flip side of the meritocratic model is that it absolves society of the responsibility to address circumstantial differences that often obstruct an individual's path to achievement. Among the targets of Guinier's critique was standardized testing, an ostensibly objective measure of intellectual potential designed to make university admissions meritocratic. She pointed out that SAT scores correlate more strongly with parental income, educational achievement, and occupational status than with the future college grades of the students who take the tests. It screens out



students from low-income families rather than those with low intellectual potential. Standardized testing is just one example of the ways in which socio-economic discrimination is built into the infrastructure that determines access to schools and jobs.

According to Guinier, discrimination is overarching, affecting every marginalized group in society: the poor, the nonwhite, and women. As the example of university admissions suggests, race is just one of the myriad manifestations of inequality. By virtue of its visible nature, it has the potential to bring attention to other structural flaws within society that are less visible.

NAUSEA AND COMMON SENSE

By Bobbie King '06

Oh, the drama caused by boobs. (For once, I'm not talking about the Bush administration.) So much has been made of this simple part of the female anatomy that we have to question how far we can let our queasiness overcome our common sense. Yes, Janet Jackson, in her exuberant display of her new purchase, could have shown better taste and more consideration. Does this require so much debate? Of course not. The fact is we all need to rethink a few things and consider the stupidity of our constant stomach aches.

Again and again, our public protests events that should not be subject to extended scrutiny. Janet's well decorated friend is the most *exposed* example

"The fact is we all need to rethink a few things and consider the stupidity of our constant stomach aches."

of such a trend. A more contentious issue is that of homosexuality. Day in and day out we hear of a new resolution or amendment to ban or legalize the union of homosexuals. It took years for the Supreme Court to finally cast down simple sodomy laws, which banned the more private displays of homosexual (and heterosexual) affection.

Now, homosexuals would simply like the right to have a legal (and sometimes religious) expression of unrequited love. They wish to foster each others growth and receive the benefits that the laws allow. We, however, allow our personal queasiness, as always, to take something harmless to anything but our stomachs and turn it into an outrageously overblown event.

Take some Tums and deal with the truth:

1) From time to time we will see a boob.

I personally enjoy them myself. We've known them since the first day from the womb. Every male, and some females, love the damn things. Why all the fuss when we get surprised by one?

2) Two guys might actually fall in love and get married.

Personally, I am not a fan of seeing it either, but that's

life. Most aren't disgusted when they see a woman and man holding hands, so let Tom and John live their lives.



Bobbie King '06

It's time to desensitize America and advertise the bold truth: Sometimes we just have to deal with the nausea, because after a while it will pass and we'll adjust. Beside, you may not realize it, but one of your best friends is gay and he/she is hiding it because you're such an ass about the whole thing. It's hard to deal with, isn't it? I know. We've all been there. It even might take a while to see that it shouldn't (or shouldn't have) changed anything, but once you take the medicine you'll see the light. At the very least you have a female friend who will have or already has displayed her twins too a wide audience.

For those overly sickened by this brave new world we live in, there's a chant. If you can say this without gagging, then we've made progress: "It's just a titty". I'm not just talking to those crazy conservatives out there, but to everyone who feels so offended (including me). I'm not even half-willing to claim that I am the model of open-mindedness. I still think drag queens are weird. If you do it with me though, I'll phase out the Tums and move one to the wonder drug called common sense.

"MINORITY" AND THE PARTITION OF THE HUMAN RACE

By Gladys Um'(GS)

Richard Rodriguez refuses to accept the label "minority" on the grounds that the term implies social marginalization, from which this phenomenally successful American essayist who holds a B.A. from Stanford, an M.A. from Columbia, and a Ph.D. from Berkeley, and who happens to be of Mexican descent, has largely been exempt.

I refuse the "minority" label on the grounds that it is less forthright than the "nonwhite" label. As someone on the receiving end of the labels "minority" and "nonwhite," I believe I am within my rights in expressing a preference for one or the other. The sole reason I am assigned the label "minority" is that I am "nonwhite"; that is, certain facial features I possess differentiate me from those considered "white."

The terms "majority" and "minority" are peculiar lexical items in that their referents are moving targets across time and space. The criterion determining a person's membership in the category of majority or minority depends on the geographic setting as well as the historical period. In the United States, a shift in racial consciousness among the ruling class occurred around the twentieth century. Before, the notion of "majority" had been reserved for people of English, usually Protestant descent. Now the category of "majority" has expanded to include all persons of European descent and certain groups of Near Eastern descent. Before the twentieth century, differences in national or ethnic origin within the group of Americans of European descent mattered enough in the minds of most people of the dominant class that the concept of "majority" could be applied to some people of European origin and not to others. Since the twentieth century, the dominant perception of what constituted a "majority" has been based primarily on externally manifest physiological features.

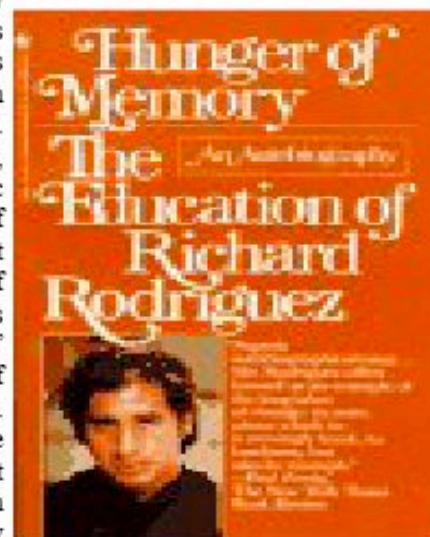
Jews, Irish, and other ethnic groups, which had been considered "minority" in the nineteenth century, are now part of the "majority."

The only thing that remains constant about the majority/minority dichotomy is its function of partitioning a population of human beings in a way that reveals the primary classificatory preoccupations of a

"I refuse the 'minority' label on the grounds that it is less forthright than the 'nonwhite' label"

society. The particular criterion used for the partition is arbitrary: it could be facial features, religious affiliation, geographical origin, or language. Since the twentieth century, minority status has been defined by physical appearance, namely, facial structure, without regard to ethnicity, language, religion or other cultural criteria. Under the present classificatory scheme, a fifth-generation American of Chinese ancestry who attends an Episcopal Church, eats turkey on Thanksgiving, celebrates the fourth of July with barbecues and fireworks, and speaks English with a standard American accent, is a "minority" while a Serbian immigrant who attends an Eastern Orthodox church, speaks English with a heavy foreign accent, and is ignorant of American cultural traditions is a "majority" because of his physical features.

The term "minority" is an evasive speech act. It is a way to manifest—and perpetuate—a preoccupation with certain physical features without explicit reference to criterion which determines who gets assigned to



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this category. What people mean when they call me a minority is that I am a minority by a particular set of physical criteria. I suspect that the appeal of the word "minority" rests on its ambiguity. It masks the real issue at stake, which is none other than the obsession with skin color, facial structure, hair texture—a set of attributes selected from an infinite set of possible attributes on which to categorize human beings. The real issue is the belief that this particular set of attributes is somehow more essential than any other set of attributes, that this way of partitioning the human species is more appropriate than any other. The word "minority" is a euphemism for nonwhite. I would prefer the more speech act in the appellation "nonwhite" to the euphemism circumventing the real issue.

The "minority" label feels safer than any other label because of the objectivity implicated by its quantitative denotation. What could be more objective than the denotation "less than 50%"? Majority/minority are statistical categories whereas white/nonwhite are nonexistent categories. The term "minority" conceals,

behind the language of quantification, the impossibility of assigning humans to racial categories. Most so-called "black" Americans have some white ancestry, many Americans are of mixed European, African and Asian ancestry, not to mention those persons whose geographical origins are in Asia but whose facial features resemble Europeans' and persons whose geographical origins are in Europe but who carry genes of Mongolian invaders from Asia.

It is easier on most people's conscience to assign the label "minority", an abstract statistical term that in itself is devoid of content, than to use fuzzy terms like "white" and "nonwhite." But the use of the words majority/minority imposes a dichotomy between white/nonwhite; it is a speech act that affirms and perpetuates an arbitrary selection from among an infinite set of possible criteria on which to partition the human species.

If I had it my way, I would be referred to simply as a human being. Given the choice between the evasive appellation "minority" and the more honest label "nonwhite," I would choose the latter.

"But the use of the words majority/minority imposes a dichotomy between white/nonwhite"

SHABBAT SAVILLANO

By Elizabeth Landau '06

"Hay algún judío aquí?"

Had a teacher surveyed a typical class of 30 students in my middle school as to how many students were Jewish, at least 10 would have said yes. In high school or at Princeton, maybe 5-10 would have affirmed, depending. But Professor Romero, my Intercultural Communications teacher at the University of Sevilla, Spain, didn't ask "Are there any Jewish students here on a typical Monday afternoon this spring." What he asked was "Hay algún judío aquí?" – "Is there a Jew here?" It just so happened that, sí, there was one Jew out of 25 Spanish communications majors and 5 American study abroad students. *A Jew. Me.*

In 1492 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel expelled the Jewish population of Spain, permitting only those who agreed to become Catholic to stay. Those who fled became known as *sephardim*, after *sefard*, the Hebrew word for Spain. Portugal and Northern Africa saw an influx of Jewish refugees shortly after the Inquisition, and eventually the *sephardim* spread throughout Europe. Today there remains a sephardic community in Israel that preserves *ladrijo*, the same Spanish dialect spoken by Jews in 15th century Spain. In Spain today, of its 10,000 Jews most of them live in Madrid or Barcelona, though substantial communities still persist in smaller towns and the island of Gibraltar. But for the spring of 2004 I had chosen to study in Sevilla, a city of about 750,000 inhabitants in the sunny southern province of Andalusia. Although one may get lost in the "Judería" district of Barrio de Santa Cruz and even eat at a cafe called Bar de Juderia, a pedestrian wearing a yarmulke (skullcap) or a tallis (prayer shawl) in Sevilla would be a rarity indeed. After reading up on Franco's friendship with Hitler, and a former study abroad student's webpage referring to a Jewish population of about 80 in Sevilla, I began to suspect that in this part of Spain, swastikas would be more prevalent than Jewish people. In fact, when my roommate Sofia and I went horseback riding in Doñana National Park, that is exactly what we found: swastika

graffiti on the road and a bench, right in front of a blue spray-painted declaration "Putá Judios," which we Americans may take as either "Jewish bitches" or "screw the Jews."

This discovery, compounded my spotting a Star of David with a line struck through it painted on a wall in central Madrid, cast a shadow of fear over the possibility of observing Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath that lasts from sunset on Friday to sunset

on Saturday. In America, especially in large cities with heavy Jewish populations such as Philadelphia and New York, one can see flocks of families walking to synagogue on a Friday night, and afterwards returning to their homes for a special meal that includes soft circular *challah* bread and wine. But for me, the most important part of attending a Shabbat service at my synagogue in the Philadelphia suburbs was that crucial period after the final blessing over the wine cup when everyone turns to the adjacent person, gently shakes her hand, says "Shabbat Shalom," and catches up on life news, etc. This is the moment when even outsider should feel part of the community, welcomed by a handshake and friendly conversation. As an American in Spain, I was already an outsider; if I could find a Jewish community in Sevilla, I reasoned, I might have a feasible gateway into the culture and people of this foreign land.

So when I found out from my study abroad office that a Shabbat ceremony actually did occur for whoever wanted to participate at the "Calle Bustos Taverna Synagogue" every Friday evening, I immediately marked the address on my calendar, but at the same time prepared myself for a secretive cult-like ritual in someone's basement. If only 80 Jews lived in Sevilla, even less would actually attend synagogue, especially on a Friday night. Before going I read an article online by a girl who had studied in Sevilla last semester and found the synagogue to occupy one room in a dilapidated building "far from the center of town." Nonetheless, at 7:45 that Friday, I headed northeast

"What he asked was 'Hay algún judío aquí?'- 'Is there a Jew here?'"

PRISM

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according to my already tattered map; I told no one where I was going.

In my mind, the Comunidad Israelita inhabited a shack in a run-down neighborhood of knife-bearing gangsters. But in reality, Calle Bustos Taverna turned out to be about 10 minutes north of my apartment in Plaza de San Francisco (where heretics were tried and burned back in the day), just a few streets over from Plaza Duque, home of the department megastore Corte Ingles, and even closer to the Roman ruins behind the bus stop at Plaza de Encarnación. At 7:55pm, Sevilla was alive with thousands of people of all ages in the streets, licking their *conos de helado* from McDonalds or smoking on the benches, or waiting for a bus, or admiring polka-dotted flamenco attire in shop windows. Though I assumed this “typical Spanish” activity was isolated from the occultish, secretive Jewish society, every person I asked pointed me in the right direction to Calle Bustos Taverna. All I had to do was find number 8. Turning at number 6, I saw two men in a doorway talking and eyeing me.

“Yes, this is the synagogue,” the gray-haired one told me before I even opened my mouth.

For the one room it occupied, the synagogue did present itself well: red

curtains, a wooden arc for the torah, sterling silver 7-candle menorahs, tapestries with Hebrew writing, crown molding, and simple scaffolding in front of the rear section of foldable chairs. When I moved forward to sit down near a 30-ish man with a beard, an older man tapped me on the shoulder and directed me towards the other set of chairs.

“Women over there,” he explained in heavily-accented English. “The sephardic way.”

The service itself was the shortest I had ever witnessed for any Jewish occasion in my life: less than 20 minutes total, mostly with the men mumbling or silently reading and bowing, while the women stared at them in stupor. I was the only woman who had taken a prayer book.

During the service I noticed that no one was really leading; those who held *siddurim* had apparently gone through the same routine every Friday night, but not so much that they said their prayers in unison; on the contrary, the chorus of voices did not chant in

perfect unison, and during some portions seemed to mumble and gutter over the syllables. One of the only two young men in the room bowed over and over. An older man simply stared into space the entire time. At first I thought the man who sat in the center of the room was the rabbi, but when I asked the man who locked up, it turned out there was no rabbi. They were going to bring a rabbi from the north of Africa, but it turned out to be too expensive, he told me.

As a woman and an American, and an American redhead at that, superficially I stuck out as a *guiñi*, a non-Spanish foreigner with nothing to offer. But recognizing the line “I’ha do dee lee crat calah” – the welcoming of the Sabbath bride -- and the words to a traditional song called Yigdal, I did not lose confidence that, yes, though my ancestors came from a different part of Europe, sang different melodies, and practiced different customs, we were all united somehow, in an ancient culture that has endured despite persecution, against all odds. Despite my dramatic personal

variations on Biblical practices and beliefs (I would unremorsefully drink a glass of milk with a hamburger, for example), my Jewish heritage is something I cannot sever. Though it has not altered the pigmentation of my

skin or the shape of my facial features, Judaism as an ancient struggle against persecution runs through my blood, my breath, and in the blood and breath of the *Sephardim* in Sevilla, even if women still have to sit on the other side of the room.

I knew the service was over when the men murmured “Shabbat Shalom” to each other, sometimes shaking each other’s hands or patting each other on the back. This is what I was waiting for: the post-prayer chatting among community members.

My heart sunk when the younger men grabbed their jackets and headed for the door. Since no one stepped forward to talk to me or wish me a happy Sabbath, it became blatantly obvious that no one was going to invite me to a Shabbat dinner, let alone introduce me to the rest of the community.

To my left, the young woman who had entered shortly after I did and inquired about teaching Flamenco was speaking to an older woman, and one of the men waited for her. Realizing that their conversation had

“Judaism as an ancient struggle against persecution runs through my blood, my breath”

more to do with job-seeking than schmoozing, I turned to the man and asked if he is from Seville. He was.

“Cuántos judíos hay aquí?” I asked, inquiring as to how many Jews lived in Sevilla.

“Es una comunidad pequenita,” he said (“It is a small community”). “18 personas.”

18?!

“Hay anti-semitismo aquí?” I asked.

“¿Qué?”

“You speak Spanish?” asked the man who had sat in the center, apparently the “secretary.” I nodded. “Then speak Spanish?”

“Hay anti-semitismo aquí?” I asked again, making an effort to enunciate my vowels.

“Pues, no hay judíos!” the man said. He and the leader had a good laugh. “Si no hay judíos, no puede ser antisemitismo!”

I had never thought about it before, but suddenly it made sense: if there were no Jews, there couldn’t be anti-semitism.

The first man guessed there were about 18 Jews in the whole city, the sort-of-leader estimated 80, since most of them never went to services. Perhaps the only reason why swastikas permeated Doñana and an X-ed out Star of David marks a central plaza in Madrid is that many Jews still carry on in those places, guarding ancient traditions, keeping a dangerous faith.

“Es bueno que hay servicios cada viernes,” I told the short red-faced man who locked the door when everyone had left.

He looked at me as though he hadn’t quite understood, and a few seconds later I realized that “servicios” probably wasn’t the word I had intended; in fact, this was the caption above the bathroom. I should have said, I suppose, “reunion,” which means meeting, but also reminds me of what the Bustos Taverna synagogue really is: a weekly reunion of about a dozen Jews scattered in Sevilla, holding onto something that their ancestors were expelled from that very place for in 1492.

“Shabbat shalom,” I called to the man on the street. Around me, passersby gave me a quizzical look, perhaps wondering the significance of this phrase,

perhaps incredulous at hearing *that* phrase on the streets of Sevilla. But in my heart I knew that, given that judíos sevillanos are such a rare find, Hebrew words have no more meaning on these streets than spoken HTML.

* * *

“Hay algún judío aquí?” Professor Romero asked one day in March, a few weeks after my visit to the Calle Bustos Taverna synagogue.

“Sí,” I said, raising my hand after it was clear that no one else had.

“Bueno,” he said, going over to the chalk board and drawing a Star of David. “¿Sabes que es?”

I explained that this was the Star of David, symbolizing the Jewish religion and Israel. To me, the star embodies the enduring faith of the Jewish people and the quest for a land where Jews can practice their faith in peace.

“Hay algún palestino aquí?” he asked then, inquiring as to whether there was a Palestinian student in the classroom. To my surprise, a boy in the back called “Sí.”

What did the Star of David mean to him?

Killing. Murder. Terrorism.

A Star of David to a Palestinian is like a Swastika to me. But there

is a difference between nationalism and religion; not all Jews support Israel, not all Palestinians support Palestine, not all Muslims support Palestine, not all Israelis support Israel. Perhaps, to its artist, the crossed-out Star of David in Madrid was an expression of anti-terrorism. But for me it is an anti-religious symbol, inextricably linked with the persecution of my ancestors, irrespective of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

So 512 years after the grand expulsion of Spain’s Jews, their traditions live on here in however small numbers, in whatever secrecy, through whatever means, and among graffiti artists their presence is still controversial. But as a Jewish-American studying here, I am proud to join that enduring minority, whether in a one-room synagogue or in a classroom where I’m the only one who can say for certain “Sí, todavía hay judíos en Sevilla”—that is to say, we are still here.



INTERNATIONAL FRESHMEN ADJUST TO PRINCETON LIFE

By Rohan Kapadia '06

Coming to Princeton is always a big change for freshmen when they first arrive here. Except for those actually from the town, it involves leaving your hometown and family and moving to a new place, as well as beginning four years in a new and probably very unfamiliar environment. But for some, the changes are significantly larger than for most. Around nine percent of the university's student body is international, coming from every continent in the world. For these students, the initial transition to being at Princeton can vary from being simple and painless to being a little more difficult or uncomfortable. This is part of the reason that the university holds its International Pre-Orientation every year. While most students are on Outdoor and

Community Action, Princeton has an International Pre-Orientation to help the students coming from all corners of the globe get acquainted with their new surroundings and get over their

jetlag. Since the beginning of freshman year is often a time when students stick to the friends they made in OA, International Pre-orientation can be a very valuable experience. It gives students who can't go into the wilderness after a 27-hour flight the chance to also meet people.

Being away from home is one of the hardest problems most freshmen face. It is especially difficult for most International students because they can only go home during winter break. According to Pardon Makumbe '07, from Zimbabwe, "homesickness is especially pronounced when parents and siblings of roommates visit". Many subtle cultural differences, too, can make adjustment bumpy at the beginning. For example, the ways of greeting people can differ greatly in other countries. Many students are confused by the often casual use of "how are you?" without an expectation of a reply. Forbes College resident Aitalohi (Aita) Aimaze '07 says that she "wondered whether they really cared or whether it was merely a social norm."

Meeting and introducing themselves to other people is also more difficult for these students: Aita, who comes from Taiwan and is Nigerian and Taiwanese, says that "most of the time, when they discover that I cannot attach myself to a specific state when asked the question 'where are you from?' the conversation ends shortly." Part of this difficulty is usually caused by unfamiliarity with other parts of the world. She concludes that "when one says 'I am from New Jersey' or 'Pennsylvania', people follow by asking 'oh, what part?'" whereas having less exposure to Taiwan prevents people from understanding her home background as well as they would that of someone who comes from a region they are familiar with. Sometimes people confuse

Taiwan with Thailand when meeting her and she has to explain the difference, and she says people often ask her "what language they speak in Taiwan?" Pardon, too, wishes that people at

Princeton were more familiar with the outside world. He says that many people he meets think Zimbabwe is "a lot less developed than it actually is", believe that he must have "narrow experiences" because of his background, or that not being from the US makes him "not as cool."

Another huge adjustment every student from another country has to make that goes completely unnoticed by others is getting used to using US dollars. Almost all international students spends the first few weeks they are here converting all the prices they see but don't understand yet, and soon learn to stop doing so after realizing that the prices are in totally different ranges from that of which they used in at home. In fact, for Aimaze, this was one of the most difficult things to get used to when she arrived. Because Taiwanese currency is worth 1/35 of a US dollar, she says she, "found herself mentally multiplying every price tag by 35 and then deciding quicker than a blink of an eye that nothing was worth buying."

"Being away from home is one of the hardest problems most freshmen face"

Considering the difficulty in adjusting to a new environment so far away from home, why do so many students from every part of the Earth still choose to come to Princeton? In actuality, the difficulties international students face in adjusting begins to fade away after a while and almost everyone is able to join in campus life with only a little more effort than American students.

Makumbe has wanted to come to the university since he was twelve. At the time, he says that although he did not know much about Princeton in comparison to US colleges in general, "the name and place just appealed to me, I just loved the place!" The difference between Princeton and Zimbabwean schools, he says,

is the great number of resources available here and the large amount of university support. Aimaze too was attracted by all the opportunities available to students, such as theatre, music, lecture series, film showings, culture shows and dance, as well as the chance to "meet people of different ethnicities, backgrounds, interests and ideals."

After completing almost their first whole year at Princeton, both these freshmen are very positive about their experience so far.

According to Makumbe, "Princeton is the perfect strike of a research university with strong undergraduate emphasis. That did it for me, and I figure it's working pretty well!"

"Considering the difficulty in adjusting to a new environment so far away from home, why do so many students from every part of the Earth still choose to come to Princeton?"



Elisabeth Landa '06

¿CACHAI? MICROS AND THE JOYS OF CHILEAN LIFE

by Krista Brune '06

One afternoon last week, I found myself squished onto a dirty bus with sixty strangers that did not speak my language and holding on for dear life. All I had to do was survive the ride...not a simple task when the micro flies over bumpy roads and jerks to sudden stops to let more people on (when it is already packed as tightly as a can of sardines)... and manage to get off the bus at the right street. It shouldn't be too difficult, right? I attempted to maneuver around the other cramped, tired and agitated passengers to reach the exit as the bus continued its wild ride. *Permiso, permiso* I kept repeating, vaguely hoping that I would reach the door by the time the bus passed my street without hurting another passenger or making a fool of myself. I was holding onto that impossible dream when the bus zoomed over a pothole...my sense of dignity and pride escaped out the window as I fell into the lap of a young, Chilean woman. I can only imagine what she was thinking, but at least she did not say anything. The little kid standing next to her was not as kind- he turned around, pointed and started laughing at me. Yes, the *gringuita* had become the laughing stock of yet another Santiago bus...probably a daily occurrence in this city of six million people. I tried to hide my shame as I left the bus, embarrassed and wondering what the heck I am doing in another country, another hemisphere, and another world...

The simple answer to this question would be what I thought when I decided to study abroad for a semester in Santiago- I was going to learn about another culture, travel to a different part of the world, and improve my Spanish. Although I anticipated the difficulties and differences, I thought that "culture" meant literature, art, food, theater and dance...more than the (supposedly) simple events of daily life. I also mistakenly thought my most arduous task would be trying to communicate in Spanish. It did not occur to me that I would have to learn a new language, Chilean. I now listen to conversations sprinkled with a variety of *chilenismos*. Sentences now end with uniquely Chilean phrase *si, po* or *¿Cachai?*, variants of the Castilian *si, pues* (yes, well) or *¿Entiendes?* (Do you understand?). I'm slowly adjusting to the overwhelming use of these phrases in Chilean discourse, but the other uniquely

Santiago cultural element of the *micros* will require some more time. My host mom, who is filled with affection and knowledge, has informed me that my most difficult *prueba* (test) during my five months in this country will be getting on and off of a *micro*. So far, I would have to agree with her analysis of the situation.

The synthesis of Chilean culture represented by these infamous yellow buses has truly surprised me. These are not your typical American school buses or city buses, but instead the hub of *Santiagoño* life and the heart of their public transportation. People from all walks of life - young, old, rich, poor, workers, students, and professors- enter these buses on a daily basis. On these forms of transport, the diverse participants in Santiago society interact with each other if only for a brief while. Sometimes, the actual physical contact on these rides is a bit much- especially for an American used to adequate personal space.

During my first two weeks in Santiago, I have seen more rarities and have more stories to share from my experiences on the *micro* than from any other aspect of my stay. On each ride, at least one or two vendors have gotten on the bus attempting to sell ice cream, cold drinks, gum, candy, lottery tickets, cell phone holders or a variety of other goods only to quickly exit and continue their sales on the next passing bus. A man with a silver-painted face entered the bus, moving like a robot and saying "I am a machine" in a monotone fashion. After his performance, his son ran up and down the bus aisles asking the other riders to give his dad money. During another ride, I was treated to a hip-hop performance by a duo that gave a spiel similar to that of flight attendants before they started singing: "Thank you for your attention. We hope you are having a safe and enjoyable ride today..." The song was even more entertaining- singing in Spanish to an American hip-hop tune.

Each ride on a *micro* is likely to be filled with new and unique experiences. The cultural knowledge of living in this city and experiencing it like a Chilean would - with multiple *micro* rides a day- could not be replaced by anything learned in a book or movie...this is the real Santiago. *¿Cachai?*

LEARNING BY OSMOSIS

by Sean Cameron '05

I just met a man waiting for the evening bus
just like me.

I asked him what he thought about war, abortion, capital punishment, and affirmative action.
He studied me a moment, looked around, checked himself, and gave his response.

He was an intelligent man with well-articulated opinions
Derived from the people who kept an eye on him
Types of people who read Borges at bus stations through dark sunglasses
Or took college courses on avant-garde political thought
Or creative writing classes

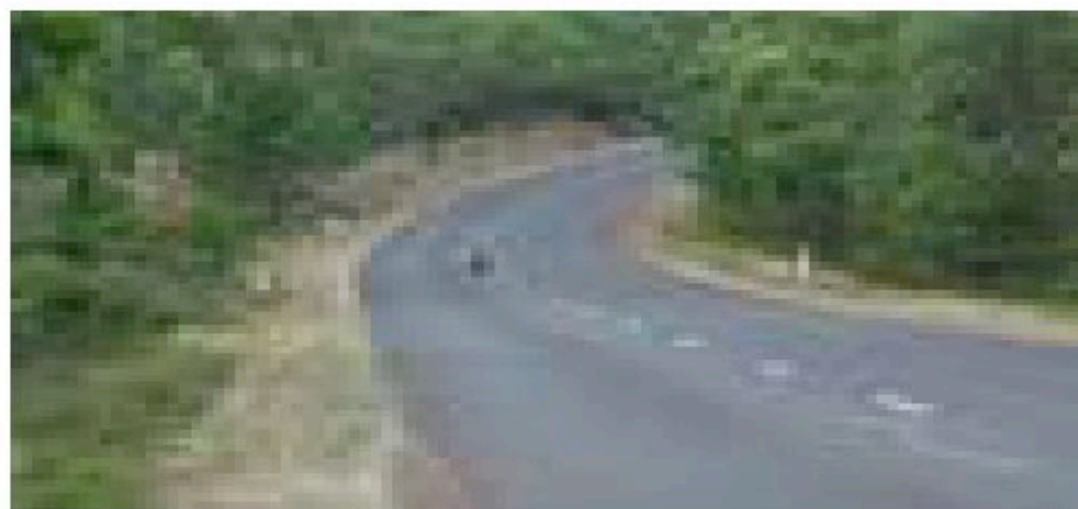
Or philosophy classes to avoid appearing dull.
These people had spoken to him.
I considered asking where he was from, too - a little about his background,
But that would have been redundant at that point.

The man had sized me up too.
He asked me for my opinions.
I told him.

Everything was the opposite,
but we were the same.

I formulated my judgments as he did.
Only I'd been on the receiving end of the other side's commentary all my life, forced to nod and sit in silence.
Just like him.

He asked me for a light.
We smoked in the dark, waiting for another passerby to ask about his opinions,
To see who he'd been hanging around,
To see in whose hands this world was in after all.



Josh Steen

TRUE INSPIRATION

By Theri Pickens '05

I held my paper and all I could think was that I needed
an ambulance.

My paper was bleeding - from multiple gunshot
wounds - and as I sat in the waiting room of my mind,
I contemplated whether resuscitation would be the best
recourse or was it a waste of health insurance, I mean
time, to conduct further tests on the patient, I mean
paper, then I finally decided to tuck it away in my file
cabinet, I mean authorize euthanasia.

And as I read the 2 page single spaced ten point times
new roman font commentary on what had gone wrong
I couldn't be angry at the good professor, I mean
doctor because she wasn't trying to heal my paper, she
was trying to heal me.

Teach me
Tell me

There's a reason why our library looks like a church
and when people ask what the dickens is Dickinson
doing next to the chapel?

I have to answer both questions with one sentence:
Ideas are sacred and I deem it necessary to recognize
these facts as truth, truth that is powerful, and I speak
truth to power that podium and pulpit are not that
different.

These square boxes are simply oversized books
begging us to open them and comprehend the ideas
that resonate from within them, that reverberate in the
hollowed hallowed halls of academia.

But maybe it's just me that seems to hear the echo
they leave behind.

Pens that drop from notebooks unwritten in
Texts without highlights,

The refraction of light from my eyes sees that they
are talking sometimes to no avail, to people who use
polysyllabic words as a veil and are compelled to tell a
classroom of 20 to 25 people how they were interested
and or intrigued by the authors tone in this passage
and how they can't wait to investigate the ideas that
hit them

when what they are really doing is participating in
academic ventriloquism.

So who's hand is up in what?

If we are not dummies, then how did we learn to be
free?

I tell you it is because the good doctors make our
papers bleed.

Because in the waiting room of my mind I discovered
that in my community the road of intellectualism is the
one less traveled by.

It hath made all the difference that my black
professors have walked the road ahead of me.

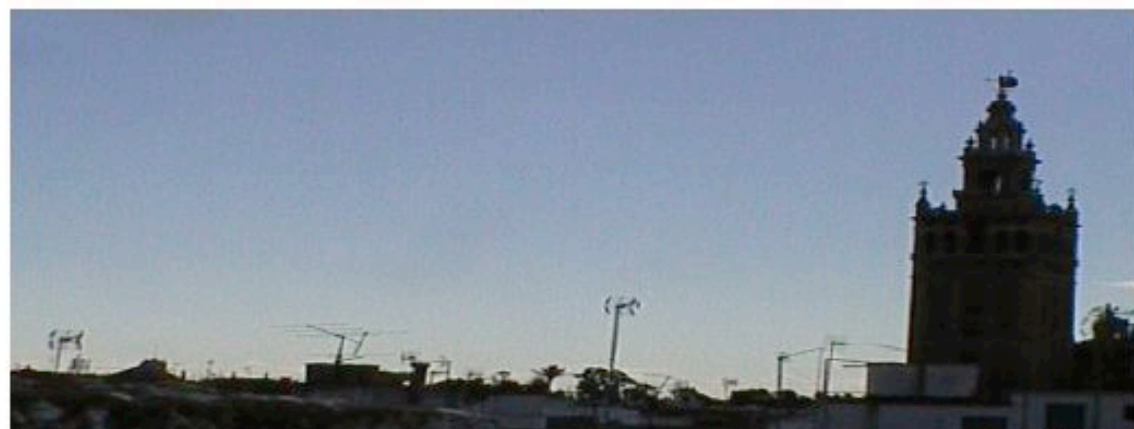
So I stand here saying this is for you -
for every paper you wrote as an undergraduate,
for your generals,

for your dissertation,

for every time you lecture exemplifying bold
intellectual proclamation,

we tell you that you deserve a standing ovation.

For inspiring us to share in this sacred trust,
we say thank you, thank you very much.



Elizabeth Linder '06

OWNING THE LETTERS: POETRY AND CULTURE IN
TRANSLATION WITH AYISHA KNIGHT

By Jesse Davie-Kessler '06

I face Ayisha Knight¹, and I try to read her
hands before the translator does. She is communicating
through American Sign Language and an interpreter to
a round table of Princeton students; we gathered to
hear her "survival poetry" at Princeton University's
Women's Center. "I can't be described in one
checked box on college applications," she is telling
us. "I am the daughter of a white Jewish mother and
a Black Cherokee father by birth, but I was raised in a
community of single mothers who raised me as their
own."² There are "not enough labels to go around,"
Knight says—or perhaps there are too many. She rolls
her eyes at the growing laundry list of identities: black,
deaf, openly gay, a survivor of sexual assault. Poetry,
she explains, has helped her to recover from this last
experience. And when she later signs her poetry—with
the help of a translator—to a spoken-word recording of
it, one line in particular wrenches my gut: "I am not a
rape victim any more because I now own the letters that
spell the word 'survivor.'"

Language, "own[ing] the letters," has given
Knight back her body. "I wore the label of/ VICTIM,"
Knight writes in her autobiographical poem "Pass It
On," "until ten years later/ when wisdom cloaked/ in
poetry/ unraveled lies with
its/ spoken truth/ and healed
this/ wrinkle in time."³ As
Knight presents, I shift from
futile attempts to translate
her single, separate hand
motions to a reading of her
broader story. She looks

*"I am not a rape victim
anymore because I now own
the letters that spell the word
'survivor.'"*

Heavenward with chagrin to describe an embarrassing
moment; her magnetized hands smack together as she
speaks of emotional attachments to other members of
the deaf community at Gallaudet School for the Deaf.
She needs no translator to convey her idealism and her
creative energy to this room of hearing students. She
is dancing with her hands, speaking with her body,
penetrating the silence that so often surrounds cultural
difference. I only wish that I could mute, for a minute,
the interpreter's voice—so that I could hear Knight

more clearly.

Through ASL, Knight "gives voice" to emotions
that her body spells out. I am not surprised to learn that
Knight studied Theater as an Undergraduate student—
her poetry in itself is a sort of textualized performance.
Perhaps because of her experience in drama, or perhaps
simply as an outcome of her proficiency in American
Sign Language, her body language communicates the
emotions that drive her poetry to a non-ASL-literate
hearing audience with staggering power. If Knight's
poetry has helped her to reclaim her body, it has done
so in two senses: through a cathartic process of writing,
the shaping of pain-packed memory into written text,
and then through the physical performance of these
poems, in which her body *itself* becomes a means of
expression.

Knight describes the relief she felt when she
entered Gallaudet School for the Deaf, where she at
last felt recognized by her peers as a social person. She
quickly found those with whom she could most closely
relate: black women. But as nurturing as the Gallaudet
community was—especially the smaller community of
black women that she discovered for herself—there
was one drawback: one entered at the risk of alienating
oneself from the hearing
community. Her ongoing
challenge, she tells us, has
been to plant herself firmly in
a diverse hearing world while
still depending on her friends
in the deaf community for
support.

After she signs one poem, Knight asks the
group to share something about ourselves. We must
look taken aback; we are not expecting our presenter
to question us so soon. For the first time since we
arrived, the room is silent; nobody moves. Knight
nods, and then goes on to share another poem, this one
about body image and disordered eating. Again she
addresses the audience: she asks if some of us relate
to the experiences she describes. Two girls speak, but
most of us turn our glances downward and inward.

Knight seems so easily to give voice to her memories, these “spoken truths”—eating disorders, abuse, questions surrounding identity. Knight has confided to a room of students she has just met those experiences that lay “buried” for ten years, “beneath lost time.” Her sincerity cuts across our diverse backgrounds faster than her hands give flight. Just as she has “[un]wrinkled time” with her language, she has

“Her sincerity cuts across our diverse backgrounds faster than her hands give flight”

also cleansed this space, before cluttered with twenty people’s “labels” of cultural identity. In their place, she sees a group with stories worth telling. And yet the circle of students “gather[ed] round” this table, “listen[ing] to the whispers,” do not whisper back. Our silence drags on into discomfort.

Knight leaves us with a smile and a question: “do you have a place you can express yourselves?” We applaud Knight emphatically, extending our jazzed hands into the space around ourselves, past one minute and into the next, off-balance and transfixed. She reads us and laughs. That sound breaks the spell, and we pass breathless into the corridor.

(Endnotes)

¹ For more information on Ayisha Knight and to hear recorded segments of her poetry, visit her website at www.ayishaknight.com. Look also for her poetry in the “Def Poetry Jam” —she is the first deaf poet whose work will be performed in the show.

² Knight’s statement to the Princeton students concerning her identity, I later found, was practically identical to that included in her personal website.

³ All following textual quotations will be drawn from Knight’s poem “Pass It On.”

PASS IT ON

By Ayisha Knight

Shhh. Don't tell anyone.
It will be our little secret.

There in the basement,
clean laundry mixes with
dirty deeds
and a secret is kept.
By the time I rejoin
the party that never missed me,
I have buried the memory
beneath lost time
and the lie that says
I have the right to
remain silent,
but not before
I remember
the smell of semen and tide.

Remember, Anger Permeates Everything (RAPE)

staining my consciousness
with false testimony
given by lying tongues
pre-treated with
fear and guilt
until I become brainwashed
and start spinning
out of control.

Endless cycles of self hatred
soaked with shame
left me so confused

I couldn't remember my name
so I wore the label of
VICTIM

forgetting that I was neither
Vic nor Tim

until ten years later,
when wisdom cloaked
in poetry

unraveled lies with its
spoken truth
and healed this
wrinkle in time.

Ladies, gather round,
listen to the whispers
then pass it on.

Tell everyone,
they have the right
to speak to the world.

What do you believe is most important and why? How does my religious upbringing factor into what I believe? How does what you believe affect how you live your life? How have your religious beliefs evolved, or continue to evolve? How can my academics inform my beliefs? What thinkers have influenced your life and what were their religious beliefs? Is one religious tradition inherently better than another? Is Spirituality possible without religious tradition? Is God a Democrat? Republican? Green? Apolitical? How can I respect my neighbor's beliefs if I believe something different? How should society and religion relate to one another? What am I meant to do with my life???

The Office of Religious Life At Princeton University

We like questions.

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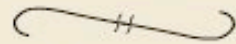
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Elizabeth Lanza '06

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