

## With Ferguson, Hamilton College's Privilege Shines

Joe Simonson  
*Editor-in-Chief*

Privilege may as well be the 2014 Word of the Year. Next to microaggression and twerking, it holds a prominent place in the vocabulary of self-satisfied Millennials. We've all heard about the various facets of privilege, "White Privilege," "Male Privilege," "Straight Privilege," "Anal Privilege," (this term was mentioned by a good friend of mine at the University of Connecticut where his class discussed the advantages associated with being born with a proper alimentary canal) as well as an unlimited amount of others.

Every student at Hamilton College, believe it or not, enjoys some type of privilege over their fellow man. The very fact that so many Hamilton students are so well versed in neo-Marxist and Frankfurt School theories is a testament to this privilege. The young radicals obsessed with structures of oppression, inequality, and critical theory can all thank the privilege of having their parents, a wealthy benefactor, a bank, or the government subsidize the study of criticizing the very institutions that brought them here.

When the Ferguson verdict came out last Monday, many individuals both at Hamilton and elsewhere shared their feelings (which is all we seem to do nowadays). Before reading any of the testimonies or evidence released by the prosecutor, a large number of Hamilton College's social justice activists were ready to condemn the verdict.

Some in the media went further. In perhaps another desperate bid to retain relevance, *Time* magazine published an article entitled "Ferguson: In Defense of Rioting." A writer for the hip metamodern online magazine *The New Inquiry*—no relation—published the piece, "In Defense of Looting." Some no-name blog told us to "check our looting privilege."

On their Twitters and Facebooks,

Hamilton students shared these sentiments. The message of these students and other writers is clear: the destruction of small businesses (many of which are minority owned) and public property is permissible whenever people perceive an injustice has taken place.

Now, let me be clear: Any language endorsing this kind of behavior should be universally condemned. The students who believe that it is permissible for an immigrant's business to be destroyed because of a judicial verdict are intellectually bankrupted, vapid nihilists whose sadism and disregard for the well-being of innocents suggests a fundamental flaw in character and psychological soundness. The Hamilton College administration and Days-Massolo Center should swiftly react to this kind of language and declare it unacceptable and antithetical to the kind of community Hamilton College wishes to foster.

I do not believe that this kind of language should be banned, either by our school or the government, but deep self-reflection ought to take place about how we react to bad news. If a notice from an administrator needs to be the catalyst, so be it.

So where does privilege fit into all of this? Well, to my knowledge not a single Hamilton student hails from Ferguson, Missouri. I don't think any Hamilton student was a victim of rioting or looting. I don't think any parent of a Hamilton student woke up the morning after the decision was announced and saw their workplace destroyed. I don't think any Hamilton student looked out their window and saw the dystopian scene of a National Guard soldier with a loaded rifle standing by the road. No, instead the only thing Hamilton students saw last Monday night, from the comfort of their homes on their expensive laptops, were a series of tweets and blog posts telling them to be incensed.

The attitude that the destruction of a small business 1500 miles away in a city that "doesn't really matter" is acceptable might make sense when you have the privilege of being a bystander cheering on senseless violence behind a glowing screen. When you have the privilege of living in or outside of a coastal city where the rule of law is routinely respected and the breakdown of civil society has not occurred in decades, rioting can seem pretty cool. When you have the privilege of receiving an overpriced education that often times does not demand critical thinking, where only certain points of view and opinions are nurtured, rioting seems like a perfectly legitimate response when things don't go your way.

There are certainly racial disparities in American society. I'll be the first to admit that an overhaul of our nation's drug policies is needed because of the ways in which minorities are disproportionately harmed. But I'll also be the first to point out that many of the members of Hamilton's hip how-many-likes-can-I-get-on-this-edgy-Facebook-post political scene would be the first to call up mommy and daddy in an instance where they were arrested and get an expensive lawyer with a nice plea deal. Using your privilege is okay when you're on the "right side of history," I suppose.

I don't know if another "community dialogue" is going to be productive. School administrators have made it clear that they are taking a partisan stance on the issue of Darren Wilson's acquittal. Dean Thompson's email on Thanksgiving did not give me comfort that truly all opinions on this matter would be respected. Regardless, as Hamilton students meet tonight in a fancy eco-friendly multimillion-dollar building to discuss their feelings, this writer will be asking everybody involved to "check their privilege."

### Social Insecurity: Entitlement Costs Rising

Alex Klosner | *Staff Writer*

Planning for retirement in college seems like an unnecessary stress among the countless assignments, papers, and other tasks. But it's time to start stressing.

In 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law to create "a system of federal old-age benefits." Under the initial plan, Americans at 65 years of age and older could begin receiving monthly payments from the federal government. In 1956, Congress amended the

initial Social Security Act to include disability programs. By 2013, 57.5 million Americans (about 18% of the population) receive monthly Social Security benefits. Analysts calculate that approximately 10,000 baby boomers (people born from 1946 to 1964) retire every day. Rising healthcare costs and an aging American population will bankrupt Social Security if lawmakers do not take prompt action.

How does Social Security raise revenue? Unlike most other government programs, the Social Security budget is separate from the budget of the federal government. A payroll tax or FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act)

tax is levied on both employees and employers to fund Social Security and Medicare. FICA imposes a 12.4% tax for Social Security. Employers pay half of the tax and the other half is taken out of the employee's paycheck. FICA also imposes a 2.9% tax for Medicare (employers and employees each pay 1.45%). Self-employed individuals must bear the 15.3% burden of both the employee and employers FICA tax.

Payment to retired workers makes up the vast majority of Social Security distribution. Social Security pays out an average of \$15,528 per year for retired individuals or \$25,332 for retired couples. In 2013, retired workers received about 70% (\$560 billion worth) of Social Security benefits. Disabled workers collected \$140 billion and families of deceased workers received \$112 billion.

According to an article released late last year by *USA Today*, in 1955 there were eight workers contributing to Social Security for every person receiving Social Security benefits. Today, there are three workers for every Social Security beneficiary. By 2031 this ratio will shrink to 2:1. For every individual collecting Social Security, there will be only two people contributing.

Under current parameters, Social Security is not sustainable in the long run. In 2033, benefits for disabled and retired Americans will fall 23% without reform. Diverting federal funding to Social Security and other entitlements could wreak havoc on other crucial investments. According to an article published last year by *Politico*, in the 1960s

the federal government spent three dollars on investments (i.e. research, infrastructure, education) for every dollar it spent on entitlements. By 2023, for every dollar the federal government spends on investments it will spend five dollars on entitlements—not good news for scientific innovation, our crumbling infrastructure, and our second-rate public school system.

There is no easy answer to solve the Social Security crisis. Lawmakers must act if Millennials want to see one cent of Social Security retirement income. The government could raise taxes, cut benefits, or some combination of both. Congress and the President must put aside ideological differences, end the partisan gridlock, and compromise. The government must also increase the retirement age. Average life expectancy has increased since 1935. The transformation of the U.S. from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy makes it easier for older Americans to participate in the workforce. The government must also raise the \$117,000 cap on payroll taxes. The government eliminated the Medicare tax cap in the 1990s and it must consider doing so with the Social Security payroll tax cap in order to raise revenue. Lawmakers must also slightly reduce benefits for future recipients. The Republican-controlled Congress and President Obama must create a plan that combines spending cuts and tax increases in order to preserve the program for future generations.

## Sexual Assault Policies

Phil Parkes | *Staff Writer*

I join with University of Virginia sociologist Bradford Wilcox in maintaining that U.S. Colleges and Universities make a mockery of justice when they take sexual assault into their own hands. Hamilton College, as I noted in an earlier issue of *Enquiry*, has been a shining example of this. But I also join Wilcox in making an important qualification about the practicality of what has become the “tell the police” alternative. Namely, that local law enforcement cannot do its job without a campus culture that supports its work. To this end, I suggest the following reforms for Hamilton College.

First, the College should reexamine the role and function of fraternities on campus. Some have called for the abolishment of fraternities. Others see fraternities as a sacred expression of free association. Others, like the Hamilton College administration, are content to narrow the role of fraternities on campus to that of drinking clubs. Instead of limiting their role and questioning their privilege, the administration should work closely with fraternities and sororities to help them lead the campus by good example. Greek life in turn must recognize and act upon the benefits of social responsibility.

Second, college administrators, activists, and concerned students should form associations to support students on both sides of sexual misconduct allegations in a criminal court. This means gradually replacing the menu of options (not including

counseling itself) currently posted in bathrooms on campus with a firm and vigorous action plan for legal redress. Appointing a delegation of Hamilton College representatives to accompany a complainant to local law enforcement is hardly a substitute for the more comfortable and anonymous process the administration currently provides, but it gets students closer to the standard of justice they deserve. And unlike the present anonymous on-campus judicial system, the threat of jail time will better deter genuine perpetrators. More broadly, the implementation of a well-known plan of action gives structure to the many student groups already concerned about sexual assault.

Third, provide more opportunities for students to drink in the presence of responsible adults. To my knowledge, President Stewart has voiced interest in the benefits of relaxed drinking regulations. Why not launch another task force to round up support from liberal arts colleges to address the issue nationally? For colleges, binge drinking is perhaps just another problem that, like sexual assault, is better to frequently and vigorously *consider* but rarely address in-depth. But this doesn't mean that students and faculty cannot advocate for legal reforms that have smaller repercussions, like expanding exceptions to the drinking age that already exist in New York. Hamilton College faculty members once rode on horseback to visit fraternity houses on weekends. Granted, that was a different time, but mature company still has its refining effects, and is worth another look.

Steps to address sexual assault should

begin with those in positions of social and intellectual influence. As evidenced by the slow erosion of student privileges, like living off-campus, that influence is already waning in important ways. For now, however, Greek life can still lead by personal example, all the more if it finds itself enabled and encouraged to do so by the administration. And the college's administration is capable, if not willing, to set aside politics and gather students around good ideas when they arise. Furthermore, administrators must recognize that Greek life can positively influence the student body in ways that rules cannot. Teachers and staff who find ways to impart social maturity to younger students make long-term investments in the College's welfare. Lastly, individual students must recognize that the buck stops with them, and the personal example they choose to live out.

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