Cynicism. We hear about it all the time. The level of public discourse has gotten so low, so mean-spirited, that it is turning off people who might otherwise want to participate in the public sphere. The Wesleyan Media Project, led by campus by Assistant Professor of Government Erika Franklin Fowler, did a great job this fall of tracking and analyzing the enormous increase in political advertising, much of it negative in tone. We can all see a general decline of confidence that any meaningful discussions are to be found in the public sphere. Should we describe this decline of confidence as the growth of cynicism, or just as an intelligent reaction to our contemporary context? Cynics are no fools, and one might even describe cynicism as the effort to protect oneself from appearing foolish. One of the hallmarks of contemporary cynicism (with ancient roots) is the rejection of conventional standards. The cynic delights in re- jecting the criteria of those with power and privilege and, as such, this rejection is often made with contempt. Cynics “know” that the es- tablished order is wrong—corrupt, unnatu- ral and unjust—and their knowledge can give them a sense of self-righteous superiority. We reject the established ways of the world because we know better. But cynicism about politics and the public sphere doesn’t lead us to change the way things are. Instead, it leads to a with- drawal from public life, a withdrawal that is justified by the cynic’s belief in his or her own superiority. We cynics know better, and we know that participation in public life is for those who just don’t understand the ways things really work. Another dimension of cynicism is the belief in one’s own self-sufficiency. Cynics don’t have to engage in the public sphere because they have developed a way of life that doesn’t require engagement. They have nothing to gain from interacting with others who don’t share their views, and they feel reinforced from other cynics who also reject this kind of interaction. A community based on rejection reinforces its members’ contempt for the dominant culture and their proud alienation from it. They feel they don’t need to engage because their cynicism gives them a sense of self-righteous autonomy. Cynicism may be particularly prevalent among young people, and psychologists even have a specific measure for adoles- cent cynicism, A-cyn2, on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. As an educator, I find this youthful attitude to be particularly worrisome, because above all it protects students from learning. Behind the facade of the knowing rejection of the status quo, behind the defense of the self-sufficient community, is the fearful refusal to engage with new possibilities. Cynics have already made up their minds, and people who have made up their minds believe they have noth- ing to learn.

When you participate in the public sphere, you have to open yourself up to the views of others, and real engagement means being open to change. That’s why civic participa- tion should be part of every student’s edu- cation. Participation is a public experiment through which you discover things about the world, about yourself and about the possi- bilities for change. Public engagement is challenging because you may be surprised that the people or systems about which you’ve already reached conclusions are more complex than you’d ever imagined—more complex and more important for shaping the future. I am so pleased with our efforts thus far to build on the educational value of Wesleyan’s traditions of civic engagement. Our students are working in so many contexts—from hos- pitals and homeless shelters to regulatory agencies and public schools—and then re- flecting on their experiences when back on campus. They are learning that the liberal arts aren’t just relevant to the four years of college, but that our broad education can have an immediate connection to the work they are doing in the public sphere.

In this age of degraded political dis- course and anonymously funded attack ads, it’s easy to see the reasons for the cynical withdrawal from public life. But when students turn themselves off to en- gagement and participation, they are cut- ting themselves off from learning as well as depriving our public sphere of their energy and ideas. At places like Wesleyan we turn back the tide of cynicism, our students re- sist the temptation to withdraw from pub- lic life in jaded self-satisfaction; we remind them that if they don’t engage in shaping their future, somebody else will do it for them. Students at Wesleyan discover that stimulating and rewarding work is to be found by engaging with others in trying to make the public sphere a more meaningful environment for all of us. We not only wish them well. We depend on them! UPRIGHT

...our students resist the temptation to withdraw from public life in jaded self-satisfaction..."
Houghton “Buck” Freeman ‘43, whose generosity continues to have an enormous impact on Wesleyan, died December 1, 2010. He was the son of Mary Houghton and Mansfield Freeman ’16, a distinguished scholar of Chinese philosophy and a co-founder of the international insurance firm that became known as American International Group. Buck Freeman grew up in China and acquired fluency in Mandarin. He interrupted his studies at Wesleyan to serve in the Navy during World War II and provided intelligence reports from southern China concerning the students he and Doreen considered family.

In 1946, he became the first Wesleyan student to acquire fluency in Mandarin. He in- tended to influence thinking and action on environmental issues.

Ms. Huffington, a founder, geologist, has a long-standing interest in stewardship of energy supplies and achieving a decreased reliance on hydrocarbon fuels. Her interest led her to develop Elkstone Farm in Steamboat Springs, Colo., which features a permaculture greenhouse designed to grow organic produce year-round in a sustain- able, energy-efficient manner.

The first holder of the Huffington Endowed Chair in the College of the Environment, Dana Royer researches how plants can be used to reconstruct ancient environments.

Wesleyan’s location in Connecticut is of vital importance to our global community. “Without Dana’s contributions we would know much less about Earth’s climate history and its great importance to today’s world,” Wilf said. Leo Hickey, professor of geology and Curator of Paleobotany at Yale University, said, “In the rapidly developing field of plant paleoecology and ecophysiology, Dana Royer stands out in terms of innovation and sheer breadth and depth of knowledge. He is truly an emerging leader in the geological sciences.”

He often connects the deep-time climate and CO2 record to the present day in highly so- cietally-relevant ways that are widely cited in the ‘modern’ climate change literature.”

“We are delighted that Dr. Yohe is to be named to the Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair in the College of the Environment,” says Ms. Huffington. “It is a privilege to support a researcher and edu- cator of his caliber in an area of study that is of such vital importance to our global community.”

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The award recognizes a scientist, aged 35 or younger, for outstanding original research marking a major advance in the earth sciences. Royer researches how plants can be used to reconstruct ancient environments. In a CSA press release, Peter D. Wilf of Pennsylvania State University said, “Dana is a true innovator who successfully tackles extremely important questions in paleo- matology and paleoecology, in part using paleo- botanical proxies calibrated with a remark- able series of careful modern analog studies.

Wesleyan on BROADWAY
A Benefit for Athletics and for Financial Aid

The Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair in the College of the Environment is to promote cross-cultural understanding between the United States and the countries of Asia. Freeman especially valued the inclusive culture of Wesleyan that provided a supportive context for Asian students far from home. By any measure, the Freeman Scholars Program has had a pro- found impact on Wesleyan and on the many Freeman scholars who care deeply about the future of their own countries.

Freeman served as a Wesleyan trustee from 1982 to 1991, and Wesleyan awarded him an honorary doctor of laws degree in 1993. In the fall of 2010, he was inducted into Wesleyan’s Athletics Hall of Fame. Through personal gifts and the Freeman Foundation, he is the largest donor in Wesleyan’s history.

President Roth wrote on his blog, “In recent years I have heard from former Wesleyan presidents and trustees, who have spoken of Buck’s modesty, his devo- tion to alma mater, and his deeply moral character. They also remembered his wry sense of humor and the twinkle in his eye when he heard about the latest news concern- ing the students he and Doreen con- sidered family.”

“Our hearts go out to his entire family, to his daughter, Linda, and to his wife, Doreen, and their son, Graeme, both of whom I have had the privilege of getting to know over the last few years,” he said. [UPFRONT]

Deborah Anne Lombardi, who ran with his wife Doreen, Hon. ‘03, and their son, Graeme ’77. He had assumed that position in 1992, following the death of his father, Mansfield Freeman, who had contributed generously to Wesleyan’s East Asian Studies Program. Buck’s and Doreen’s $5 million gift at the end of the Campaign for Liberal Learning in the 1980s was the largest single gift to that campaign, and it jump-started construc- tion of Bacon Field House and the new pool in the Freeman Athletic Center—a project that reflected Freeman’s enthusi- asm for competitive athletics and fitness.

The Freeman Foundation’s landmark contribution to Wesleyan is the Freeman Asian Scholars Program. Begun in 1995, this program has provided full scholarships at Wesleyan for more than 300 talented stu- dents from Asia. The program’s objective is to promote cross-cultural understanding in the United States and the countries of Asia. Freeman especially valued the inclusive culture of Wesleyan that provided a supportive context for Asian students far from home. By any measure, the Freeman Scholars Program has had a pro- found impact on Wesleyan and on the many Freeman scholars who care deeply about the future of their own countries.

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FILMMAKER WEISBERG ’75 ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

No Tomorrow, a documentary produced by Roger Weisberg’s Public Policy Productions, examines the death penalty through the lens of a single capital murder case in which he knew the victim, a central figure in his previous film, Aging Out.

In 2004 PBS aired Aging Out, about three teenagers who are forced to fend for themselves after leaving the foster care system. One of the young people featured in the film was Risa Bejarano. Aging Out chronicles Risa’s struggles as she graduates from high school and heads off to college at UC, Santa Barbara. Despite difficulties during her first year as an emancipated adult—including school breaks that left her essentially homeless—Risa seemed to be in a hopeful place.

It turned out that Weisberg had chronicled the last year of Risa’s life.

“Several months after our film was completed, we got a call one morning from Risa’s former foster mother,” he recalls, “telling us that Risa was found shot and killed in an alley in downtown L.A. The police located both Risa’s foster mother and us through Risa’s diary, which was found near her body at the crime scene.”

Weisberg and his crew were stunned. They had stayed in touch with Bejarano, as they knew the victim, a central figure in his previous film, Aging Out. “As one of the experts in the film says, the right question is, ‘Do we deserve to die?’”

“Our film then became much more of an investigation of the death penalty itself,” he says. “No Tomorrow is not only our window into the complexity and controversy surrounding capital punishment but also a very sad personal story for us.”

The irony was overpowering: “We were interviewing the defendant, his family members, and footage of the young man growing up. ‘And we had no access to any of that footage,’ Weisberg said. ‘The lawyers would not permit us to interview the defendant, and, once he was convicted, the prison would not permit us access to death row.’

The filmmakers did, however, have access to the jury. Presiding Judge Lance Ito, who also presided over O. J. Simpson’s 1995 murder trial) wrote to each juror, endorsing the idea behind the film and inviting them to respond to Weisberg’s interview request.

“Eight of the 12 jurors decided to come forward and talk about their experiences during the trial, their ambivalence, and ultimately how they decided the verdict,” recalls Weisberg. Additionally Weisberg’s team interviewed legal scholars and attorneys on both sides of the capital punishment debate.

“Our film then became much more of an investigation of the death penalty itself,” he says. “No Tomorrow is not only our window into the complexity and controversy surrounding capital punishment but also a very sad personal story for us.”

Asked his feelings on the death penalty, Weisberg defers to his film: “The right question is, ‘Do we deserve to die?’”

No Tomorrow premieres on PBS in March 2011. See pbs.org/no-tomorrow/.

Scholar Athlete

SHEA DWYER ’10

Running Back Shea Dwyer ’10, of Marlborough, Conn., became just the second Wesleyan player (after Matt Percival ’00) to receive the distinction of being a finalist for the Gagliardi Trophy—Division III’s version of the Heisman Trophy. He broke a 24-year-old school record for rushing yards in a game (213) and went on to have a breakout season, finishing among NCAA Division III runners and fifth in all divisions with 1,552 yards a game.

A government major, he is now a student in Wesleyan’s Graduate Liberal Studies and is doing substitute teaching at the elementary level.

“It really enjoy playing football,” he says, adding, “My parents gave me good work ethic.” A far from the magic of this season: “This was one of the closest teams I’ve ever played on. We’re family. And Coach Whalen [’83] is an amazing, amazing coach. He brought in an awesome staff.”

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The controversy surrounding the publication of On the Origin of Species in 1859 had captivated the young Rice, and it shaped his life’s work. An ardent Methodist and an ordained minister, Rice’s devotion to science was as strong as his belief in God. The apparent tensions between his religious faith and his concern with scientific truth fueled his teaching and his scholarship. Despite his early skepticism, by the middle of the 1870s Rice believed strongly in the scientific veracity of the evolutionary model, and he felt that it did not contradict Christian teachings.

Rice refused to undermine the book’s science to appease church officials. In his book The Poet of Science and Other Addresses (1919), Rice writes “… I have lived a double life, functioning sometimes … as the Reverend Dr. Jekyll, and sometimes as Professor Hyde.”

Beginning in the mid 1890s, during a period of Wesleyan’s affiliation with Methodist Church, Rice taught one of the university’s earliest interdisciplinary elective courses. This was well before courses crossing disciplinary boundaries were common anywhere, and when the elective system was just beginning to take hold. According to the 1895–96 course catalog, “Relations of Science and Religion” covered “holocentric astronomy, the antiquity of earth and man, [and] the theory of evolution,” among other topics. Rice’s closely related book, Christian Faith in an Age of Science (1903), was originally commissioned by the Methodist Book Concern, but it turned out to be too controversial for the denomination’s publishing arm. Rice refused to undermine the book’s science to appease church officials. He opted instead to publish commercially with A. C. Armstrong of New York. A review in the January 23, 1904, New York Times states, “We have every reason to believe that Prof. Rice’s book will serve a very useful purpose as a buffer to soften the jolt of transition for a great many persons from their traditional conceptions of religion to those homogeneously rational and scientific.”

Throughout his 51-year career at Wesleyan, William North Rice taught so many different courses that he quipped that his professorial chair was really a “settee.” An active field geologist, he traveled to Bermuda, Europe, Mexico, the Grand Canyon, the Rocky Mountains, and Alaska’s Yakutat Bay. From 1901 to 1916, he supervised the Connecticut state geological survey. He revised later editions of his mentor’s geology text and served as an officer of national and local scientific societies. Rice was one of the founders of the Middletown Scientific Association, a town/gown organization before which he gave an amazing 85 talks. A sought-after preacher, Rice also devoted years of service to the Middletown Board of Education. His dedication to Wesleyan was no less impressive, and he worked on a project to recatalog the library’s holdings, helped to edit the early volumes of the Alumni Record, and participated in numerous committees. A strong supporter of coeducation, Rice served as Wesleyan’s acting president three times over his long career. In 1923, near the end of his life, both William North Rice and his son, Edward Loramis Rice (Class of 1892), a prominent zoologist at Ohio Wesleyan University, served as expert consultants to Clarence Darrow on the losing side of the famous Scopes Trial, in which a high school biology teacher in Tennessee was convicted of teaching evolution in violation of state law. Many other illustrious natural scientists have succeeded William North Rice at Wesleyan, and his— and their— dedication to scientific inquiry alongside community and professional service is still a hallmark of the university’s science programs.

Learn more: www.wesleyan.edu/masters | masters@wesleyan.edu | 860/685.2900