

GOING PUBLIC

Writing and Publishing the Op-Ed

HOST

Glenn Michael Gordon, Assistant Director, Undergraduate Writing Program

FEATURED STUDENT WRITERS FROM UNIVERSITY WRITING, SPRING 2018

Timothy Chua published in *The Advocate*

Eric Heiser published in *NY Daily News*

Diego Lomeli published in *Trib Talk (Texas Tribune)*

Antigone Ntagkounakis published in *Killer and a Sweet Thang*

Zoe Panas published in *Kent County News*

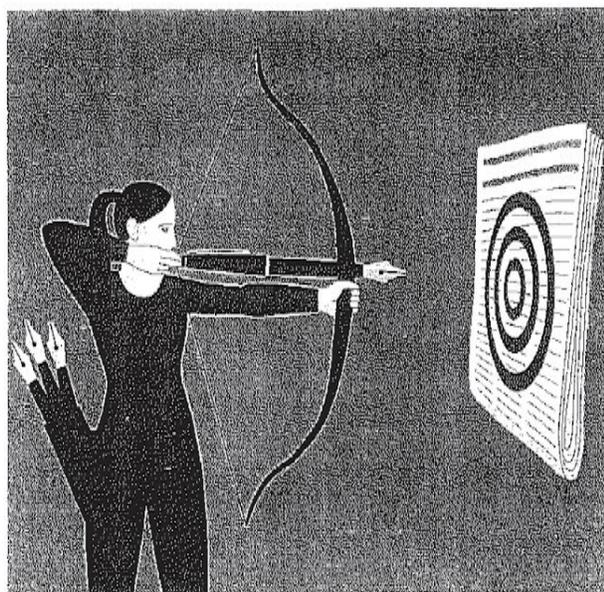
Kiiki Abrema Quarm published in *Joy Online (Ghana/MyJoyOnline.com)*

Note: These op-eds reflect the views of the student writers, not necessarily that of the Undergraduate Writing Program.

COLUMBIA

MAGAZINE

COLLEGE WALK



Strong Opinions

What are the consequences if I write something on race at Columbia?" a student asked the panel at a recent discussion titled "Going Public: Writing and Publishing the Op-Ed." The overflow crowd of two hundred undergrads in Schermerhorn 501 was all ears. So was Glenn Michael Gordon '10SOA, the assistant director of the Undergraduate Writing Program at Columbia and the event's creator and host.

The afternoon had been an attention grabber from the get-go. You might have thought that students raised on the Internet would either a) view the traditional op-ed as passé, its power diluted in a sea of opinionated tweets and blog posts, or b) retreat from public discourse altogether,

for fear of nasty comments and forum trolls. Yet the turnout said otherwise, as did Gordon's introductory remark that, since 2011, when the first year composition class University Writing began assigning op-eds, students have published more than a hundred of these essays, in places like the *New York Daily News*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *USA Today*, the *Huffington Post*, *Army Times*, the *Atlantic*, *Salon*, the *South China Morning Post*, and a bundle of hometown papers.

You might have thought that students raised on the Internet would view the op-ed as passé.

The panel was made up of five sophomores who had taken University Writing the previous semester and subsequently published their op-eds: Madison Cox linked the scarcity of female engineers to childhood gender socialization in her piece for the *Washington Post*; Adam Croxton, a US Air Force veteran who was raised in a Mississippi trailer park, published an op-ed in the *Columbia Spectator* on student debt and being the first in his family to attend college; songwriter Tinatin Japaridze, in the *Moscow Times*, told of how entering the Eurovision Song Contest after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War laid bare her divided loyalties between Russia, where she grew up, and her native Georgia; Kita LeBron, opining in the *Peoria Journal Star*, urged that paper's readership to consider the underlying causes of unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore; and Josef Starc, a product of the oft-criticized Oakland public school system, where teachers were negotiating a new contract, wrote in praise of his high-school education in the *Oakland Tribune*.

"In University Writing, students write four essays, the last of which is the op-ed," says Gordon. "For the first three, you're working on building an argument. By the time you write your op-ed, you've learned to develop your argument and present it within a highly crafted essay."

Gordon had the panelists read parts of their op-eds aloud, and demonstrated the ways in which all the pieces answered the four questions that editors ask when considering an op-ed: Why you? Why us? Why this? Why now?

Gordon, who is the former editor in chief of *Readersdigest.com*, strongly encourages students to submit their op-eds for publication, noting that "the word 'published' still has a lot of cachet." He told the audience: "It never hurts a CV to have publications on it — it shows a level of excellence and striving."

This comment was in response to the student who asked about the risks of writing an op-ed about race. The student, who was white, posed a hypothetical in which, two years after publishing his op-ed, "I apply for a job at Goldman Sachs and they Google my name and say, 'This guy's a racist: we can't hire him.'"

There was a three-second pause before a wave of nervous laughter welled up from the audience and rolled lightly over the room. Gordon jumped in. "You know what? I think partially there's laughter because it's the laughter of recognition," he said. "A lot of people have anxiety about putting themselves out there — putting a strong opinion out there. And there is some truth to the idea that often your biggest critics are people who haven't even read your op-ed and just react to what they *think* it's about. So I understand the nature of your question."

Thus Gordon rescued both the audience (from its assumption that the student had just implied he was racist) and the student (from further snickers). He then asked the panelists if they'd like to address the student's concern.

"The onus is on you to have a well thought out, clearly communicated piece, so that it can't be misinterpreted," said Croxton, the Air Force veteran. "If you hold a controversial view, stick to it. But make sure that it's smart. I think if you shy away from something that's controversial, you're not doing yourself or journalism justice."

— Paul Honda

ADVOCATE

Survivor's Outing of a Trans Man Is Undeserving of a GLAAD Award

BY TIMOTHY CHUA
MAY 14 2018 5:09 AM EDT

Beating out the likes of other popular TV shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Survivor: Game Changers* [took the crown in the 29th GLAAD Media Awards: Outstanding Reality Program category](#). GLAAD president Sarah Ellis praised the show for its “thoughtful and responsible handling” of the moment when contestant Zeke Smith was [outed as a transgender man](#).

But did CBS really handle Smith’s outing well? In an initial glance, it may seem as though *Survivor* did a good job in conveying the message that outing someone is wrong by having the host berate the wrongdoer, Jeff Varner, for outing Smith to his fellow contestants. However, *Survivor* actually replicated Varner’s actions by allowing Smith's outing to air.

You may ask, How did *Survivor* out Smith when he gave the show permission to air his outing by saying that he wanted the world to “see how much [he has] grown”? Didn’t he also say that he thought others could benefit from the airing of his outing? While Smith did say those things, Smith never once said that he wanted the world to know that he is a transgender man. In fact, moments after his outing, he said that he didn’t want to be known as “the trans *Survivor* player,” he wanted to be known as “Zeke the *Survivor* player.”

If Smith didn’t want the world to know that he's a transgender man, why didn’t he just tell the press that he didn’t want his outing to air? Smith probably had already accepted the fact that his outing was going to be aired regardless. *Survivor* contestants are required to sign a contract before participating in the show that acknowledges the producers have “unlimited right” to “edit and otherwise exploit” any footage. Despite having prerogative over Smith’s outing footage, the show could have chosen not to air it.

However, there was no doubt that the show wanted to air Smith’s outing all along. Shortly after Varner outed Smith, the show’s host and executive producer, Jeff Probst, immediately chastised Varner for not just telling “six people” but also “millions of people” right at that moment during the taped tribal council. If Probst had no intention of airing the footage, why did he claim that Varner had told “millions of people” when in fact Varner had only outed Smith to his fellow contestants at that point?

What's more, Probst decided not to hold a formal elimination vote at tribal council, for once. Many have cited the lack of a formal vote as the reason it was "impossible" to have edited Smith's outing out. Is that really the case, though? Even if editing out Smith's outing may have caused an illogical flow in the show's storyline, it still beats outing Smith. Even if fans may ponder what truly happened in the episode, it puts Smith in a situation where he can truthfully decide for himself whether he wants to reveal that he is a transgender man, instead of having no control over his outing. Isn't that what a trans ally would do? So much for Probst's statement about how he couldn't imagine "what was done to Zeke was OK [...] under any circumstances."

Does this suggest that Probst values the potential flow of an episode more than a transgender person's life? Probst then went on to attempt justifying the airing of Smith's outing by saying that Smith "led" him. Imagine this scenario: Your boss happens to know that you're transgender. How would you feel if he or she asked you to "lead" him or her into telling everyone that you are transgender, when you don't even want to be known as transgender in the first place?

GLAAD was wrong for nominating, let alone handing the win to *Survivor: Game Changers* for Outstanding Reality Program. While *Survivor* did a good job in giving Smith the "unprecedented autonomy" over how his outing story was going to unfold, the show did not give him "unprecedented autonomy" in deciding whether he wanted the world to know that he's transgender in the first place.

TIM CHUA is a student at Columbia University in New York City.

New York's homeless in shelters but not truly free

By ERIC HEISER | NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | MAY 07, 2018 | 5:00 AM

Six nights a week, I live in the dorms at Columbia University. One night a week, I live at a homeless shelter. In New York City, in order for a homeless shelter to operate, a volunteer with a permanent address must stay the night. Once a week, I am one of these volunteers.

Each night, around 60,000 New Yorkers — some of them families, some of them single adults — sleep in homeless shelters throughout the city.

The two shelters where I have volunteered for the last six months or so are relatively small; one, located in the basement of Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on West 68th St., serves around 10 men each night, and the other, in the basement of the New York Society for Ethical Culture on West 64th St., serves about the same number of women.

What has struck me most about the nights I have spent at these shelters is the utter lack of freedom shelter residents live with. In fact, almost every aspect of their lives is dictated by the system they have turned to for a warm bed.

Each night they must be in by 7 p.m.; they cannot leave or go outside after that point. Second, they must be out by 6 a.m. each morning. Third, they cannot stay somewhere other than the shelter more than one night in a row.

If they break any of these rules, they will lose their bed and end up at a different shelter or on the streets.

Not surprisingly, these conditions greatly affect the lives of shelter residents. Think about all of the things that happen after 7 p.m. in New York City. They can enjoy none of those things.

Moreover, they are afforded absolutely no privacy. They are constantly surrounded by strangers, and this forced proximity to others naturally causes disagreements that frequently boil over into verbal confrontations and cultivate a stressful and tense living environment.

This tension is not eased by the fact that the rules make it very difficult to get a full night's sleep. Who can get enough sleep when you have to be awake by 5:30 every morning?

This causes many homeless individuals to do what I do after a night at the shelter: find somewhere else to sleep a few extra hours. Of course, for me, this is quite easy: I go back to my dorm. But for them, it means finding a bench or a subway car or some other public place that is neither comfortable nor private.

Unfortunately, the shelter system inherently offers very few opportunities to escape its oppressive rules. If you miss a few nights in a row, your bed is given to someone else, because, especially at the nicer shelters, there is always somebody else who can use it.

This is something that is often talked about among shelter residents. They contemplate whether or not it is a good idea to go to a family gathering or even simply go out at all in fear of losing the bed they have waited so long to secure.

In other words, for people living in New York City homeless shelters, the choice is between having the freedom to do what they want or having a warm and dry place to get a few hours of sleep each night.

I don't mean to suggest the mere existence of strict rules is cruel or arbitrary. Rules exist for a reason: to ensure the safety and property of shelters owners and the shelter residents themselves, and to help make the logistical nightmare of coordinating beds for 60,000 people solvable.

Some rules — absolutely no drugs on the premises, for example — are perfectly logical.

But rules as restrictive as the ones currently in place seem overly rigid, especially when the average homeless New Yorker will spend over a year in the shelter system.

While shelters give people a warm bed in which to sleep, they do not take the place of a home, because a home is so much more than roof and a bed. It is a place to call your own and a place you can go whenever you need and stay as long as you like. It is the center of your world.

Without a home, you can never truly be free.

That is why we must continue to push for more affordable housing. Its scarcity is the number-one cause of homelessness in New York City. We can and must work to give the 60,000 people living in New York City homeless shelters places they can call their own; that is what they deserve as New Yorkers and more importantly, that is their right as our fellow human beings.

Until then, let's rethink exactly what we ask of them when they're living in the beds the public provides.

Heiser is an undergraduate at Columbia University.

Second languages give Texas students clear advantages

By [Diego Lomeli](#), June 8, 2018

If you live in or around a Hispanic community in Texas like I do, you've probably heard the phrase, "Quien sabe dos lenguas vale por dos." It roughly translates to "whom speaks two tongues is worth two people." There are a number of [other ways Texans might say that](#), in Vietnamese, Tagalog, French, German or any number of other languages.

[Most of us](#) need the English translation; approximately 15.6 of our 24 million Texan neighbors speak only English. It's 2018 and the world is growing increasingly competitive financially, academically and socially. We all care about our children and their success in the competitive future, but we can't claim to be setting them up for triumph if we don't give them every possible edge today. The advantages of being raised bilingually in the 21st century are glaring. We need to provide instruction in a second language to our kids, and we need to start now, while the most benefits can be reaped.

The global business community is becoming increasingly integrated thanks to modern technology. Consequently, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is becoming more urgent. Communicating directly with new clients and companies in their native languages can help found stable international business relationships.

The advantages extend beyond business, to doctors speaking to patients in their native tongues, or researchers relaying their findings to multicultural peers. No wonder Texas high schools require their students to study a foreign language for at least four semesters, and major television companies like Disney and Nickelodeon air shows like *Handy Manny* or *Ni Hao, Kai Lan*, which expose their young viewers to foreign languages (in those cases, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese).

We are undoubtedly beginning to see bilingual education as a necessity for our children to have a chance in the competitive world of tomorrow, but we aren't doing enough.

Many parents and educators [hesitate to raise and instruct children bilingually](#) for fear that the language development process becomes too complex for the child, and that bilingualism can negatively affect cognitive development.

However, these beliefs stem from faulty mid-20th century research, earning bilingualism a stigma which it never deserved. These [early studies](#) did not control for socioeconomic status, or differences in degree of bilingualism. In fact, the methodological approaches were so atrocious that some studies determined the degree of bilingual proficiency according to the place of birth of the subjects' parents, or even just by their last names. These poor techniques very often led to kids being given cognitive tests in languages they barely spoke, and compared to them to native speakers of varying socioeconomic statuses simply because their last names were De La Garza, Zhou, Garcia, etc., providing "evidence" that "bilinguals" suffer retardation.

More [recent research](#) refutes the belief that bilingualism is correlated in any way to lower cognitive ability. [Modern studies](#) with [more sophisticated methods](#) have [consistently shown](#) that learning a second language in childhood leads to an increase in creativity, selective attention, inhibition and working memory. Pair those cognitive advantages with the obvious communicational advantages and raising a child bilingually becomes the clear choice. Pop culture, the media, and our own communities are beginning to acknowledge this evident "bilingual advantage," but the new data has yet to completely replace the old.

This is a time-sensitive manner. The earlier students begin bilingual instruction, the greater their proficiency in the second language. The sooner we start encouraging second language acquisition in our kids and implement policies in our school districts to increase the number of students who receive a bilingual primary education, the more Texans with this prized competitive edge we'll send into the markets, schools and social world of tomorrow.



Diego Lomeli

Student, Columbia University

KILLER AND A SWEET THANG

My First Time In A Janitor's Closet

What no one taught me in sex-ed.

Antigone Ntagkounakis

**The following content is of a sensitive nature and may be triggering to some.*

I'm sixteen years old and scrubbing the lingering scent of you off my body in the shower. I am scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing away, trying to get rid of you. I push the loofah down into my skin, *harder*, and a few drops of blood trickles down into the drain. I don't feel anything. This is not what I was expecting, not how I was supposed to feel after my first time.

I scrub faster but there is no soap left and I look down to realize I've been gripping the sponge so hard my knuckles have turned white. My skin seems pale and I have not eaten all day—to look good for you. I didn't even realize you wouldn't be able to see me.

I am sixteen years old and have just lost my virginity and my sanity, but no one told me that it would be like this. No one told me about the various positions or the pain. No one told me that you'd rip my brand new lace panties, or that I wouldn't stop bleeding for days. No one told me that there wouldn't be soft lighting, music, or flowers. No one told me what happens in the movies after the lights go down.

I close my eyes and I am back in that room. I'm underneath the stairs where no one ever checks, overlooked by students and teachers alike: the perfect hiding spot. *Aw yeah, you like that?* Your voice echoes, never checking for an answer. I guess it was rhetorical. But I didn't like it. No one ever told me if I would like it or even if I should have. No one brought it up, as if it were already decided, as if my pleasure was never even considered. To you, I know it wasn't.

I lean back, into the rainfall of the showerhead above, and I picture myself there, on the ground. I see myself: bruising my knees, without so much as a kiss, touch, or hint of foreplay. You didn't want a girl, just a doll. I see an all-too-young memory, a silhouette of myself: tossed and turned, propped up and bent over at your discretion. And in that moment, in that shower, for the rest of that night and that year, I never knew that it could be any different. I wasn't sure that it could get any better.

* * *

As a young woman, I was taught about sex in two ways: either not at all, or implicitly. What about health class? What about sex-ed? Of course, growing up I had both, but I wouldn't say I learned about sex. I learned about periods and pregnancy in relation to sex, the act, just being the end to the former and the start of the latter. I learned about ways I could catch deadly diseases or become a statistic for rising teen pregnancy. I learned about date-rape drugs, wearing appropriate attire as to not 'ask for it,' and how to insert a tampon. Condoms and other contraceptives were brought up, but again, as part of the patronizing don't-get-pregnant-and-die rhetoric.

Masturbation was a word I never learned from a teacher, parent, or friend, but instead through the internet and TV. I barely knew it existed, and I certainly did not know it could apply to me, that was just something boys did. My first real introduction to sex didn't come until I googled Kim Kardashian's sex tape after hearing about it on an episode of E! News—fascinating. Other than that, all the depictions I saw of sex made up for what they lacked in realism with overblown romantics. I thought I would marry my high school sweetheart. I thought he would love me forever. I thought sex involved some kind of massage oil and a George Michael song. Imagine my surprise when it ended up being a bunch of raunchy Facebook messages and a clandestine meeting in the janitor's closet.

Imagine my shock when I had never seen a penis in real life, and suddenly had one stuffed down my throat with no warning. I'll always remember how he didn't kiss me—not once throughout the entire interaction, and not ever in the countless sexual interactions we had over the course of a year.

The worst part? I always thought to myself, *maybe this is just how it goes. Maybe this is just what sex is.* Someone else had entered my body before I even got the chance to know it myself; I had never seen my own vagina nor could I even tell you my own sexual anatomy beyond that. And I stayed in that relationship out of the kind of harmful sexual naiveté that made me believe that my own self-worth and pleasure was secondary to satisfying a male partner. I never brought it up, I never asked. I accepted how I was treated because I knew nothing different, and I was convinced it was better to be wanted (even if that meant being used) than to be alone.

* * *

Now, I'm turning twenty and I can look back and understand the abusive nature of that first relationship, both sexually and emotionally. But I have listened to stories far too similar and much worse. I have hugged too many broken young women, crying about boys they thought they could trust. I have too many friends that are survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and toxic relationships; I know too many women who were never taught to value, prioritize, or assert their own sexuality.

Now, it's 2018 and it's not enough to stop teaching kids abstinence-only education. What comes after that? Passing out free condoms and avoiding anything that falls under the umbrella of "promiscuous" does not equal liberal sex education. It is 2018 and girls are still taught that sex is meant to be romantic while boys strive to emulate the "harder, faster, aw yeah you like that?" approach of porn. But other paths exist, ones where women are not educated as mothers-to-be-or-not-to-be but instead as empowered sexual beings, exploring and voicing their own sexual interests. There is a future where men are not taught only to dominate, but to connect and communicate with their partners—whether they are sleeping with someone for a night or for a year.

When I had sex for the first time, I did not have sex. Really, sex was had with me. A boy got off from the use of my body, and I gave it to him under the false pretense of love, or at least, validation. It wasn't assault, it wasn't rape, but it wasn't right. If that's sex, it's not the kind I want myself, or any woman, to be having. It's time to move away from the tired binary of love for girls and lust for guys. It's time to push for inclusive and complex discussion, starting in schools, in sex-ed, in health classes, of what sex is and can be: beautiful, natural, and hot for everyone involved.

Schools should make all students feel included

Zoe Panas, July 11, 2018

Though there has been significant progress even from the time I entered Kent County High School as a freshman in 2013, attitudes toward the LGBTQ community remain uncomfortably negative.

When I made a joke about being bisexual in my graduation speech last year, I expected the gasp that swept over the gymnasium. I did not expect to feel upset about it. I thought I no longer cared about Kent County attitudes. I was ready to leave that fall for Columbia University, where I knew I could fully be myself.

While I am more comfortable in New York City, I don't feel as disconnected from Kent County as I originally predicted. Actually, rather than feeling finished with Kent County High School, I feel even more strongly that I have to help improve other students' experiences. The Kent County Public School System lacks sufficient education for and about the LGBTQ community, and that needs to change.

Currently, support for queer youth at KCHS is better than it ever has been. The Gay-Straight Alliance is allowed on school grounds, which it wasn't during my freshman year in 2013 when it first began. Its membership has more than tripled since. There are cute rainbow "Safe Space" signs on nearly every teacher's door. Most improved, perhaps, is that by the time I graduated in 2017, I found my peers to be generally indifferent towards most LGBT students.

Surprisingly, "indifferent" is much better than before. While queer kids are still bullied about their identities, it happens far less frequently than it did 13 years ago when drag queen Marti Cummings left Kent County for New York City. "When I did come out as a teenager," he told me, "it was very much like the cheese stands alone."

When I followed suit and "left the rural eastern shore for big city lights and dreams" just as Marti did, I had a much less hostile town to return to.

Kent County is undoubtedly more progressive than it used to be, but that didn't stop me from desperately wanting to escape. It never really felt like LGBTQ students were welcome.

For example, the sex education I received from KCHS was extremely negligible. What I do vaguely remember was focused entirely on heterosexual relationships. There was no information on how to have safe sex as a gay person, and there was nothing at all about how to avoid unhealthy romantic relationships, regardless of sexual orientation.

My required reading throughout high school had very little, if any, LGBTQ representation. Queer topics were only mentioned in class when I was the one bringing them up. It felt like we didn't exist.

Support for the GSA grew dramatically, but actual education remained absent. If it can improve, then by the time this year's freshmen graduate, maybe there will be no more whispered rumors about lesbians in the girls' locker room before practice. Maybe queer kids won't have to drop out of school to avoid discrimination. Maybe more people who grew up gay in Kent County will come back the way Marti has. Maybe Kent County's queer teens will finally feel comfortable being themselves.

While a lot of progress has been made in the last 13 years, there's more to be done. Kent County needs to properly educate its students about the LGBTQ community. Whether this means improved sex education, incorporating more LGBTQ representation into the curriculum, or something else, our schools should make all students feel included.

Zoe Panas was the Class of 2017 valedictorian at Kent County High School and currently attends Columbia University. She writes from Worton.



We should be more selfish

Source: Ghana | Myjoyonline.com

Date: 04-06-2018 Time: 07:06:23:am

Kiiki Abrema Quarm

Ghana is hungry, and it makes zero sense. About 1.2 million people are currently food insecure, and an additional 2 million are vulnerable to food insecurity. Over half of the labour force is employed in agriculture. How is it possible, then, that we spend about US\$2.2 billion annually importing food alone? The answer is that we're not selfish enough.

If we don't start acting selfishly with superpowers, it's going to cost us, and in a big way. The ambassador of the Netherlands to Ghana, speaking at the recent launch of the Value Added Agriculture Expo urged us to stop spending so much money importing food and produce locally. He argued further that agricultural investments would promote trade and economic growth.

While a valid exhortation, it risks sounding disingenuous. Part of the problem of Ghana's food insecurity is the commodification of food in itself.

The country has been subsumed into a global market in which we have sold large portions of land to international investors and obediently keep our market open to international trade liberalization policies. These agreements were supposed to open up barriers to global trade to the mutual interest of all involved.

The problem is that we're not quick to scrutinize what 'mutual interest' means. The same policies we faithfully adhere to are circumvented by the big dogs. They benefit from slashed import tariffs while our own farmers lose business competing against their goods. These agreements have thus only served to cripple our smallholder farmers by forcing them to compete with absurdly low-priced subsidized goods from industrialized countries.

There is an enormous imbalance of power that exists between us and Western superpowers. This gives them leverage to strike deals that appear benevolent, but are always ultimately in their interest.

Telling us to produce more to promote trade instead of to feed ourselves first is urging us to further shift the limited amount of resources primarily towards production for the consumption of the global market, rather than focus on feeding ourselves, mimicking colonial patterns of trade and production.

Kwame Nkrumah predicted this in 1965. He warned against a new kind of colonialism, one that uses the language of development and aid to establish external control in African countries to benefit from their resources. This neocolonialism is insidious because it lends a charitability to the powers of the Global North that developing countries would be silly not to take advantage of.

The recent fuss about the updated military deal with the United States that the government agreed to is an interesting example to consider. Many believe they have seen through this deal as an attempt of the U.S. to establish a military base in Ghana. Under this agreement, Ghana provides “unimpeded access to and use of” agreed facilities and areas, some of which may be “designated as for exclusive use by United States forces” in exchange for \$20 million and training of Ghanaian troops.

The Minister of Defence argues that the U.S. is not, in fact, establishing a military base in the country. Almost tragically, he says it is not true, that “they do not intend to do that, not at all.” Yikes. It may benefit us to examine how straightforward the United States has been about their interests in the past, for example in [Libya](#), [Rwanda](#) and the proxy wars of the Cold War.

Ghana’s lack of selfishness has worked in conjunction with the imperialist language of aid to make us believe that true development can only come about by yielding our resources to foreign countries international bodies to hone them for us. It echoes the ‘let me keep the money safe for you’ experience most of us remember from our childhoods.

Interestingly, one of the main aims of our incumbent government is to achieve a Ghana Beyond Aid. Doing this requires some sacrifices. Moving beyond aid doesn’t just mean Foreign Direct Investment or generous sums from the World Bank and IMF. It means becoming truly independent.

A Ghana Beyond Aid means a Self-Reliant Ghana. This kind of Ghana does not depend on imports to feed her people but exercises food sovereignty. Self-Reliant Ghana is not bullied into cheating herself in the global market but focuses on channeling all her resources towards her own exclusive benefit, first. Self-Reliant Ghana trains her own people and doesn’t need agreements with equivocal wording for support.

A Self-Reliant Ghana is selfish because she puts her own interests above all else, just like the countries who would attempt to exploit her.

Again, being selfish will necessitate some sacrifices. We should consider, however, if the costs of being truly free forever outweigh the paltry benefits of starving ourselves so that others can eat.

Abrema Quarm is a rising sophomore at Columbia University who is avidly yet nervously interested in African history and international relations.