

# opinion

Column/Simson L. Garfinkel

## Serving exile in the Big Apple

NEW YORK —By the waters of the Hudson I laid down and wept. I remembered Cambridge.

For the past four months, I have been living in exile in the Big Apple. I didn't choose to live in New York; I chose to go to graduate school at Columbia University. I knew the city would be bad. I didn't know it would be hell.

I didn't get university housing. Priority in the Columbia graduate housing system is based on how far you live from New York when you apply — the farther you live, the higher your priority. Boston just doesn't cut it. I have friends from Colorado who didn't get housing.

My first month, I lived in the sublet den of a 42-year old cocaine dealer at 96th and West End Avenue. She had dropped out of college in the 1960s to explore the world. She had since been divorced four times. The woman charged me \$550 a month rent for the room. There was another student whom she charged the same.

She didn't need to work, since she only paid \$300 a month for

her 6-room, rent-controlled apartment. New York is like that.

I didn't have a lease. When I told her I was moving out, she had her lawyer call me up and threaten a lawsuit. New York is like that too. I'm told that such landlord-tenant relations are typical in the city.

On my way home each night, three or four people would ask me for money. New York has nearly 100,000 homeless people and nearly an equal number of vacant apartments owned by the city. New York has always been a city of excess.

When a slum lord fails to pay taxes and the city takes possession of an apartment building, it bricks up the windows, tears out the plumbing and the electrical system and does its best to make the building uninhabitable. Ostensibly, the practice keeps drug addicts from using the building. It also keeps the homeless from squatting.

Can't have the homeless living in abandoned apartments when the city is spending millions of dollars on shelters.

This in a city that gives hun-

dreds of millions of dollars in tax credits to builders of office buildings and luxury condominiums.

A friend was looking for a two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, so I moved in with her. The apartment is in Prospect Heights, a community in the process of gentrification — meaning that the poor people are getting pushed out for the rich professionals, of which I am considered one.

A block east, the rent on my apartment would be \$1500 a month. A block west, ghetto children smoke crack in abandoned lots and on the steps of broken-

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feed

## Take police powers away from

(Editor's note: The Tech received a copy of this letter addressed to the Cambridge City Council.)

To the Honorable Council:

I've been reading with interest accounts of the latest MIT police action against non-violent protesters at the recent "Tent City" round-up. Once again MIT has body is sure to spray dirty water on your windshield and make you pay to have him clean it off. Telephone calls cost a quarter, bus and subway a dollar. Unlike the MBTA, New York's MTA (Mass Transit Authority) doesn't offer any discount programs or monthly passes. I once asked an MTA employee why. "People would use them too much," he said.

Drugs are everywhere. Crack is the city's number one problem. A police officer told me that 70 percent of the city's crime is directly traceable to drugs.

This week my roommate told me she's moving back to Seattle. "Brooklyn reminds me of everything about my parents that I hate," she said. Now I am faced with the dilemma of finding another roommate in a city of strangers or carrying rent for the two-bedroom on my own.

I want to come home. I want to come back to Cambridge.

Oh Cambridge, if I forget thee, may my eyes go blind, may my right hand turn black and fall off. Oh Cambridge, I didn't realize that you were heaven-on-earth until I spent a year living in New York.

Simson L. Garfinkel '87 is studying at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. He is a former contributing editor of The Tech.

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down brownstones. Brownstones that the city bricked up to keep out the drug addicts.

I feel safe at night, behind my double-locked front doors. A month ago, an off-duty police officer was shot while buying drugs, but that happened four blocks away. A block is a long distance in this city where the very rich live next to the very poor. There is no crime on my block.

Each day, I leave for school on a 7 am subway. The ride takes about 45 minutes. To save time, I eat at school. If I took the extra 15 minutes to break my fast at home, the subway ride would take an hour, perhaps more. The subway slows down as the morning rush hour progresses. The press of bodies doesn't let up until 10 am.

I'm lucky: other students in my class have a 90-minute commute from Staten Island. My advisor comes from New Jersey — it takes him nearly two hours some days. Nor is he untypical: Manhattan is to New Jersey what Boston is to Somerville. Daily commutes from Connecticut or northern Pennsylvania are common.

New York is not "my kind of town." It smells. The city cleans the streets three times a week and they overflow with trash and grime. Delivery trucks block

three lanes of traffic and hold up busses because service alleys are non-existent.

Four years ago, a friend and I drove from MIT to the city. Thirty miles out, I asked him about the dome of red haze that seemed to blanket the skyscrapers. "That's from the cars," he said. "You mean we're going to be breathing that?" I asked.

I've developed a cough from the dirt and chemicals in the air. A month ago, the EPA announced that it was rolling back the deadline for New York (and several other cities) to comply with the Clean Air Act. But cars are only part of the problem. This is a city where nearly everybody smokes. Sometimes the smoke is as bad on the streets as it is indoors. And then there are the special New York hazards. I spent an afternoon talking to a subway cop: he said the metal dust in the air from the trains turns his snot black.

Perhaps New York has more subway problems than most other cities because New York has the largest city subway system. The New York subways represent 10 percent of the world subway market. Nothing else even comes close.

Everything in New York costs money except the subway maps, but booths are always out of them. Get caught in traffic, some-

and I think it's the scope of the problem. In public places, people come clear to know how to prevent political what to make power to arrest should be the victim of the



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