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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Student Activists Protest Bush's Political Platform

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A one thousand dollar-a-plate dinner in Midtown featuring prospective Republican presidential candidate Texas Governor George W. Bush and New York Governor George Pataki drew large crowds of protestors opposed to Bush's conservative policies on abortion rights, AIDS and sex education, capital punishment, and drug laws yesterday.

Over 50 Columbia students attended the rally, including members of Students for Choice, Campaign to End the Death Penalty, College Democrats, Columbia Queer Alliance, and Everyone Allied Against Homophobia.

The students said they were against Bush's support of a constitutional ban on abortion, his policies in favor of the death penalty, and his encouragement of abstinence rather than safer sex education to prevent HIV and AIDS.

“I hope Bush realizes that he's not welcome here. He's a sexist, racist man who does not belong representing any part of our population,” Students for Choice member Holly Henderson, BC '01, said.

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“We hope to send a message to the media that Bush is not a moderate. People need to be active to maintain the rights they have,” said Tom Hughes, CC '01, a member of Everyone Allied Against Homophobia.

The Associated Press reported that Bush’s speech focused on his education policies, including his promotion of school choice. Bush also discussed the Republican party’s focus on the economy and perceived neglect of social issues, according to the AP.

“We will give states more flexibility to use federal funds, at their option, for choice programs including private school choice,” Bush said in his speech.

Those attending the Bush speech were either donors to his campaign or guests of donors, and most were unwilling to comment on their political views. Some said they were not sure of their views yet and wanted to hear what Bush had to say first.

“I think the thing is that we don’t know a lot about Bush, and many people think he has clay feet,” said Nico Herrera, CC '94, an individual donor. “I think he might have peaked too early, and I want to

make up my mind whether to vote for him or [Arizona Senator John] McCain.”

Herrera said he did sympathize with some of the protestors and said that Bush had made some mistakes in terms of the death penalty issue.

“[The protest] is good. It lends an air of contention, which is healthy in a democracy,” he said.

Campaign to End the Death Penalty had more than 30 members at the rally, and members said they hoped to make the media aware of

Bush's death penalty track record, citing the statistic that Texas has the third highest capital punishment rate in the country.

"We're trying to get to the media and make people in New York realize that it will be dangerous if Bush gets into office," said Alex Baker, CC '01, a member of Campaign to End the Death Penalty.

Several students at the protest were from Texas and had had first hand experience with what they said were Bush's ignorant policies.

Students for Choice member, Jane Pickell, BC '02, said that when her high school football team in Austin, Texas won the state championship, Bush gave a congratulatory speech. The focus of the address, Pickell said, was "don't get girls pregnant."

"I'm from Texas, and I'm pro-choice, and I think he's a bit too conservative," Pickell said.

Amongst abortion rights protestors, there was some contention about the message being sent. A group called Youth Education Life Line (YELL) brought a banner which read, "Just Say No is not Enough, Teach Safe Sex." Some representatives from the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) said this slogan detracted from the anti-Bush, pro-choice message that they

were trying to get across. As a result, the YELL group was moved to a separate area further down Seventh Avenue.

Students from across Manhattan attended the protest, including several groups from New York University. Sarah Sills, a junior at NYU and a part time activist coordinator for NARAL, said that she was pleased with the turnout for the event.

event.

“I think what’s impressed me most is the diversity of the crowd. There are lots of students, women, men, young, old, all joining together,” she said. “We hope to bring some attention to the fact that Bush has anti-choice views and make sure people know.”

Students from the new student group Everyone Allied Against Homophobia were concerned about Bush’s opposition to gay marriage as well as his sex education policies and their potential impact on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

“Bush’s history on HIV transmission education is abstinence, not education. People are dying of AIDS because he’s not willing to confront the issue,” Hughes said. “Just as he wants to control women’s bodies with respect to abortion rights, there’s no reason to think he doesn’t want to control how people have sex.”

New York is home to many activist organizations, which makes it very conducive to student involvement and activism, Co-Coordinator of Students for Choice, Lauren Porsch, BC ’01, said.

“We have a lot of joint activism efforts, many of our members have interned or volunteered at NARAL,” she said. “New York is pro-choice and New Yorkers should know that.”

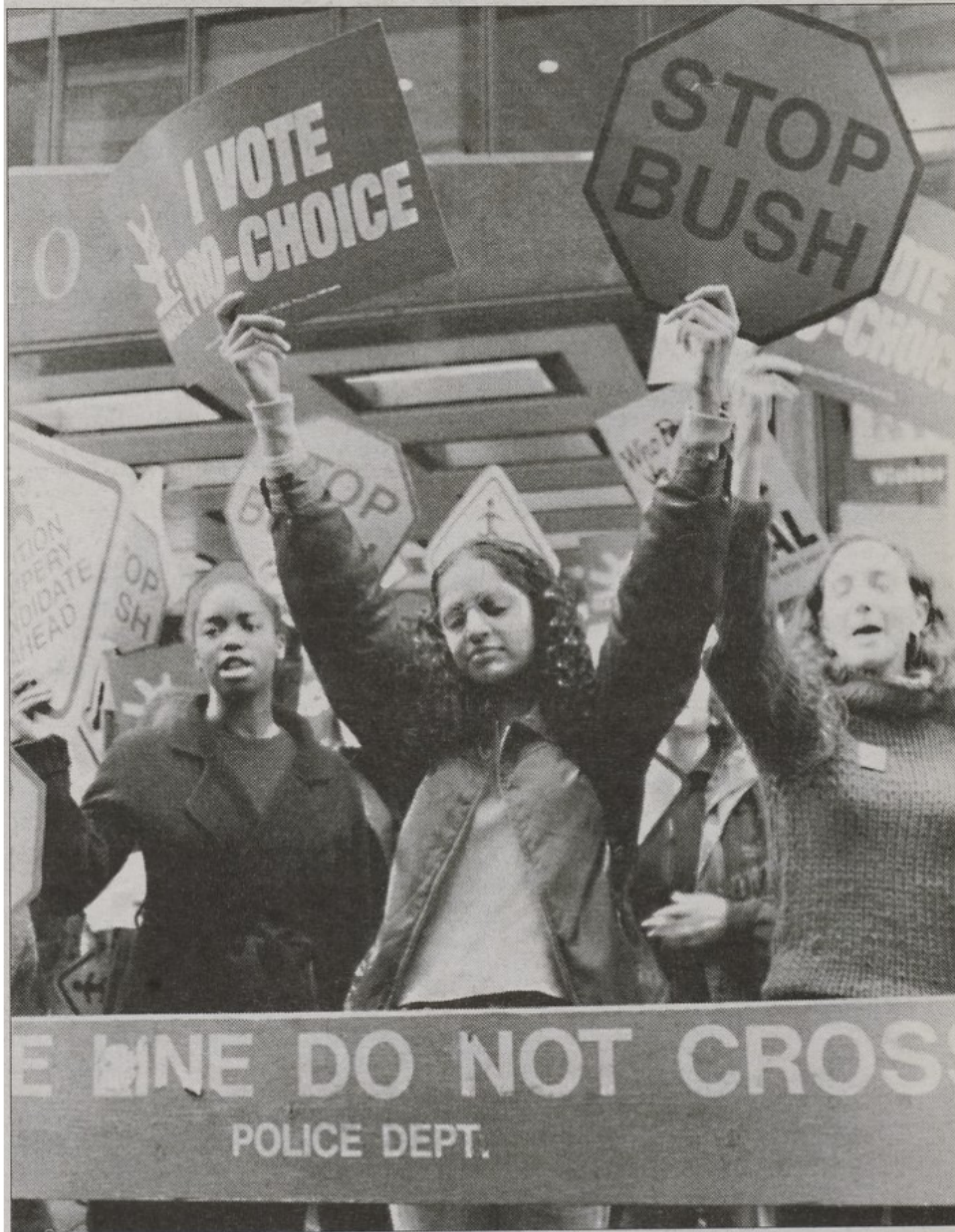


PHOTO EDITOR—SPENCER KOZINN

Ambika Panday, BC '01, grasps two signs protesting George W. Bush's political platform and campaign.