

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXXXVI, Number 29, 24 February 2012 — Holder talks financial crime, affirmative action at Low
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Holder talks financial crime, affirmative action at Low

BY YASMIN GAGNE

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United States Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. discussed financial regulation and affirmative action at a World Leaders Forum event on Thursday, although he did not take live questions from audience members, as WLF speakers normally do.

Holder, CC '73 and Law '76, spoke primarily about the Department of Justice's

response to the fraudulent lending practices and mortgage packaging that he said helped cause the economic downturn.

Several hundred Columbia students gathered in the Low Library Rotunda for the event.

University President Lee Bollinger, who introduced Holder, said that DOJ might have work left to do.

"One of the looming questions at this point in time is what left is to be done by legal

authorities, at the federal and state level, to hold authorities accountable for the creation of fraudulent mortgage-backed securities and other investment instruments," Bollinger said.

Holder listed several recent actions DOJ has taken to fight financial fraud, including reaching a \$25 billion settlement with the nation's top five mortgage providers over foreclosure abuses. He also said that under his watch, DOJ has

identified, prosecuted, and convicted a record number of individuals involved in financial fraud.

World Leaders Forum speakers—who can range from presidents of foreign countries to renowned artists—generally take questions from audience members after they speak. For this event, though, audience members who wanted to ask questions had to write them down and submit them before the event began. Bollinger then posed questions to Holder.

One of Bollinger's questions concerned the United States Supreme Court's decision earlier this week to reconsider affirmative action. Bollinger was involved in defending affirmative action when the court declared it constitutional in a landmark 2003 case, and he said on Thursday that the court's decision to revisit the issue is "ominous."

Holder expressed support for affirmative action, saying that he "can't actually imagine a time in which the need for more diversity would ever cease."

"Affirmative action has been an issue since segregation practices," Holder said. "The question is not when does it end, but when does it begin ... When do people of color truly get the benefits to which they are entitled?"

He added that as a Columbia student, he "saw diversity and interacted with people who had different views."

"People come from so many different backgrounds and bring so many different perspectives that the study of contemporary civilization is enriched by those people," he said.

Holder—who was appointed Attorney General in 2009 by

President Barack Obama, CC '84—also fielded a question about why the Obama administration has not yet shut down the American detention facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

“Congress wouldn’t let us,” Holder said. “President Obama came in and he said we want to close Guantánamo in a year, and here we are four years later.”

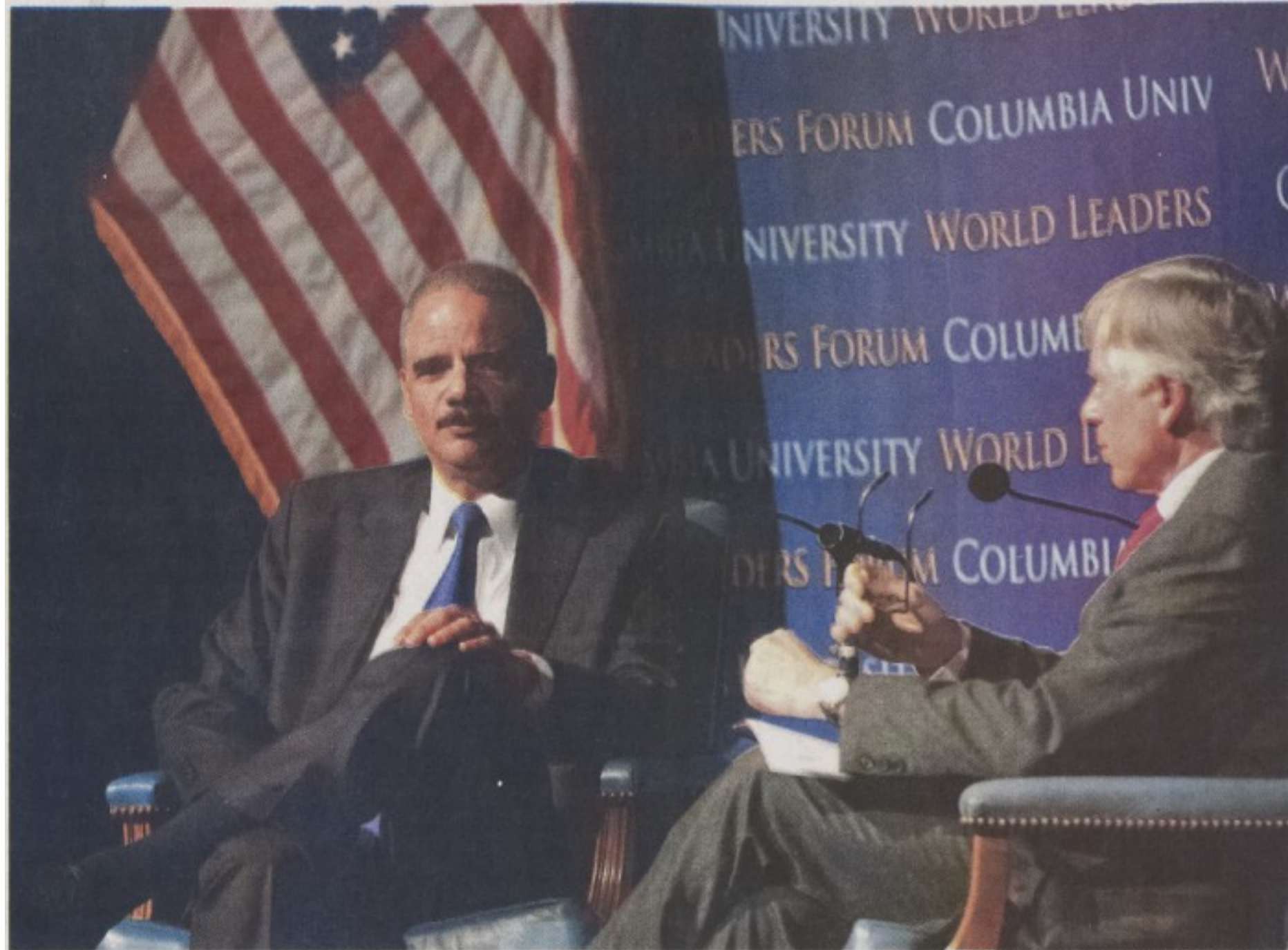
During the event, several members of the Student Global AIDS Campaign protested Holder outside of Low. They criticized Holder’s handling of a case involving Antonio Davis, an HIV-positive activist at risk of losing his paralegal license because medicinal marijuana was found in his system.

“We were trying to get the message across that this treatment is unjust and that it needs to change,” SGAC co-president Amirah Sequeira, CC '12, said. “Our message for Eric Holder was that he needs to make sure that these charges are dropped.”

Asked by Bollinger what he would like his legacy as attorney general to be, Holder said he wanted to be remembered as “a person who fought for justice, who tried to keep the Justice Department focused on great traditions that have always defined it.”

Jeremy Budd contributed reporting.

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HENRY WILLSON / SENIOR STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

RETURN TO CU | Attorney General Eric Holder, CC '73, Law '76, spoke at a World Leaders Forum event in Low Library on Thursday



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Q AND A | Holder answered questions submitted by audience members and posed to him by University President Lee Bollinger