

interest and, in the fall of 2000, he began teaching in the all-black, all-boys Hales Franciscan School. The school emphasizes high standards and rigorous discipline, including “daily checks of the gig line,” Ryan told supporters in that Oak Park living room. “It means lining up the zipper on their khaki pants, the buttons on the shirt, the tie...It shows someone is paying close attention.”

In 2002, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) tried to recruit Ryan to oppose Democratic senator Richard Durbin. But Ryan declined, saying he wanted to give his teaching experiment more time. (Critics note that it’s a better gamble to run for an open seat than to oppose an incumbent.)

In this campaign, Ryan is appealing directly to African Americans, who for decades have tended to vote almost exclusively Democratic. At both his announcement and primary victory celebrations, he was surrounded by black supporters, including former students and ministers in whose pulpits he had preached. He’s also reaching out to Latino, working-class, poor, and student voters, urging them to abandon a party that he says hasn’t helped them economically or educationally.

HILLARY CLINTON is among those calling high turnout critical to this election’s outcome. “It is not enough to just be here sipping, mingling, socializing,” she told revelers at the May campaign event. “You have to get out the vote.”

She also urged Illinois voters to “make history” by electing Obama, who would become only the third African American to serve in the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction. Edward Brooke, a Republican from Massachusetts, was the first; Braun the second. Obama identifies himself as African American, but it is his mixed-race background that others want to make into a metaphor for the United States in the twenty-first century. “Obama is the very face of America’s broadly embraced vision of democracy,” best-selling novelist Scott Turow, J.D. ’78, wrote in an article published on Salon.com in March. Tyler professor of constitutional law Laurence H. Tribe agrees, recalling that, at Harvard, Obama “inspired students of every ideological stripe and inclination.”

Longer-lasting Harvardians

In his foreword to the anniversary report of the class of 1954, class secretary John T. Bethell made some upbeat observations about longevity. The good news, he wrote, “is that so many of us are still here to stand up and be counted. At the start of 2004, the Alumni Records Office listed 964 ‘active’ members of a class that originally numbered 1,221. A survival rate of 80 percent, 50 years out, is almost epochal.

“Fifty-year survival rates among Harvard College classes have been on the rise for almost a century, and we’re at the leading edge,” Bethell is pleased to report. “Let’s look at some of the numbers. Out of 91 graduates in the class of 1854, only 31 were alive 50 years later. The class of 1904, holding its fiftieth reunion when our class was graduating, then had 353 living members: a 47 percent survival rate. Of the class of ’29—our fathers’ generation—630 members, or 62 percent, were alive at the fiftieth. A quarter-century later, our showing is 18 percentage points better.”

All of this long-lastingness has occurred despite the fact that one in three of the men of ’54 reports in the class questionnaire that he has had a life-threatening accident or illness. Moreover, classmates judge George W. Bush the worst president to have served since their College days (with Richard Nixon in second place), which must be stressful. Fifty-two percent are Democrats, 40 percent Republicans.

What’s the prescription for persistence? Ninety percent of the class take medications on a regular basis, with the mean number of pills per day being three. That helps, but staying active may also be part of it: more than half the class still works full or part time, and more than a third of those who have retired work as volunteers. Many classmates say they consistently try to eat foods that are low in fat (58 percent) or cholesterol (49 percent). As for exercise, more than a quarter of respondents do it for at least 20 minutes every day, and 53 percent do it several times a week. Walking is the most popular workout (56 percent), but classmates mentioned a variety of healthful activities they go for, such as “lawn-mowing,” “typing,” and “sex.” Fewer than 5 percent of the class smoke. And 46 percent say they drink no hard liquor at all.

Obama has received endorsements from sports superstar Michael Jordan and former Democratic senators Bob Kerrey of Nebraska and Bill Bradley of New Jersey. A crucial endorsement that helped him downstate came from Carbondale city councilor Sheila Simon, daughter of the late, beloved Paul Simon, the former U.S. senator, who died last December before his support for Obama was publicized.

Among those endorsing Ryan are former secretary of education William J. Bennett, J.D. ’71, former congressman and secretary of housing and urban development Jack Kemp, and the Reverend Christopher Bullock, an African-American Baptist minister and current Bush-Cheney convention delegate who agrees with Ryan’s assessment that Democrats have failed to help minorities. “The Democratic Party offered an eight-course meal, but we’ve only gotten the appetizers,” he says. “Instead of waiting at the table to be served, let’s get in the kitchen and do our own cooking.”

AS A NEW TEACHER, Ryan was taken aback when his freshmen students turned in essays filled with incomplete sentences and erratic punctuation. He went back to basics, “drilling on vocabulary and grammar,” he recalls. “I said, ‘Okay, each week we’re going to start memorizing 50 words.’

“Remember that Helen Keller play?” he continues, referring to William Gibson’s *The Miracle Worker*. “I told them Helen Keller was a very smart person, but she didn’t have the words to communicate. Even though she had great thoughts here”—he taps his skull—“[she had] no way to get them out.”

The Republican candidate gets excited when he talks about what worked in the classroom and the bonds he’s forged there. But his grasp of legislation is far less sure, and even some supporters say he has to come to grips with government minutiae before he tries to debate Obama.

“Ryan needs to get to the middle of the road as quickly as possible,” says Illinois