

## Presidential Portrait

ON THE CHILL, blustery afternoon of May 1, a piece of Harvard's living history lit up the Faculty Room in University Hall. The occasion was the unveiling of the portrait of Neil L. Rudenstine, who served as the University's twenty-sixth president from 1991 to 2001. Both the likeness itself and the remarks delivered at the occasion varied from the routine.

The oil painting depicts a seated Rudenstine, Ph.D. '64, as scholar, wearing his crimson doctoral gown, against a blue-gray background—a colorful contrast to most of his predecessors portrayed in the room, who wore their black presidential garb and were posed in equally subdued settings. Rudenstine, a serious and devoted reader, is shown book in hand; when queried, he conceded that it was a prop supplied by the artist, Everett Raymond Kinstler.

The first speaker, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) dean William C. Kirby, recalled Rudenstine's vivid first impressions of Harvard as an entering graduate student, in September 1960 (quoting from Rudenstine's May 1994 address launching the \$2.1-billion University Campaign). Now, 46 years later, following his service on the faculty and in Massachusetts Hall, Kirby said, "Neil Rudenstine has moved *inside*" University Hall. The portrait, he said, depicts "a scholar, a listener, a leader, passionate above all about knowledge."

Kirby, whose decanal tenure would end June 30 after four years characterized by an increasingly strained relationship with President Lawrence H. Summers, cited Rudenstine's characterization of the pursuit of knowledge as "the primordial energy and motive force" of a university—a pursuit in this case, the dean said, "accompanied by understanding, grace, and a remarkable generosity of spirit." Rudenstine had maintained a fundamental respect for the broad range of academic disciplines and for members of the community, all the while effecting changes that made Harvard more than the sum of its parts. Of their joint visit to Peking University for that institution's centennial, Kirby said Rudenstine had spoken as a "true intellectual" making the case for a "humane" learning, for a "liberal education," rather than for instrumental or pre-professional schooling; the address elicited "stormy applause."

Summers, whose presi-

dency also would end June 30, after especially public differences with FAS, was not among the speakers, and took in the proceedings from the back of the crowd. Derek Bok, predecessor to Rudenstine and now designated interim successor to Summers, was in the audience, too. So was Harvey V. Fineberg, provost under Rudenstine from 1997 to 2001.

Next on the program, at Rudenstine's request, was Drew Gilpin Faust, his final decanal appointment as the first leader of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Pledging to "take Neil at his word"—and citing his observation that "A very large part of life is spent talking and listening, writing and responding, trying to persuade and be persuaded"—Faust summoned up some of those words from his thousands of handwritten notes (which made recipients feel "...*this communication comes directly and especially to me*") to his speeches.

She cited at length his belief that to know how to live, one must know "how to use words...precisely, faithfully, and lyrically so that we do not sow even more confusion than already exists in the world, either through the willful distortion and crude simplification of language and meanings, or through any careless disregard for the intellectual and imaginative stringency necessary to the task of articulating truths." Some of those present no doubt compared that formulation to the controversies sparked by Summers's speeches on anti-Semitism and on the role of women in academic science and engineering, and by some of his casual remarks on other subjects. (Rudenstine updated this theme three days later at the Harvard memorial service for long-time

Corporation member Robert G. Stone Jr., who, he said, "seemed more and more intent to emphasize the fact that mutual respect, understanding, and real enlightenment—knowledge that actually illuminates and deepens our experience—are much more important than intellectual debate or argument that fails to reach any real depth.")

From Rudenstine's many addresses, Faust extracted recurring phrases that she felt expressed his values—among them "mutuality in conversation and human re-

**Neil L. Rudenstine: the official portrait. Above right, president emeritus Rudenstine and Angelica Zander Rudenstine before the unveiling ceremony in University Hall.**



lations,” and “engagement balanced by...wise skepticism.” In closing, Faust applied to Rudenstine words by Nelson Mandela—“A leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind”—language that Rudenstine himself had cited during the 1998 honorary-degree ceremony for Mandela.

The Reverend Peter J. Gomes then lightened the occasion by remarking how rarely he had the chance to “say nice things about people who are still alive.” Surveying the room, on whose curatorial committee he serves, Gomes glossed the portraits of Harvard’s twentieth-century presidents: Charles William Eliot, “frowning forever over the president’s chair” when the faculty convenes for its business meetings; A. Lawrence Lowell, “frowning over everybody”; James Bryant Conant, appropriately hung “over the exit sign,” given his ceaseless commuting to Washington, D.C., during World War II; Nathan Marsh Pusey, whose name graces the ministry in Memorial Church occupied by Gomes himself; and Bok, “our former and yet-to-be president, ready to hop back into that chair,” the uncomfortable sixteenth-century seat used during installation ceremonies.

IN HIS OWN REMARKS, Rudenstine said the occasion gave him a feeling of “enormous freedom”: instead of chairing faculty meetings, he could now talk openly. He noted that his talk at Peking University had focused on intellectual freedom: no matter how good the institution’s science and technology, he remembered saying, its greatness would ultimately depend on its members’ ability to freely discuss political, social, and other questions.

With that theme in mind, Rudenstine said, he would dispense with his prepared remarks, instead focusing on a few points about the university enterprise and the importance of the faculty. (The role of the faculty figured prominently in news accounts of the Summers administration’s problems since early 2005, in his resignation message of February 21, and in coverage of events then and since.)

Rudenstine began by emphasizing “how important the continuity of the faculty is,” stretching back, in his experience, to Presidents Pusey and Bok and forward to Summers. But those connections did not mean merely that the faculty members grew old together. Rather, their ties represented the “living history, the living and active memory” of the institution, and therefore a “living capacity for interest in and guardianship of academic standards and moral values,” as younger professors learn from older ones and convey those values to their students. Students, staff, and administrators come and go, Rudenstine said, but the faculty members at their best remain within the community for decades—“and they’re still smart,” essential “stewards and guardians” of the institution’s “unwritten constitution” of excellence, civility, and the ability to work together.

His second point concerned how to work with such a faculty



body. “No matter how authoritarian a president like Eliot could seem to be,” he said, “you realize that he didn’t move many muscles without bringing the faculty with him.” He illustrated the point by narrating Eliot’s selection of Christopher Columbus Langdell to be the transformative dean of Harvard Law School; having engineered the appointment, Rudenstine said, Eliot pursued the fundamental course of backing his dean.

Rudenstine’s third point was “how fertile, how innovative, how inventive” the faculty is. “The rule when I was here,” he said, was that there should be “no more than one [research] center per faculty member. It was broken” because the professors simply had too many good ideas. Among those present in the room, he noted that Carswell professor of East Asian languages and civilizations Peter K. Bol was about to launch a new center for geographical analysis, and that Cogan University Professor Stephen Greenblatt, a Shakespearean scholar, was about to publish a new book on Lucretius. The message was that the faculty was engaged, invisibly, in continuous intellectual “self-reinvention,” about which administrators might learn as new centers and programs sprang up. In this sense, too, the whole institution depends on its faculty.

During his administration, Rudenstine said, he had had some “bloody” moments with FAS and other faculties, some good moments, and “not many relaxing moments.” He recalled the outraged response to his proposal to tax the faculties to pay for Allston development, in order to move beyond planning to the huge investments necessary “to begin to make Allston happen.” From that debate and others, he had come to believe, “Whatever the battles are, whatever the arguments are,” when the faculties were asked to do something and were persuaded that it was in Harvard’s best interest, “they will do it”—and so they had, in accepting the Allston levy.

Though his experiences had sometimes been humbling or perplexing, Rudenstine said, he could not conceive of anything “more exhilarating, more rewarding” than presiding over the intellectual excitement of the Harvard community. “There is simply no other university in the world that comes close.” Surrounded by members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences—to which he had his deepest ties as Harvard student, junior professor, and administrator—in the room where that faculty debates and votes on its affairs, Rudenstine concluded that the University’s excellence “has to do with the fact that people really won’t settle for less than the best.”