



# A Scholar in the House

*President Drew Gilpin Faust*

by JOHN S. ROSENBERG

**T**RADITION AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY were tangled together in Barker Center's Thompson Room on the afternoon of February 11, when Drew Gilpin Faust conducted her first news conference as Harvard's president-elect.

Daniel Chester French's bronze bust of John Harvard, perched on the mantelpiece of the enormous fireplace behind the lectern, peered down on Faust and the other speakers—and a stone VERI-

TAS crest backed up the bust. Carved into the heraldic paneling on either side of the fireplace were great Harvard names: Bulfinch and Channing, Lowell and Longfellow, Agassiz and Adams, Holmes and Allston. Huge portraits of iconic Harvardians hung on the walls: astronomer Percival Lowell, for science; Le Baron Russell Briggs, professor of English and of rhetoric and oratory, a humanist and University citizen who served as dean of Harvard College and—nearly simultaneously—dean of the Fac-



ulty of Arts and Sciences and president of Radcliffe College; and, from the world of public service, Theodore Roosevelt, A.B. 1880, LL.D. 1902, an Overseer from 1895 to 1901 and from 1910 to 1916, among other offices held. And there was as well, in the corner, a smaller portrait of Helen Keller, a 1904 Radcliffe alumna to whom Harvard awarded an honorary doctorate 51 years later—the first woman so recognized.

But for all the weight of the Georgian Revival setting and the late Crimson celebrities, the event was thoroughly modern. The coffered ceiling had been retrofitted with energy-efficient fluorescent lights when the Harvard Union was renovated in 1997. A thicket of television cameras filled the risers erected for the occasion, attesting to worldwide interest in the University's leadership transition. And of course Faust, about to become Harvard's twenty-eighth president, would be the first woman to hold that office. She acknowledged the significance, saying, "I hope that my own appointment can be one symbol of an opening of opportunities that would have been inconceivable even a generation ago." Asked by a reporter

about her gender, Faust responded levelly, "I'm not the *woman* president of Harvard. I'm the president of Harvard." (See "Crossing Boundaries," March-April, page 60A, and the more extensive on-line report at [www.harvardmagazine.com/2007/02/11/crossing-boundaries.html](http://www.harvardmagazine.com/2007/02/11/crossing-boundaries.html).)

Perhaps too neatly, the colliding style and substance of the occasion symbolized an ancient university (nearing its 375th anniversary, and in the 400th year of its namesake's birth) preparing itself for contemporary challenges and opportunities. But the obvious news angles—that Harvard had appointed a president after a period of upheaval, and a woman at that—deflected attention from two other story lines that may prove far more consequential during the administration that begins July 1. Both themes involve a return to tradition as the likeliest route to move the University forward expeditiously.

First, in selecting Faust, Harvard determined that it would best be led by someone whose career has been that of a scholar

(she is an accomplished historian), to an extent not matched since chemist James Bryant Conant became president in 1933. Second, because Faust has been dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study since 2001, Harvard has turned to one of its own—the first truly internal candidate since Derek Bok, then dean of Harvard Law School, became president in 1971. In the intersection of those paths, one may perceive the prospects for a presidency rooted in the University's past and ambitious about its future.

### "An unprecedented rate of progress"

FAUST SKETCHED elements of her childhood "in a privileged family in the rural Shenandoah Valley" of Virginia in "Living History," an essay published in this magazine in 2003. "I was the only daughter in a family of four children," she wrote, and subject to her community's prevailing expectations for girls. As she noted in the bracing preface to her widely acclaimed 1996 book, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*:

When I was growing up in Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s, my mother taught me that the term "woman" was disrespectful, if not insulting. Adult females—at least white ones—should be considered and addressed as "ladies." I responded to this instruction by refusing to wear dresses and by joining the 4-H club, not to sew and can like all the other girls, but to raise sheep and cattle with the boys. My mother still insisted on the occasional dress but, to her credit, said not a negative word about my enthusiasm for animal husbandry.

Looking back, I am sure that the origins of this book lie somewhere in that youthful experience and in the continued confrontations with my mother—until the very eve of her death when I was 19—about the requirements of what she usually called "femininity." "It's a man's world, sweetie, and the sooner you learn that the better off you'll be," she warned. I have been luckier than she in that I have lived in a time when my society and culture have supported me in proving that statement wrong.

At least a few elements seem to have impelled "Drew" (she did not go by her given name, "Catharine") beyond the settled circumstances in which she lived. In the 2003 essay, she described the all-white school she attended (she was a fifth-grader during the 1956-1957 academic year), the all-white Episcopal church to which the family belonged, and her growing awareness of racial inequality in that era of Southern resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education*—an awareness that prompted her to write a "Dear Mr. Eisenhower" letter to the president that winter to express her "many feelings about segregation."

That dawning social conscience combined with some inner spirit to direct Faust far beyond needlework: "Did my sense of the privileges allotted my brothers—who did not have to wear scratchy organdy dresses or lace underwear, sit decorously, curtsy, or accept innumerable other constraints on freedom—make me attuned to other sorts of injustice?" Or as she put it more piquantly at the Harvard College Women's Leadership Awards ceremony on April 25, "I think I was born a pain in the neck."

And her mother, despite those admonitions, guided her into a wider world through the powerful medium of education. Faust attended Concord Academy in Massachusetts, the first step in a

trajectory that led northward, into academia. She then earned a bachelor's degree, magna cum laude with honors in history, from Bryn Mawr in 1968; while there, she marched for civil rights and against the Vietnam War and was a student-government leader. Among her teachers was Mary Maples Dunn—later president of Smith College and then director of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College, and interim president during the year in which Radcliffe transformed from college to institute for advanced study.

Faust pursued master's and doctoral degrees in American civilization from the University of Pennsylvania, concluding her graduate studies in 1975. She then served on the Penn faculty, in the departments of American civilization and of history, from 1976 until her appointment as the Radcliffe Institute's founding dean, effective on January 1, 2001. Committees of faculty and students twice honored her for her teaching.



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During her early academic career, Faust also passed through testing personal experiences. An early marriage ended in divorce in 1976; Faust and historian of science Charles Rosenberg (then at Penn, now Monrad professor of the social sciences) married in 1980. Their family includes Faust's stepdaughter, Leah Rosenberg, an assistant professor in the University of Florida's English department, where she specializes in Caribbean literature, and their daughter, Jessica Rosenberg '04, who begins graduate study in comparative literature at Penn this fall. In 1988, Faust was treated for breast cancer (during a conversation, she calls the diagnosis, just after her fortieth birthday, and therapy "life-transforming") and in 1999 for thyroid cancer, which required no treatment after surgery. She now enjoys an "entirely clean bill of health."

Whatever she left behind in Virginia, Faust wrote in 2003, "I have always known that I became a southern historian because I grew up in that particular time and place." Both "historian" and "southern" figure in that formulation. "I wanted to keep my scholarship and teaching at the core of what I did," she says. Although the wide praise for *Mothers of Invention* and her association with women's studies at Penn and Radcliffe may have created an impression that Faust is principally a feminist historian, her work, while thematic, is much broader.

From *The Sacred Circle* (1977), a study of the ideas and ideology of five proslavery Southern intellectuals, through *Mothers of Invention*, Faust says, "The reason I got so interested in the Civil War, moving from the antebellum South to the Civil War period in the focus of my research, is that it is a moment when people are confronted with the necessity of change and how they respond to that. What changes do they make, and what ones do they resist?"

The subjects and approaches vary, but Faust's books tease out the reactions of elites on the edge—or during their failure to adapt to new circumstances. *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (1982) probes deeply the mind and mores of one member of the "sacred circle": a South Carolina lawyer, publisher, planter and slaveholder (he died at the evocatively named Redcliffe plantation), U.S. Representative, and governor, and the successor to Senator John C. Calhoun as the foremost proponent of nullification. In pursuit of that idea, she shows, Hammond "overtly espoused traditional republican political values," but in fact undercut Calhoun's efforts "to restore the politics of deference" by resorting to more democratic politicking. His defense of slavery as a benevolent, divinely ordained, and mutually beneficial system was rendered hollow by the harsh relationship that Faust reveals between master and bondsmen, and by his sexual use of women he owned. Between his public beliefs and his private needs, Faust shows, "Like many other Americans of his day and many southerners especially, Hammond was alarmed by what seemed to him an unprecedented rate of progress in the modern world," transforming economic life but also "long-cherished social and political arrangements as well as traditional systems of belief and morality."

In *Mothers of Invention*, Faust examines an entire elite—plantation wives and daughters—whose race, gender, and class accorded them an elevated place in society that was shattered in the Civil War. Through diaries, letters, and other evidence, Faust explores what it meant to be thrust from the luxury of living above and apart from the brutality of administering a slave economy, to the necessity of running plantations when the men went off to battle. Ranging across the fiction women read and wrote, their appeals to Jefferson Davis for protection and sustenance, their jobs in hospitals and schools, their changes in faith and in clothing, and the consequences (social and sexual) of the disappearance of suitable mates from the community, she analyzes the collapse of a system dependent on deference to patriarchy. One of her subjects wrote to her husband, "I will never feel like myself again." Faust notes that others, especially upper-class women heavily invested in their past superiority, "[f]or all their disillusionment with slavery, with Confederate leadership, and with their individual men...clung to—even reasserted—lingering elements of privilege," holding fast to "the traditional hierarchical social and racial order that had defined their importance."

Faust's histories of these doomed elites are characterized by deep archival research, multiple forms of evidence, and human empathy—her ability to understand the ideas and hopes of people whose values and behavior may be utterly alien. Scholarly curiosity has motivated her research and writing, aligning her own career experience closely with that of the professors she will now lead. But her subjects and discoveries, unlike those of most of her former peers, bear an almost uncanny relevance to thinking about the culture of elite research universities. For after a century of intellectual and institutional preeminence, universities have en-

tered an era when their assumptions and performance face questions both from within and from the wider society.

## “I was always a citizen”

**P**RODUCTIVE SCHOLARSHIP did not isolate Drew Gilpin Faust in dusty archives. “I resisted a number of requests, invitations, even a certain amount of pressure, to take on administrative roles,” she says. “But I found myself doing a lot of it anyway, because I’d be asked to chair committees, or be on boards, or be on committees for the American Historical Association—to be an officer, take responsibility for my discipline, for my university, for my department.” So despite her focus on research and teaching, Faust chaired the American civilization department and directed the women’s studies program, for five years each, during her quarter-century at Penn.

Her service ultimately extended far beyond such professorial routines. “A Mind of Her Own,” an extended article by Jean M. Dykstra published in the February 1991 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, portrays Faust the scholar also taking on highly contentious is-

suces—diversity; faculty, student, and staff interactions; the challenges facing Penn’s urban West Philadelphia environs; fraternities—as chair of a Committee on University Life appointed by that institution’s president, Sheldon Hackney, in late 1988. Dykstra cited the committee’s emphasis on the “incivility” of students and faculty toward staff members; Faust’s advocacy of moving fraternities from their central campus location; and her promotion of smaller classes, in part, as Faust said, so “students have to take responsibility for their own education—talk, contribute, argue, risk.” At the time Dykstra wrote, Faust was serving on 11 Penn committees (Harvard’s news release on her election as president cites her work there on academic planning and budgets, academic freedom, human resources, the university archives, and intercollegiate athletics). She was also a member of the search committee that in 1994 chose Judith Rodin to become Penn’s (and the Ivy League’s) first regular female chief executive.

“I always enjoyed those roles,” Faust says now. “I was always a citizen in that I was very engaged with the communities in which I found myself.”

**T**WO YEARS AGO, Drew Gilpin Faust began looking for a date when women presidents of Ivy League universities could convene for a panel discussion as part of the Radcliffe Institute’s “Voices of Public Intellectuals” series. By the time that Penn president emerita Judith Rodin; Princeton’s Shirley Tilghman; Brown’s Ruth Simmons; and Rodin’s successor, Amy Gutmann (listed in their order of appointment) sat down in an arc of Harvard chairs flanking Faust, circumstances had so changed that she said, with laughter and applause, “I have arranged a tutorial for myself.”

The tutorial, held before a full house in the Loeb Theatre on May 2, gave some sense of the speakers’ paths to their current eminence, and of the challenges of running a university. For the most part, the visitors were surprised to find themselves moving from scholarship into management and positions of leadership; most noted the support and critical interventions of helpful mentors. Tilghman, who said she had wanted to be a scientist since she was five years old, observed that her career as a biologist had been pertinent because women in science during the past 25 years have needed three essential traits to survive: determination; humor; and—in light of the challenges posed to their success—an “absolute inability to recognize reality.”

Explicitly or otherwise, the presidents seemed to share what Gutmann described as their “incredible ambitions for our own institutions” as engines of knowledge and human betterment for those they educate. She also noted the “endless difficulties” of realizing those ambitions: “No one should be under the illusion that this is the type of job that everyone wants to do.”

Faust, who moderated (but withheld her own views), asked if there was a female leadership style particularly suited to academic institutions. Simmons declared that idea “nonsense.” Tilghman observed that universities are “very strange beasts,” built to an unusual degree on “conversation,

## “A Tutorial”



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consultation, mutual respect.” Socialization as a girl in America, she thought, promoted skills that work well in such settings—but she also pointed out that the president then has to make a decision, choosing one direction from among others that may also be plausible. Gutmann said a president would use every skill she had to move her institution forward, so the multitasking demanded

of contemporary mothers could prove useful.

The guests had plenty of ideas about the biggest challenges universities face. Their institutions, Tilghman said, are “the most effective engines for social mobility in this country. In fact, I don’t even know who is number two.” But there are impediments to access. Gutmann cited conversations with government officials concerned about the “threat of China” who advocate controlling access to labs and limiting student and scholar exchanges. Simmons highlighted the deplorable state of K-12 education in this country and the stunting effect that has on most students and on society as a whole.

Given those problems, and others (of intrusions into the academy, Tilghman said, “The day we let someone in Washington decide what should be the curriculum in classes is the day we should all pack up and go home”), Rodin suggested that campus leaders had an exceptional opportunity to be role models within their own communities: “the beacons and activists” for civic engagement and honest discourse, exemplifying university values for students. Gutmann urged her peers to carry the message about the worth of a broad education in the liberal arts and sciences across the land and around the world. And Rodin said she saw in the four women who have followed her to Ivy League presidencies—a “pretty amazing” group—a new generation of leaders eager and able to do just that.

(A video of the entire discussion is available at [www.radcliffe.edu/events/lectures/2007\\_vpi.php](http://www.radcliffe.edu/events/lectures/2007_vpi.php).)

## Of the institute's intellectual program, Faust wrote, "Crossing boundaries is fundamental to the Radcliffe experience."

Still, it was a decisive step to accept a full-time position such as the deanship of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study (RIAS). Asked what led to the change, she replies, "Neil Rudenstine," then Harvard's president, who first engaged her in thinking about the post during a conversation that began in the fall of 1999 and ultimately extended several months. "I had understood the job to be one in which I could do a substantial amount of my scholarship and run an organization," she recalls.

In fact, from the time her appointment was announced in April 2000 through the first four years of her deanship, Faust found herself absorbed in untangling "impenetrable financial records," explaining the new institute to Radcliffe College's alumnae, and building a lively academic community of scholar-fellows—women and men. (During a sabbatical last year, she worked on her sixth book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the*

common interest. According to executive dean Louise Richardson, who led the institute while Faust was on leave, fellows have reported rediscovering "the intellectual camaraderie they had missed in their home departments."

- Participants in projects have reached out productively to other schools for expertise. Radcliffe's conference on computational biology in May 2003 was the first such gathering on campus; it drew 150 people together for three days of workshops and lectures, seeding a now robust field of research. A conference on women and enterprise was produced by a faculty committee drawn from five Harvard schools.

- Radcliffe-funded "exploratory and advanced seminars," initiated by ladder faculty, bring together scholars from throughout Harvard and beyond to address a new problem, ranging from malaria to debt relief in Africa. A dozen or more such seminars annually have spawned new connections involving departments across the University, and virtually every school, to examine problems in science, the humanities, public policy, and the professions.

- Advisers including Jennifer Leaning, professor of the practice of international health (Harvard School of Public Health); Homi Bhabha, Rothenberg professor of the humanities and director of the Humanities Center; and former Graduate School of Arts and Sciences dean Theda Skocpol all serve as substantive participants in shaping RIAS's programs, building strong bridges to the rest of the University. Higgins professor of natural sciences Barbara J. Grosz, of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, has provided powerful links to that entire realm of research as Radcliffe's dean of science since early in Faust's institute tenure (see page 69 for news of her appointment as RIAS's interim dean, succeeding Faust as of July 1).

- Radcliffe's breadth has been extended, with 38 men and 25 international fellows among the 260 who made up the first five classes of fellows resident at the institute.

In this basic intellectual sense, Faust wrote early in her decanal tenure, "Crossing boundaries is fundamental to the Radcliffe experience." Effective administration has been fundamental, too. As dean, she:

- transferred former Radcliffe College training programs (in publishing and landscape architecture) to other institutional homes, made the Murray Center for social-science research a part of the Harvard-MIT Data Center, closed other programs that no longer fit the new institute's mission, and reduced staffing and expenses significantly with the help of University financial administrators, outside advisers, and consultants;

- directed a comprehensive campus plan for the institute, and oversaw the renovation of the Schlesinger Library, the former Radcliffe Gym, and Byerly Hall (now under construction); and

- proved a robust fundraiser for the new institute's fellowships and programs, drawing on revived relationships with Radcliffe alumnae and the advice of a Dean's Council whose members include several leading supporters of the University.

Meanwhile, as at Penn, Faust became involved in Harvard priorities well beyond the demands of her day job. As RIAS dean,



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*American Civil War*, on the impact of that war's enormous death toll. She delivered the manuscript in January, just before her election as president, and so describes it as her "scholarly denouement." Knopf will publish the book next year. She also returned to the classroom, teaching an undergraduate seminar on the Civil War and Reconstruction this past spring.)

Whatever the short-term obstacles, Faust made the most of her own administrative knowledge, the suggestions of the intellectually eminent advisers she convened, and the opportunity presented by the founding of the institute as a full affiliate of Harvard. From her very first messages about the new institute, Faust emphasized "Radcliffe's potential to create interest and engagement across the University." She realized that potential in a variety of ways, not all of them widely known:

- Radcliffe Fellowships, the core one-year appointments for advanced study, have proven a way for junior faculty, from Harvard and elsewhere, to complete research essential for qualifying for tenure. Moreover, clusters of fellows concentrating in fields such as astrophysics or immigration have brought professors from separate departments together to work on problems of

May 2005: Meeting at Massachusetts Hall, Drew Gilpin Faust, who led University task forces on women faculty,

with professors Evelyn M. Hammonds and Barbara J. Grosz, who directed the two efforts. Hammonds, now at Penn, oversees implementation of the recommendations; Grosz succeeds Faust as Radcliffe's interim dean.

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THE SEARCH for Harvard's twenty-eighth president began under difficult circumstances.

## A "Better Answer"

should not have been a surprise: he had expressed reluctance to give up his laboratory group, had not done any fundraising, and had not been an administrator (apart from his institute duties).

Lawrence H. Summers's resignation on February 21, 2006, ended his presidency far sooner than had been expected. The Corporation, whose members (excluding the president) organize such searches, had to begin one quickly, under heightened scrutiny, knowing that the University would be led, perhaps for a prolonged period, by an interim president. Moreover, the Corporation itself was freshly constituted: Senior Fellow James R. Houghton's service began in 1995, but all the other members were appointed after Summers took office in 2001; the newest, Patricia A. King, elected in December 2005, did not formally join the Corporation until the following May.

After a further flurry of external speculation, the search committee quickly came to consensus. The Corporation voted to elect Faust, and sought the Overseers' consent, on February 11.

Beyond selecting Harvard's first woman president, this search set other precedents by chartering formal faculty and student advisory bodies, and by extensive outreach to alumni (see "Precedent-Setting Presidential Search," May-June 2006, page 66).

The search committee (including three Overseers) proceeded in customary secrecy, prompting the equally customary news leaks, particularly after the entire 30-member Board of Overseers was briefed in December on a list of candidates that included many leaders of research universities: presidents Lawrence Bacow (Tufts), Lee Bollinger (Columbia), Richard Brodhead (Duke), Amy Gutmann (Penn), Ruth Simmons (Brown), and Shirley Tilghman (Princeton), Stanford provost John Etchemendy, and University of Cambridge vice-chancellor Alison Richard. Because all those candidates were recent appointees, and several were involved with major capital campaigns, their availability and interest seemed slight. Several said they were not candidates. Much attention focused on Nobel laureate Thomas R. Cech, a chemist at the University of Colorado and president of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute; his expertise and the institute's recent activities (see "The Janelia Experiment," January-February, page 53) appeared relevant to Harvard's plans for the sciences in Allston. Internal prospects included Elena Kagan, Harvard Law School dean since 2003; Provost Steven E. Hyman, a neuroscientist; and historian Drew Gilpin Faust, Radcliffe Institute dean since 2001.

Overseer Frances D. Fergusson, a member of the search committee, said the student advisory group "gave us a very comprehensive understanding of how each school was perceived by its students, and of the major challenges a new president would face," and credited it with helping her "grasp both the complexity and nuances of Harvard's radically decentralized structure." Fergusson credited the faculty advisers with "invaluable" input—"both in their concrete suggestions and their broad-reaching perspectives about Harvard's future." Pforzheimer University Professor Sidney Verba, who led the faculty group, said this "more structured way" of involving professors (who have been consulted individually in past searches, without the opportunity to test one another's opinions) was mutually productive. The faculty members, he noted, not only helped refine search criteria, they also know Harvard and have contacts throughout academia, and so could sound out names for the search committee and render "lots of candid assessments" not available otherwise.

Cech revealed that he had indeed been a serious contender when he called the *Crimson* on the morning of January 31 to disclose that he had "withdrawn my name." In retrospect, that

James Houghton said both advisory committees "worked extremely well....We tested all sorts of ideas with them." (Alumni contacts had to be handled differently, through travel to meet groups around the world.) The new channels yielded a "better answer than we could have had, had we not done this exercise." His conclusion: "I would be very strongly in favor" of using a similar process in future searches.

she was a member of the Academic Advisory Group, through which the president, provost, and deans consider matters of University policy—and so become acquainted with one another and with broader academic issues. In 2004, she served on the task force exploring the role of and opportunities for undergraduate life in Allston—one of the elements that figured in the master plan for campus development there, published in January (see "Harvard's 50-Year Plan," March-April, page 58). In early 2005, following his controversial remarks on women in academic science and engineering, President Lawrence H. Summers appointed her to lead two University task forces, on women faculty and on women in science and engineering. Their comprehensive recommendations, produced quickly and under enormous pressure, provoked fresh thinking about faculty development, student learning, and diversity; multiple measures are now being implemented under the direction of a senior vice provost (see "Tenure Task Forces," May-June 2005, page 67, and "Engineering Equity," July-August 2005, page 55).

active intellectual leader. Beyond her professional involvement in the principal historical associations, and her service on the Pulitzer Prize history jury, she is, among other affiliations, a trustee of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (a powerful supporter of the arts and scholarship in the humanities and higher education); the National Humanities Center; and her alma mater, Bryn Mawr College—perhaps a useful perspective for working with Harvard's governing boards.

Those experiences—and the Radcliffe Institute's role in assessing the work of scholars from all fields—have given Faust an unusually broad overview of faculty members across a research university. As a past department chair, a member of the 2005 task forces, and a dean nurturing younger faculty members during their Radcliffe fellowships, she arrives at Massachusetts Hall extensively prepared for one of the Harvard president's most important responsibilities: helping schools to identify the next generation of scholars and to advance their academic careers.

The cumulative value of these diverse activities paved Faust's way toward consideration as the University's leader. They also

Outside her two university communities, Faust has been an

## “Change often happens most easily if it can be shown to be embedded in long-held beliefs, values, traditions.”

provided the will for her to accept the offer. For all its unexpected demands, she says, “In the course of this experience at Radcliffe, I found I just loved it. I loved working in a team with people. I loved defining organizational goals. I loved seeing things happen,” whether the renovation of the Radcliffe gymnasium into a gleaming conference space or institute fellows winning Pulitzer Prizes or earning tenure. “I just found that I liked it a lot, and I seemed to be getting feedback that I was pretty good at it.” And so, with that one last book in the pipeline (“a vestige of my scholarly identity”) and no illusions that her new position will leave time for another, Faust has plunged headlong into the Harvard presidency.

### “An unparalleled opportunity to make a difference”

**S**PEAKING ON FEBRUARY 11, Faust said, “I love universities and I love this one in particular.” Asked to amplify on her lifelong love affair with the academy, she says, “At the heart of it, universities are about renewal every minute. You’re *always* learning something new,” as a student or as a scholar. That learning comes as a refreshing surprise—“a surprise that in some way reinforces some things you know but at the same time changes them. I think to be in a community where everybody is dedicated to that expansion of themselves through an expansion of what they know is just the best thing I can imagine.” In that capacity, she says, universities affect not just individuals but society—a dual role that lies at the heart of her commitment to these institutions.

Faust acknowledges that she was approached about other leadership positions earlier in her Radcliffe tenure—too soon in the institute’s transformation, she judged, for her to consider leaving. As time passed, she says, she contemplated returning to scholarly work full time (she is Lincoln professor of history) or pursuing “the *right* leadership opportunity” if it came around. When Summers resigned, unexpectedly creating a vacancy at Harvard, she says she realized that she had already been involved in trying to make the University work better. The presidency represented “an unparalleled opportunity to make a difference in higher education” in ways that mattered deeply to her. Moreover, she perceived that the institution was “crying out for a kind of intervention that I felt I might be able to make successfully.”

“Harvard has the most extraordinary resources available to it of any higher-education institution in the world,” Faust declares—not just material assets such as the endowment, the Fogg Art Museum collections, and Widener Library, but also extraordinary students and faculties. From her first day at Radcliffe, she says, she felt that it was “just a totally overstimulating environment.

“And yet,” she continues, “so many of the things we say about ourselves are true.” Referring to its decentralized schools, she says that Harvard is “*not* one university”—and so it has missed opportunities for collaboration. By investing in individual faculties and their facilities, “In a peculiar way, Harvard has not invested in itself. It needs to make the most of those extraordinary resources.” In some ways, the Radcliffe Institute has been an experiment in doing just that, by helping members of the community break down the boundaries separating “fields and schools

and disciplines,” prompting beneficial new connections and “intellectual transformations.” She mentions research links between Harvard Medical School (HMS) and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), ties between students and faculty members from different schools, and bridges over the divisions between the sciences and the humanities.

Among the principal priorities she envisions, Faust details the wholesale improvements under way in undergraduate education, work on the Allston campus, and advances in science throughout the University based on collaboration among FAS, HMS, and the affiliated hospitals. “All of these questions seem at the core of what Harvard is about,” she says, “but *none* of them has been accomplished.” She intends to embrace each and “move forward as effectively as I am able to.” She also details important work to be done in securing broader student access not only to the College, but also to graduate education in the arts and sciences and in professional schools for those pursuing jobs in less remunerative careers. Similarly, in the wake of the 2005 task forces on science and engineering, she emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals to “choose fields out of preference and talent, and not because they are driven out of [other fields] by obstacles we should eliminate,” whether of gender or of other kinds.

Even as Faust describes “spending a lot of time immersing myself” in the details of each of those issues—in part through searches for new FAS and HMS deans (see page 67) and other senior appointees—she is also trying, in the course of “a lot of listening this spring,” to identify “questions we’re not asking.” At least one important new effort, suggested during her February 11 remarks, is already emerging. Faust says Harvard needs to take a comprehensive look at the arts throughout the University. The art museum complex is about to be renovated; a new museum and performance facilities are to be erected in Allston; the American Repertory Theatre is searching for a new artistic director; the Graduate School of Design deanship is also vacant; and, in general, this is a “world in which the arts are taking on much more importance in undergraduate life in our peer institutions.” She suggests that a committee of senior advisers may be formed soon to look at Harvard and the arts in the broadest context, with significant implications for academic resources and facilities across the campus, not just in Allston.

As she refines these and endless other priorities into an agenda (finding a scale for Allston that promotes both ambitious interdisciplinary work and personal interactions; refining which goals and programs to pursue around the world, as Harvard students and scholars now “live their lives internationally”), Faust may innovate organizationally, as she did at Radcliffe. She has already announced that she will create an executive vice presidency, to whom at least the administrative, financial, and human-resources vice presidents in Massachusetts Hall will report. An advisory group will examine the position’s reporting relationships and likely candidates; once filled, it will somewhat reduce the number of people and units (now numbering nearly 30) directly responsible to the president, making it easier for her to focus on her highest priorities.

Of greater consequence: as soon as her decanal team is in place, Faust intends this summer to convene Harvard-wide academic planning, which has been in abeyance in recent years, to specify the mission of each school in teaching and research for the next decade, a process she describes as “defining our substantive purposes and hopes.” Through the planning process, she aims to “make us very self-conscious about how we use the resources we have—and what resources we don’t have”—to guide the schools’ daily work, to identify needs that fall between existing units, and, ultimately, to shape an “inevitable” capital campaign. (She is also searching for a new vice president for alumni affairs and development.)

How those immediate objectives are pursued of course depends on the larger context. Faust spoke on February 11 of her concern that society has become ambivalent, even skeptical, about universities (“American higher education is hailed as the best in the world, and attacked as falling short”). As part of her presidency, Faust says, she wants to “try to articulate what a university is in American and world society. And why the very aspects of universities that make many people nervous are at the core of what we ultimately want universities to be—and why universities *should* not try to be like every other institution in society, and what the rationale for their continuing difference from other institutions truly is. People get exasperated with how collaborative they are, how long it takes them to get things done, how everybody has a voice, how we are in some ways embedded in the past.

“Well, we need to be embedded in the past and embedded in the future at the same time. That’s a pretty complicated stance.”

### “But this is where we’re going”

**T**HOSE COMPLICATIONS seem productively embodied in Drew Gilpin Faust’s career in and approach to the academy—as scholar, as dean, and, beginning July 1, as president. In Faust’s own passage from Virginia girlhood to the pinnacle of academe, there are echoes of those women in *Mothers of Invention* who drew strength from their trials—who “had come to a new understanding of themselves and their interests.” She is an historian who observed minutely the disastrous consequences for her native South of failing to adapt. And from her first days at Radcliffe, she pursued a sweeping agenda of institutional reform in support of innovative intellectual programs.

In the fall of 2001, herself a newcomer to Cambridge, Faust told the entering Harvard College class of 2005, “When you hear—in this most wonderfully tradition-bound place—that something is because it has always been that way, take a moment to ask which of the past’s assumptions are embedded in this particular tradition. If men and women are to be truly equal at Harvard, not all traditions can be.”

In her remarks as president-elect on February 11, she reprised the theme, albeit on a larger scale. Realizing the promise of “our shared enterprise...to make Harvard’s future even more remarkable than its past,” she said, “will mean recognizing and building on what we already do well. It will also mean recognizing what we don’t do as well as we should—and not being content until we find ways to do better.” Doing so, she said, involves creating more effective ways of working together, of removing barriers, and of overcoming habits “that lead us to identify ourselves as from one or the other ‘side of the river.’ Collaboration means more energy, more ideas, more wisdom; it also means investing beyond

one’s own particular interest or bailiwick. It means learning to live and to think within the context of the whole University.”

That, of course, has been the most difficult challenge in this notoriously autonomous place, a tradition-bound hothouse for cultivating new ideas. “[T]he character and meaning of universities for the twenty-first century,” Faust said on February 11, depend on “whether they can be supple enough, enterprising enough, ambitious enough to accomplish all that is expected of them—and no less important, whether they can do so while preserving their unique culture of inquiry and debate in a world that seems increasingly polarized into unassailable certainties.”

How would she encourage the change that many members of the community wish to embrace—as they legislate curriculum reforms, discuss more effective teaching, and reorganize to promote scientific research?

At Radcliffe, she responds, she immersed herself in the archives, rediscovering the institution’s roots and envisioning how to capture and fulfill its founders’ desires “in a way that’s appropriate for a new era.” More broadly, she explains, this suggests that “change often happens most easily if it can be shown to be embedded in long-held beliefs, values, traditions, rather than being just a total assault on everything everybody thought they were and wanted.

“So it seems to me that part of moving through change effectively is making it seem seamless, or as seamless as possible, with what has gone before—of identifying continuities that can serve as bridges over the chasm of differences, building understanding and transparency about purpose and shared commitments, and using those as the fuel of change. And then saying, ‘Hope you’ll come, too, but this is where we’re going.’ So it begins with persuasion and collaboration and building a case, but I think ultimately it becomes a gesture of decisive movement.”

Two days after her appointment as president-elect, Faust joined her Faculty of Arts and Sciences colleagues for a regularly scheduled faculty meeting—a familiar figure, toting her papers in her signature red Radcliffe canvas bag, now invested with new hopes and expectations. After an introduction by interim president Derek Bok, and a raucous ovation, FAS interim dean Jeremy R. Knowles welcomed her presence in the portrait-festooned faculty room in University Hall:

In saying how delighted we are in this faculty to have a new president, and most of all, to have *this* new president, let me echo Charles Eliot Norton, speaking about Radcliffe and its first president, the redoubtable Mrs. Agassiz—there they both are, gazing down upon us.

“She gives it,” he said, “by being herself, an impetus, a dignity, and an unwavering standard that it could not have without her.” Members of the faculty, let us welcome our new and unwavering standard: president-elect Drew Faust. 

*John S. Rosenberg is the editor of this magazine.*

