

same level as her congregation when she leads services, not on a raised platform looking down on them. Nor do these women dictate to their congregants how pious they should be. “I don’t see my role,” Andelman says, “as instructing people to do X or believe X. When I talk about God, I do so in a very open way—trying to keep it as general as possible, to make room for everyone.” Flatté describes her attitude as “Live and let live. I don’t consider it my life’s purpose to have every Jew living a halakhic life—following a lot of Jewish law or participating in every Jewish ritual.” Spitzer agrees: “If I can just get someone to turn off the computer on Friday night and not turn it on again until Saturday night, that’s a huge step. I don’t need them to become Orthodox.”

These alumnae continue to fulfill the traditional rabbinic obligations, but differently, integrating Jewish practices and values more directly into everyday life, including more personal interactions on the religious journey. For Spitzer, this means creating what she calls “covenantal community”—groups that cohere around a shared vision of justice and compassion. Her work is formed of “concentric circles”: in her congregation, in her rabbinic organization, in the world. “I see my goal as saying, ‘Judaism has really powerful spiritual and ethical practices. If we take these on, it will make us better,’” she



Julia Andelman

notes. “I think people are starving for meaning in their lives. We should be offering practices that can help change people’s lives.”

Like many professional women (and men) today, the rabbis struggle to balance their public and private lives. (Spitzer refuses to have a cell phone. Andelman doesn’t give out her cell number and turned down the BlackBerry offered by her congregation.) “The connection between a rabbi and a congregation is not unlike a marriage,” Spitzer says. After seven years, she needed some distance

and took a 10-month break. “I was burnt out,” she says. “I felt going on sabbatical was modeling something for my congregation, saying, ‘There are things that are good to do for oneself.’”

But even as some worshippers are inspired, others find the change in the pulpit harder to accept. “Many congregants see a female rabbinate as gendered and a male rabbinate as neutral,” says Andelman. When she was hired in 2006 by her present congregation—in one of the most politically liberal enclaves in the country—some people left because they didn’t believe a woman should be a rabbi. And six weeks into her job, during a sweltering New York summer, a male congregant admonished her in a three-paragraph e-mail for wearing open-toed shoes: a wardrobe choice, he said, that left him questioning whether she had the gravitas to be a rabbi.

Such lingering resistance helps these contemporary rabbis appreciate their predecessors. “The first women who tried rabbinical school were not shown concern or care by their classmates and were not treated with respect by their professors,” says Flatté. “They had to do it the man’s way, and because they did, we didn’t have to as much. To get ahead and be taken seriously, we didn’t have to change who we fundamentally were.”

Elaine Yaffe ’59, a freelance writer living in New York City, is the biographer of Radcliffe’s fifth president, Mary Ingraham Bunting.

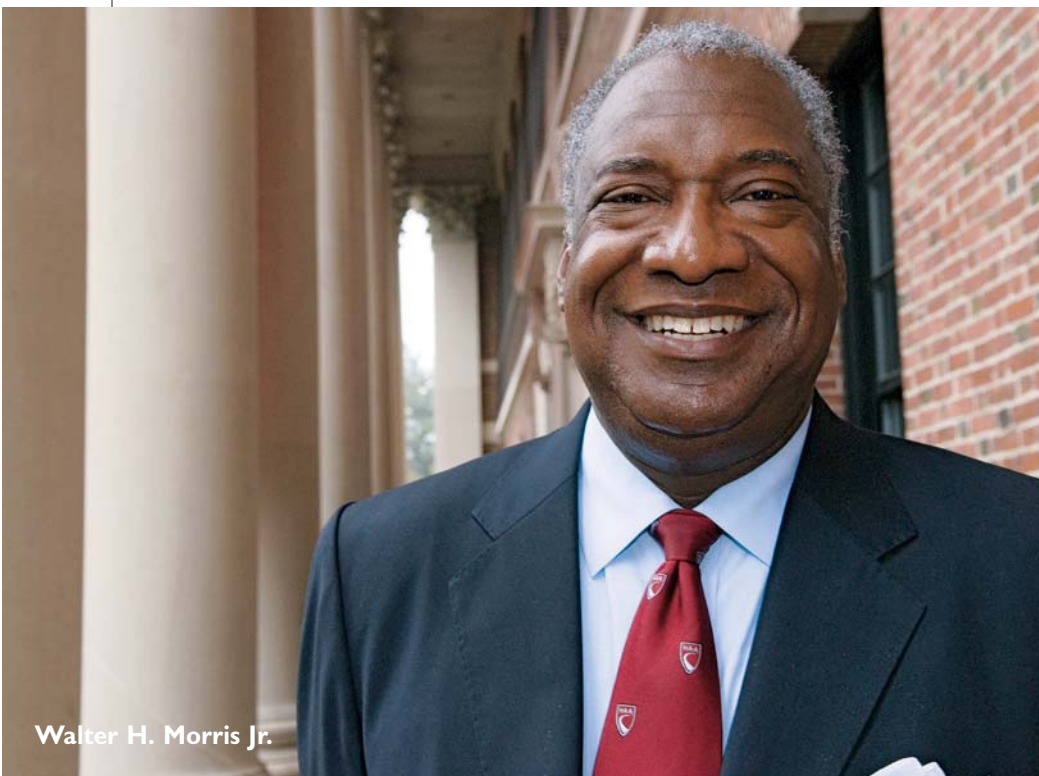
Harvard Proponent

THE HARVARD Alumni Association’s new president, Walter H. Morris Jr. ’73, M.B.A. ’75, may have left the University’s classrooms years ago, but he has never stopped learning at Harvard. He often returns for lectures, meetings, and presentations on the latest developments in politics, the sciences, and technology. He vividly re-

calls an HAA communications committee meeting in the late 1990s during which cochair James Ullyott ’62, M.B.A. ’66, demonstrated an intriguing new phenomenon: something called the Internet, which was related to a “World Wide Web.” The HAA, Ullyott explained, was planning to use this computer technology to broaden contact with alumni around the country, maybe even around the

world. “I was in awe of the Internet’s reach,” Morris says, “to the point where I immediately purchased a personal computer for home use.”

This access to life-long learning is one of the main reasons Morris stays involved with Harvard, and why he thinks others should, too. “We have been exploring a variety of avenues to ensure that the Harvard educational experience does not end



Walter H. Morris Jr.

at graduation,” he says. “Through the Alumni College, on-line learning, and travel-study programs, as well as various conferences and forums, the HAA is committed to bringing Harvard’s academic community to our alumni” worldwide.

Morris is especially pleased by dramatic growth in Shared Interest Groups (SIGs). There are currently 21 SIGs—or “clubs without walls”—representing about 11,000 alumni, he told graduating seniors on Class Day in June. In contrast to the age-based cohesion of classes and the shared locales of the 181 Harvard clubs around the world, SIGs “bring together people with common interests and pursuits crossing geographic boundaries and graduating class years,” he explained. (The newest examples include the Harvard Crimson Organization for Latter-day Saint Alumni, Harvard Crimson Alumni/ae Professionals in Sports, and Harvard-Radcliffe Science Fiction Alumni Networking Society; for further details, visit <http://post.harvard.edu/harvard/clubs/html/SIGdir.shtml>.)

Morris also introduced the seniors to the HAA’s Global Series of alumni gatherings. The most recent, held in March in Shanghai, drew 600 alumni, faculty, and

even current students from 31 countries, he reported, noting how impressed he was by the substantial number of younger alumni living throughout Asia who participated and had the chance to hold mini-reunions and network around issues of common concern. (The seventh gathering in the series takes place next March in Cape Town.) In general, alumni have multiple opportunities to get involved and contribute to University life going forward, he told his Class Day audience. “You now represent Harvard’s future as an alumni body, and your creativity, drive, energy, intellectual curiosity, and diversity are essential to help guide Harvard and the HAA for decades to come.”

His goals for the coming year include pushing to increase alumni engagement; he notes that last year the HAA changed the name of the communications committee to the “Engagement and Marketing Committee.” Its members, he says, have been instrumental in redesigning the Post.Harvard website to increase usability and access, in shaping alumni perceptions (and addressing misperceptions), and increasing alumni awareness of HAA activities and programs.

Morris first became involved with the

HAA in 1995 (on its graduate schools committee) at the urging of executive director John Reardon, who was his freshman-year proctor and mentor throughout college. “Jack has provided a lot of guidance and perspective over the years,” Morris says, fondly. Since then, Morris has worked on numerous committees, and was an elected HAA director before serving as secretary, from 2004 to 2007. He is also active in the Harvard Club of Washington, D.C., serving as a director from 2004 to 2007. He and his wife, Cynthia Lowery Morris, and their son, Walter Morris III, live in Potomac, Maryland. Their daughter, Anne Morris ’04, helped organize two reunions of black alumni, in 2003 and 2006, and serves on the HAA’s nominating committee.

As an undergraduate, Morris concentrated in economics; he recalls his junior tutorial as a “unique opportunity to study with one of Harvard’s leading economics professors, Robert Dorfman. Our group of roughly eight students covered his widely acclaimed research on ‘cost-benefit analysis’ and its application to international development decision-making.”

That concentration helped pave the way for his current career: after more than two decades in banking and capital markets, he is now a principal in the fraud and investigation and dispute services at Ernst & Young, LLP, in Washington. But one of his best memories is of a freshman seminar with Mallinckrodt professor of physics Roy J. Glauber. “His goal was to expose freshmen with varying degrees of course backgrounds to highly advanced physics theory,” he says. “I still remember his illustration of the theory of light as both a wave and a particle. I was thrilled when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics” in 2005.

For Morris, such “personal bonds” between students and faculty, among students, and between alumni and the University exemplify the strong learning relationships that Harvard is all about. “We can all recall those terrific friends and classmates from our days here while attending Harvard,” he says. “The HAA has offered me a second chance to meet and get to know personally more of our wonderful alums, many of whom have become dear friends.” ~N.P.B.