

Cambridge 02138

Quotable Harvard, Vietnam, polygyny

PARTISAN PERSPECTIVES

OBSERVING THAT 90 percent or more of Harvard graduates in Congress are Democrats, Peter McKinney '56 concludes that "the development of independent and critical thinking...is not happening at Harvard College" (Letters, March-April, page 7). But according to polls, vast numbers of the party McKinney favors believe that global warming is a hoax, that evolution is a fraud, that Barack Obama is a Muslim born in Indonesia, and that the moral high ground belongs to serial adulterers. One wonders who really missed out on a Harvard education.

CHARLES M. EPSTEIN '69, M.D. '73
Atlanta

PETER MCKINNEY might be interested in a recent national survey of thousands of

college students by Matthew Woessner, April Kelly-Woessner, and my late colleague at Smith College, Stanley Rothman. Among their findings: seniors leave college with virtually the same political affiliation that they had when they were freshmen (31 percent and 32 percent Democrats, respectively). The authors deem the belief that college professors turn their students into liberals "a popular misconception."

RICHARD OLIVO, PH.D. '69
Boston

PETER MCKINNEY'S comment rests on two false assumptions.

The first and less egregious fallacy is that Harvard students are susceptible to faculty indoctrination. I recall most of my college classmates as being politically sophisticated and established in their views

Harvard at 375: Your Experiences and Expectations

Harvard's 375th anniversary is fast approaching; see page 48 for a report on the official festivities planned for this fall and beyond. As *Harvard Magazine* prepares its coverage of the University's recent past (focusing on the past quarter-century, from before you used the Internet or recognized China and India as rising economic powers), and its prospects (up to the fourth-century mark), we invite you to reflect on:

- how your experiences and education in the College or the graduate and professional schools shaped your life, work, and perspectives;
- how those experiences and your Harvard education could have been more effective; and
- how you would improve Harvard for the future, if you were returning to the University today to prepare for the rest of your life, or advising a young person—your child, a relative, a friend—embarking on that stage of growth and learning.

Please share your thoughts, and comment on those of your fellow correspondents, at www.harvardmag.com/375th. We look forward to incorporating some of the most vivid accounts and ideas into future issues.

~The Editors



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when they arrived, and far more likely to modify or adapt those views because of interactions with their fellows than because of what they heard in the lecture hall. This was even truer of my law school classmates. Decades of interviewing applicants to the College has impressed me with how politically precocious they are even before they are admitted, and how well developed their sense of civic commitment. Indeed, this last is one of the few rays of hope I see in the present downward national spiral.

The second and greater fallacy is the assumption that because there are two major political tendencies in this country, properly educated people should divide roughly equally between them. This presumes that both are equally possessed of rational arguments, and this is unfortunately not true. Although the Republican Party, within living memory, disposed of leaders and ideas that could be called rational, for the last 30 years to be a Republican has increasingly meant to deny scientific truth, to subscribe to patent fantasies regarding our national history, recent or more distant, to espouse social and economic theories whose bankruptcy was demonstrated 80 years ago, to work for the enrichment of the few and the impoverishment of the many, and generally to substitute magical thinking for reason. That so few Harvard graduates enter Congress as Republicans can only be seen as a confirmation of the soundness of their education.

JOEL Z. EIGERMAN '63, J.D. '67
Cambridge

PETER MCKINNEY suggests that the strong Democratic skew among Harvard's alumni in Congress might be due to "the ideological imbalance of the faculty." Perhaps he should spend a few minutes reviewing the current Republican Party before looking for more complicated ex-

planations. In my grandfather's GOP, a degree from an "elite" university was an asset: it was evidence that a politician was smart, or hard working, or, sadly, that he was at least from the right sort of family. In Sarah Palin's GOP, "elite" is an insult. What's more, in Palin's faith-based GOP, candidates are all but required to espouse the view that the world is 6,000 years old, that the "theory" of evolution is false, and that anthropogenic climate change is a sinister liberal myth. I certainly hope that very few Harvard graduates share these views. Twenty-six years ago, Ronald Reagan invited the Reverend Peter Gomes to speak at his second inauguration. While Gomes was in some ways a conservative Christian, he supported a much more nuanced view of the Bible, and of Christianity, than the current GOP tolerates. Given the state of today's GOP, I'm surprised that any Harvard graduates, however conservative and qualified, have won GOP nominations for Congressional seats.

ROBERT STAFFORD '86
Belmont, Mass.

WHILE PETER MCKINNEY's letter raises the question whether Harvard's liberal atmosphere is an explanation of why most Harvard degree holders are Democrats, I have a different take on this. I think it is fair to assume that most Harvard graduates are of above average intelligence and education and tend to believe in such things as evolution and global warming. It seems most Republicans do not.

EDWARD G. SHUFRO, M.B.A. '58
New York City

PETER MCKINNEY implicitly assumes that, absent bias, the distribution of political affiliation among alums elected to Congress would be horizontal, with an equal number of Republicans and Democrats or, perhaps, even skewed in the opposite direction. He believes that students in fair and full exercise of truly independent and critical thought could not possibly be more Democratic than Republican in their party affiliation. Evidence, please?

ALISON A. SOMMERS '71
Louisville, Ky.

AFTER A MOMENT'S consideration, it is obvious that the party distribution of alumni in Congress is a ridiculous estimator for the party distribution of alumni in

HARVARD

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SPEAK UP, PLEASE

Harvard Magazine welcomes letters on its contents. Please write to "Letters," *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, send comments by e-mail to yourturn@harvard.edu, use our website, www.harvardmagazine.com, or fax us at 617-495-0324. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.

general: The members of Congress chose their party before they were elected. Perhaps alumni who are Republicans feel they have better things to do with their time than run for and serve in Congress. Perhaps alumni who are Republicans are reluctant to be associated with the contemporary Republican Party, whose leading lights include such nitwits as Scott Walker, Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Rush Limbaugh, and Glenn Beck. Perhaps the alumni who ran as Democrats were just better campaigners than those who ran as Republicans. Perhaps alumni generally prefer to live in cities, and hence run in districts that tend to vote Democratic.

MICHAEL ANDERSON '64
Bellevue, Wash.

THE NEWS THAT not one of the Harvard matriculants now in Congress is a woman caught my attention, reminding me of the summer between my freshman and sophomore years, spent working on a woman's campaign for the Massachusetts legislature and discovering the challenges that face women running for office. Nearly four decades later, many barriers have fallen; perhaps the greatest impediment to expanding women's representation is the paucity of women who put themselves forward as candidates. Approaching a once-in-a-decade opportunity—the first election after redistricting and reapportionment, when open seats are most common—this alum has shifted from the micro view (one woman's campaign) to the macro, helping the nonpartisan 2012 Project ask baby-boomer women to consider running, and then pointing them toward resources they need to win. If you're a woman who'd like to see a Congress (or state legislature) that looks more like you, please consider this your invitation to run! For details, visit www.the2012project.us.

KATHY KLEEMAN '74, Ed.M. '77
Center for American Women and Politics
Kendall Park, N.J.

MORE ON QUOTES

IN "QUOTABLE HARVARD" (March-April, page 30), Bob Shrum is cited for his hilarious observation that the Republican Party's idea of a diverse ticket is "Presidents of two different oil companies." Here's another quote for your collection: the Democratic Party's idea of a diverse ticket is "Lawyers who went to different law

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LETTERS

schools." All 11 Democratic candidates for president or vice president since Jimmy Carter—eight election cycles and 31 years ago—went to law school and all but Al Gore received their law degrees (Michael Dukakis and Barack Obama from Harvard). Not only were the three finalists for the 2008 nomination—Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards—lawyers, but their spouses were lawyers as well. Further, of the 11 Democratic attorney nominees, only Geraldine Ferraro and John Edwards practiced much law: the other nine embarked on public careers within two or three years of their degree. Whatever one's political predilection, a fair assessment would be that Republican candidates over the same period have had much more diversity of education and career.

D. ALLAN GRAY, M.B.A. '79
Downers Grove, Ill.

THE QUOTATION "Writing is easy. Just put a piece of paper in the typewriter and start bleeding" is incorrectly attributed to Thomas Wolfe. The correct attribution should have been to the sportswriter Red

Smith, who said, "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein."

EDWARD TABOR '69
Bethesda, Md.

Fred Shapiro responds: When I compiled the Yale Book of Quotations, the earliest evidence I had for this quote was the attribution to Thomas Wolfe. However, prompted by Tabor's letter, I have now found earlier evidence, and it indeed points to Red Smith. In Walter Winchell's column, printed in the Logansport (Indiana) Pharos-Tribune, April 8, 1949, the following appears: "Red Smith was asked if turning out a daily column wasn't quite a chore.... 'Why, no,' dead-panned Red, 'You simply sit down at the typewriter, open your veins, and bleed.'"

ON VIETNAM

I AM A GRADUATE of Harvard Business School. I am also a graduate of the United States Military Academy '68. HBS was a remarkable experience, and I have remained active in fundraising for Harvard for over 30 years. I value the institution.

My view of *Harvard Magazine* is

The Quotes Queue

Alongside the March-April cover story, "Quotable Harvard," compiled by Fred Shapiro, we asked readers to forward their own candidates for this informal canon. Selections from the resulting nominations appear here; read the full roll, and contribute to the conversation, at <http://harvardmag.com/quotations>.

~The Editors

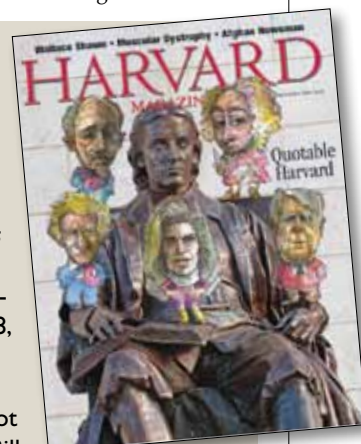
"I know I asked the bartender for more ice, but this is ridiculous...."—Attributed to John Jacob Astor IV, class of 1888, aboard the *Titanic*

"It's not easy getting up here and saying nothing. It takes a lot of preparation."—Barry Toiv '77, then serving as President Bill Clinton's deputy press secretary

"A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops."—Henry Adams, A.B. 1858, in *The Education of Henry Adams*

"In any battle between the literati and the philistines, the philistines invariably win."—Harry T. Levin, professor of comparative literature, following the 1961 court ruling adverse to Grove Press, in the Boston censorship trial for having published Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*.

"I am a professor of comparative literature, not of comparative lust."—Harry T. Levin, testifying in the same trial, responding to the prosecutor's question: "Professor Levin, which do you think would more excite lewd and libidinous desires in the mind of a young girl—Shakespeare's 'Rape of Lucrece' or Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*?"



not as favorable. The article on Bao Luong (Vita, March-April, page 28) is a case in point, and could only have been written by someone who was either indifferent to the Vietnam War or ignorant of the circumstances. I was an infantry company commander in the 173rd Airborne Brigade in RVN in 1970-1971. The atrocities I saw conducted by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong as a matter of policy make those of other wars pale in comparison. To eulogize an individual who supported and perhaps participated in such behavior is a disgrace to those who value human values. To characterize the NVA invasion of South Vietnam as a revolution rather than the brutal conquest that it was is a willful misreading of history.

Harvard Magazine should consider whether such editorial decisions reflect the spirit of Veritas.

CRAIG S. CARSON, M.B.A. '75
Plainfield, Ind.

Professor Hue-Tam Ho Tai responds: The reader accuses me of committing a willful misreading of history. Unfortunately, his letter amounts to a willful misreading of the article. The Vietnam War took place a good 30 years after Bao Luong was active in politics (from 1927 to 1929). At the time of her arrest, the Indochinese Communist Party was just being formed; she was not part of it, let alone part of the invasion of South Vietnam by the North or a member of the National Liberation Front. The Vita presented a young woman—she was 20 at the time of her arrest—who yearned for more educational opportunities for women and for independence from French colonial rule. These two themes seemed to me appropriate for Harvard Magazine since Harvard is an institution of higher learning that was deeply involved in America's own struggle for independence.

GOVERNANCE RECONCEIVED

THE JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2011 issue details the reformation of the Corporation ("The Corporation's 360-year tune up," page 43). While the changes are newsworthy, aren't the Fellows missing something?

Governance is about more than assigning committees and adding trustees. Boards are fiduciaries of the financial and academic health of their institutions. They ultimately ensure the academic excellence that will empower students—and make alumni proud. But many alumni are concerned that undergraduate education at Harvard can be improved and that the

Corporation isn't paying adequate attention.

The new plan, which expands the Corporation's alumni affairs and development roles, underscores a common but misguided view that the trustees' job is to raise money, spend money, and get out of the way.

The new Corporation intends to address academics as a committee of the whole and to defer to the visiting committees of the Overseers. In other words, it intends to do in the future for education what it's done in the past. According to the article, the new Corporation will offer the opportunity for trustees in different stages of their careers. Perhaps, too, it might offer the opportunity for a different kind of trustee: one who would raise urgent matters concerning the education and lives of Harvard College students—a coherent core, renewed emphasis on teaching and learning, promotion of free speech, and formal recognition of ROTC.

ANNE D. NEAL '77, J.D. '80
President, American Council of
Trustees and Alumni
Washington, D.C.

Editor's note: See page 45 for news on ROTC.


POLYGyny PERSPECTIVE

I LOOK AT THE ISSUE of polygyny from the viewpoint of a woman who wants more choices. I would rather be one of several wives of the man I liked best, than the only wife of a man I liked less. I should be able to ask any man to father my child (and he should have the right to say no); I believe the incidence of child neglect and child abuse would decrease if women had this choice.

Our marriage forms are those of the people who happened to have the guns, germs, and steel; they are not forms selected for by evolution; much less were they ordained from on high. Monogamy, the socialism of women one per man, may have originated in prehistory when men fought because they were bribed with the promise of a captive woman: see Euripides's *The Trojan Women*.

Divorce is not necessarily an evil; how else are the captives to escape?


The whole issue of marriage needs rethinking. We need socially acceptable forms of association and responsibility that promote the happiness of men and




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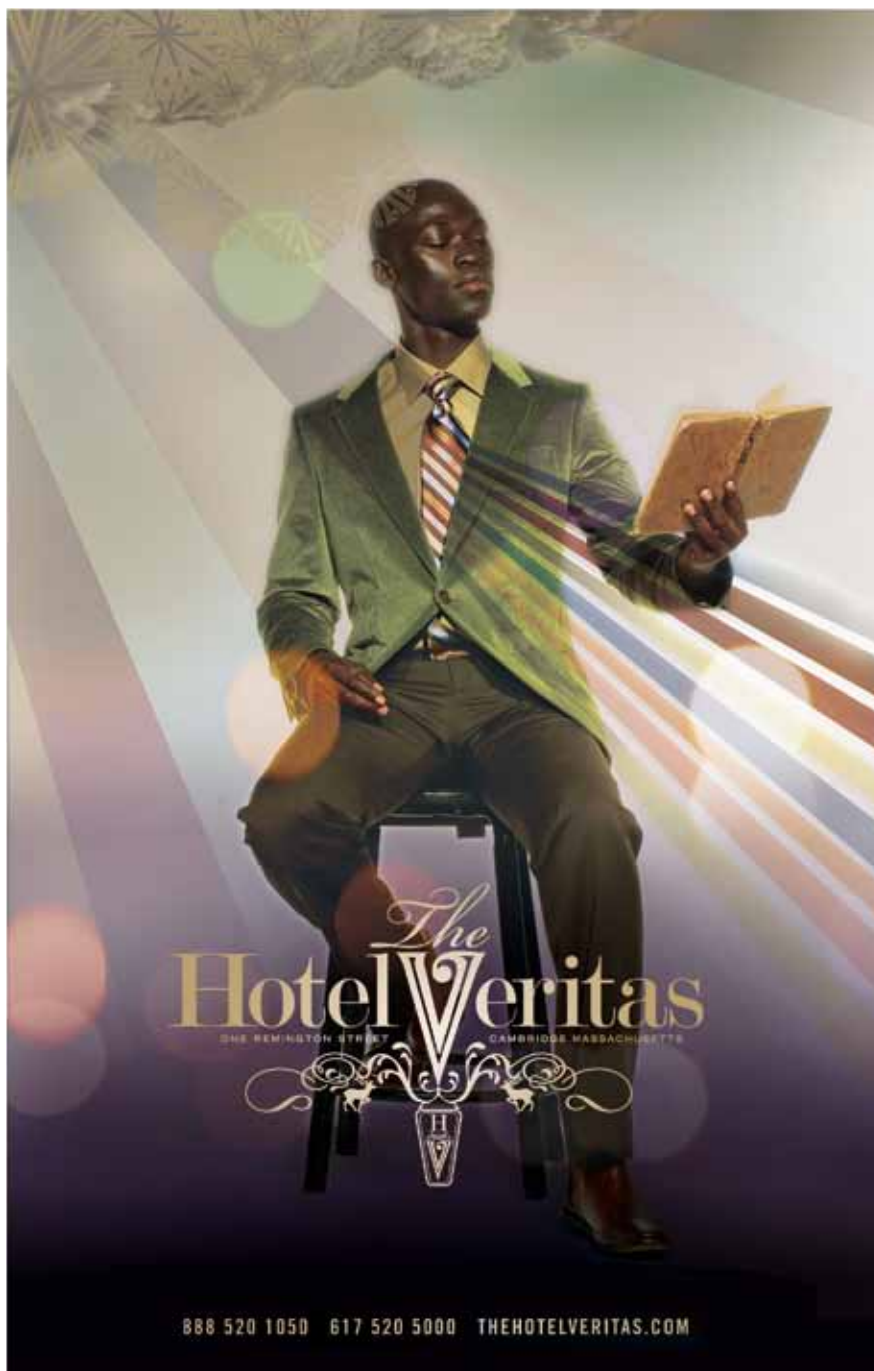
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LETTERS

women and children. Present forms do not.

DIANA AVERY AMSDEN, Ed.M. '56
Santee, Calif.

THOSE (not me) who wish to justify polygyny could refer to Darwin (where the strongest male with, presumably, the best genes has the most females) or the Bible (where there are often references to multiple wives, explicit and implicit, e.g., "He had 70 sons"). In the contemporary world, as others have often noted, there is serial polygamy and polyandry and concubines are now mistresses.

ELROY LACASCE, A.M. '50
Brunswick, Me.

WALLACE SHAWN

CRAIG LAMBERT'S article on the wonderful Wallace Shawn ("Famous Comedian, 'Dangerous' Playwright," March-April, page 35), quotes playwright and author Robert Brustein: "I don't know why he isn't more respected, because his work is as intelligent as anything being written today." I believe Brustein has answered his own question.

JOSEPH E. SULLIVAN, M.B.A. '72
Del Mar, Calif.

WHEELCHAIR STIGMA

I WAS DISAPPOINTED to find language and images straight out of Dickens in "The Gene Hunter" (March-April, page 22). Wheelchairs are instruments of liberation, not confinement, and they have come a long way since the ungainly model pictured in the article was designed in the 1950s. No one is wheelchair bound anymore, if they ever were.

If you were sitting naked in an out-sized and ill-fitting wheelchair you'd be pretty unhappy, too. Do doctors usually require kids to strip down to their underwear to demonstrate how they stand up?

Doctors and writers can do the most for the well-being of those with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy by giving them respect. See www.levelwithme.org for some simple ideas that go a long way.

GUS REED '71
Pittsboro, N.C.

Editor's note: The images for the article were not intended as a comment on wheelchairs or those who rely on them. The illustrations were selected to depict the disease as clearly as possible.

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