

Cambridge 02138

On-line gender equity, e-mail investigations, Dean John Monro

JOBLESSNESS AND IMMIGRATION

IT IS NOTEWORTHY that in “The Urban Jobs Crisis,” by James M. Quane, William Julius Wilson, and Jackelyn Hwang (May-June, page 42), there is no mention of the impact of the many millions of legal and illegal immigrants who have come to the United States in recent decades. For many years, most of our legal and illegal immigrants have not been well educated, and they typically end up competing for low-level jobs with our less-educated citizens and earlier immigrants. Consequently, our immigration has directly contributed to higher unemployment and downward pressure on wages for the urban poor. Thus it would be logical to include restricting the immigration of the poor and little-educated in the list of ways to help the urban poor already here, but I fear that it is not politically correct to make such a proposal in today’s academic community.

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Cambria, Calif.

The authors respond: In our essay, we consider pathways out of poverty for low-income blacks and Latinos. In this regard, we do mention the rise in immigration, particularly among low-skilled Latinos, between 1990 and 2000 and their concentration in farming occupations and the expanding service sector. It is likely that immigrant groups in labor markets in certain parts of the country do compete with U.S. citizens, especially those with a high-school education or less, for jobs at the lower end of the wage distribution. However, the established research does not resolve the question about whether these jobs would be filled if immigrant workers were barred from seeking them. Indeed, focusing on whether these jobs should go to immigrants or natives whose skills preclude them from seeking employment in more stable, better-paying sectors of the economy obfuscates deeper structural issues that keep the working poor from achieving economic self-sufficiency. Other forces that we dis-

cuss in our essay—some global and others closer to home—bear much more responsibility for undermining the economic progress of middle- and low-income workers.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

A RECENT LETTER (May-June, page 8) in response to Michael J. Klarman’s article on the increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage (“How Same-Sex Marriage Came to Be,” March-April, page 30) states that “strong evidence indicates that” children “stand to be harmed” by same-sex marriage. This is a complete falsehood.

In March 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization greatly concerned with the welfare of children, issued a policy statement on same-sex marriage, including an examination of the evidence on the effects of same-sex marriage on children. The authors write: “There is extensive research documenting that there

is no causal relationship between parents’ sexual orientation and children’s emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral development. Many studies attest to the normal development of children of same-gender couples when the child is wanted, the parents have a commitment to shared parenting, and the parents have strong social and economic supports.”

They then go on to fully support same-sex marriage, writing that “if a child has two and capable parents who choose to create a permanent bond by way of civil marriage, it is in the best interests of their child(ren) that legal and social institutions allow and support them to do so.”

The American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Sociological Association have also reached similar conclusions on the effects of same-sex marriage on children and have issued similar policy statements in favor of same-sex marriage.

Opposition to same-sex marriage largely comes from religious beliefs or a basic dislike of gay and lesbian people. Because these reasons don’t work well in the public-policy debate on this issue, opponents cite concerns for children—but there is no evidence to support harm to children. As

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a physician, I try to base my treatment of patients on facts and studies. The same approach should be applied to public policy.

STEPHEN SUSSMAN, M.D. '88
Haiku, Hawaii

EDX AND GENDER EQUITY

THE VERY INFORMATIVE “HarvardX at One” (May-June, page 48) does an excellent job of noting the primary opportunities and challenges involved with the race to offer MOOCs, and provides welcome information on funding structures. But it misses one issue that is a serious challenge for edX and the other major providers of MOOCs: the involvement of female instructors. edX’s

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mission statement says that one of its goals is “to deliver these teachings from a faculty who reflect the diversity of its audience.”

Leaving aside the questionable grammar of that statement, the facts refute it. Of the 25 courses that EdX currently lists on its website, none are taught solely by female faculty: 17 are taught solely by male faculty, and eight by mixed-gender groups. In HarvardX courses, the disparity is even more glaring: of the 11 instructors listed, only one is female. With a faculty that is more than 25 percent female, one would think that more than one woman would have an interest in participating.

With this gender imbalance, edX, like other MOOC providers, is missing a tremendous opportunity to export models of gender equality. Much of their audience is in developing countries, such as China, India, and Brazil, where the education of girls and women is a crucial element of economic and social development. Featuring confident, accomplished female instructors in MOOCs could export role models, sometimes in situations where powerful female role models are in short supply.

The gender imbalance in MOOC instruction is also a looming issue for the Harvard faculty, as well as faculty at universities more generally. Teaching MOOCs brings prestige and other rewards. To the extent that these privileges are overwhelmingly limited to male faculty, Harvard’s efforts in recent years to address a range of diversity issues are undermined.

LISA MARTIN, PH.D. '90
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Editor’s note: Lisa Martin, formerly of Harvard’s government faculty, served as senior adviser to the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on faculty diversity.

MOUSE MODELS

I DIDN’T KNOW whether to laugh or cry about “Mice Aren’t Men” (May-June, page 13). The author comments that the idea that mice and men are different is so controversial that a paper discussing that was “declined by *Science*” (please turn to page 74)



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LETTERS

(continued from page 8)

and *Nature* before being published in the *Proceedings in the National Academy of Sciences*.” Perhaps the article was declined because only Harvard laboratory researchers would confuse mice with men (or women).

GEORGE L. SPAETH, G '57, M.D. '58
Philadelphia

E-MAIL INVESTIGATIONS

THE ACCOUNT of the “E-mail Imbroglia” (May-June, page 46) illustrates incompetence at a high level of the College’s administration. And the adjacent photo of Harvard’s remarkable basketball team, minus its co-captains, reminds us of the heavy price paid by so many undergraduates. But neither this report nor prior ones address the role of inept instruction.

No Harvard graduate familiar with higher education and cheating can accept the unethical, mass collaboration of exam-takers at face value. There simply had to have been a widespread, profound miscommunication of the rules to test-takers or a unilateral reinterpretation of these parameters pursuant to the exam. Having failed so many of its students, Harvard has failed the smell test.

ERNST R. HABICHT JR. '60
Port Jefferson, N.Y.

SEQUESTER AS FIRST STEP

IT IS INTERESTING (and revealing) to note that President Drew Faust feels it necessary in her View from Mass Hall (May-June, page 4) to refer to America’s sequester as a “self-inflicted wound.” A 3 percent reduction in our nation’s expenditures, amounting to less than 10 percent of our outrageous annual deficit, is hardly a “wound.” Perhaps it could more correctly be called a first small step to financial sanity made in a decade.

F. GREGG BEMIS JR., M.B.A. '54
Santa Fe

THE HABIT OF TYRANNY

RANDALL KENNEDY’S comment (“Black, White, and Many Shades of Gray,” by Craig Lambert, May-June, page 25) that tyranny can take the form of custom or habit reminds me of Dean Roscoe Pound’s course in jurisprudence (the last he ever gave at Harvard Law School).

He told us that we were mistaken if we believed that the statute and case books contain the laws that govern a society’s

behavior. When it comes to human behavior, the family, culture, religion, custom, and peer pressure were far more influential than the dictates of the courts and legislators. I am pleased to see the verity of that comment being carried forward at the law school in 2013.

PAUL MISHKIN, J.D. '48
New York City

PEERLESS DEAN MONRO

THE MANILA FOLDER John U. Monroe holds in the May-June issue (Vita, by Toni-Lee Capossela, page 30) could be mine. He got me admitted for the February semester in 1946—but it was a struggle.

After World War II, millions of veterans counted on the GI Bill to finance their college educations. Me too. Why not Harvard, I thought. As a product of Iron Mountain, in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and a graduate of Neenah (Wisconsin) High School, I thought I was well prepared. Shortly before my army discharge, I wrote Harvard requesting admission forms. John responded with a polite note suggesting I apply elsewhere. No forms. I wrote again. And again. And again. Six times. Each time, John gave me a lesson in stylish turndowns. I was confused. At least let me apply, I thought, before you reject me. Finally, John relented a little. All right, he wrote, send me four essays describing your background, your education, your reasons for selecting Harvard, and your aims in life.

I did as told. Finally, he sent me a thick packet with admission forms. After discharge, I took my SATs and waited. In two weeks or so, a telegram notified me that I was accepted. The first week, at a mixer for new students, John saw me and came across the room to shake my hand. What he said I have never forgotten. “Welcome,” he said. “You are the young man who would not take no for an answer.” John and his lesson in perseverance helped me the rest of my life. Of all my great teachers at Harvard and elsewhere, John U. Monroe ranks first.

E. AARON COHODES '50
West Palm Beach, Fla.

THE ARTICLE on John Monroe took me back to the spring of 1960. I was a senior at Cambridge High and Latin, recently accepted for admission to Harvard, and working after school as a stock boy at Phillips Bookstore in the Square. One afternoon as I maneuvered a pile of dirt across the floor with my push broom, I was approached by a tall, distinguished gentleman with very prominent cheekbones and a bristling crewcut. “Are you Jim McGovern?” he asked, and when I said yes he responded, “I’m John Monroe, dean of Harvard College.” I don’t remember what I mumbled in reply, but I do remember being embarrassed about that broom and that pile of dirt. I also remember thinking, “Uh oh, they changed their minds about letting me in.”

Monro said that he had seen my application and noted that I worked at Phillips. He also noted my stated intention to concentrate in engineering, and suggested that economics might be a better choice. (Presumably he had also checked my SAT scores and decided that while the quantitative aspects of economics might appeal to me, it was less likely to overtax my math ability.) He smiled, wished me luck, and left me in something of a state of shock.

I did take his suggestion about economics, although it took less than a year for me to realize that I had no more real interest in the “dismal science” than I had in engineering. But even then I knew how amazing it was that the dean of the College had paid that much attention to my application, and

had then gone out of his way to offer some advice and counsel. I never spoke to Monro again, but based on my one brief encounter with him, I for one was not at all surprised when he opted to leave Harvard for Miles.

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