

Cambridge 02138

Attentive Schlesinger, "Bellboys," bigger data

NUCLEAR WEAPONRY

As A physicist and activist, I read "Nuclear Weapons or Democracy" (by Craig Lambert, March-April, page 47) with interest. Though it would be wonderful to ban and destroy extant nuclear weapons, it is an unrealistic prospect considering that the genie is out of the bottle. On top of that, despite their incredibly dangerous nature, humanity has had one of the longest periods of relative stability due to the MAD (mutual assured destruction) concept which provides a deterrent to their use and thus to world wars.

Given the reality that nuclear weapons

are likely here to stay, what is far more worrisome is that our leaders are in general scientifically illiterate and thus wouldn't honestly have a clue as to the truly destructive potential of these weapons of mass destruction for all life on this planet. We need leaders who understand the miracles of science that largely drive our economy, wellbeing and national security. They can make informed, educated, and rational decisions that will benefit all humanity. We also need to make major efforts to educate our citizens about science so that they too will be able to select like-minded leaders. Other-

7 WARE STREET

Quiet Campaign

BY THE usual metrics—large gifts, lots of them, for the identified aims—The Harvard Campaign and its school components announced to date are proceeding very well, with 57 percent of the overall goal realized just a few months after the public launch (see page 27).

But in other respects, the campaign is unusual: seemingly quieter to date in its public phase than it was in the formal quiet period of fundraising that preceded the unveiling hoopla last autumn. The snazzy campaign website tells essentially nothing about specific campaign goals, or the level of giving needed to fund a scholarship, professorship, or other priority—and inquiries into such matters elicit the response that the figures are not public. This appears tactical: broad program descriptions maximize Harvard's leverage and flexibility. With variable pricing, a dean can negotiate the size of the naming gift for a professorship above some floor, for instance. Nor is the University put in the awkward position of failing to meet any of its targets. Still, it seems odd, considering the information readily available from peer institutions.

More information might inspire more

useful engagement. How much does Harvard plan to invest in athletics (plenty, apparently: the hockey-rink renovation, Stadium addition and reconfiguration, new basketball arena, and more) and the arts (a theater and dance concentration, for instance)? The libraries? Professorships in new fields (and which ones)? Global initiatives, and seemingly critical—but unspecified—research priorities such as energy and the environment? Donors and fundraisers may well know the answers. But the community at large, not so much.

It is clear that the campaign as a whole seeks to make a significant statement about engineering and applied sciences (targeted for perhaps a billion dollars, counting new faculty members, research and fellowship funds, innovations in pedagogy, and the facilities to be built in Allston). At a time of justifiable anxiety about higher-education finances, it is also designed to shore up the balance sheet by endowing as many *existing* professorships and as much aid as possible (to free unrestricted funds for future use).

But bringing the rest of the agenda into clearer focus, soon, would help educate the University community about the campaign's other intellectual outcomes, illuminating the impact of the philanthropic largess now happily heading Harvard's way.

~JOHN S. ROSENBERG, *Editor*

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“The Region of Ideas and Invention”

DURING HIS COMMENCEMENT DAY address to the senior class in 2001, the Reverend Peter Gomes shared a New Yorker cartoon featuring two scientists standing together at a lab bench. “Sometimes,” one scientist remarks to the other, “I wonder if there is more to life than unlocking the mysteries of the universe.” That same year, a team of researchers from Harvard, Stanford, Caltech, and the University of Minnesota—led by Harvard associate professor of astronomy John Kovac—began doing exactly that, searching for evidence of cosmic inflation, a pivotal moment in the Big Bang. This March, they gathered at the Harvard Center for Astrophysics and shared their breakthrough discovery with the world, expanding our knowledge of the universe’s very beginnings and reminding the world of the wonder of discovery, memorably described by Professor Kovac as a “mixture of awe and elation.”

Of what use is astronomy? In 1880, Asaph Hall, discoverer of the moons of Mars and erstwhile researcher at the Harvard College Observatory, asked that question while addressing the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The chief value of the growing field was not, in his estimation, to be found in its “great benefits on navigation and on commerce,” but in “the spirit of honest, unrelenting criticism, and impartial examination” that it embodied and encouraged. Working in what Hall described as “the region of ideas and invention” satisfies a fundamental fascination with knowing more about ourselves and the world we inhabit, and leads to new insights and useful outcomes that we cannot predict. Yet if Hall’s question was posed to policymakers today I fear we’d hear a one-sided answer. Federal investment in basic research has declined sharply, from an estimated \$40 billion in 2009 to \$30 billion last year, and budget cuts continue to hamper research efforts in many fields. Limiting the scope of human inquiry will forestall human progress, stunting the growth of new branches on the tree of knowledge before we can see what fruits they might bear.

Similar problems are emerging in research areas with the potential to generate knowledge with more immediate applications. Just a few days after the Big Bang discovery was announced, a team of Harvard Medical School researchers led by professor of genetics and neurology Bruce Yankner published a study on a protein—known as REST—that appears to protect the aging brain, a finding that may revolutionize treatments for Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia. This groundbreaking research could have gone even further toward clinical applications if it had received additional support from the National Institutes of Health, but the squeeze of sequestration led to limited funding.

At a moment filled with opportunities, the nation seems to be reconsidering the merits of supporting science; we will feel the



deleterious effects of budget cuts for generations. Imagine if the National Science Foundation had not helped fund the construction of the telescopes used by Professor Kovac and his colleagues, if the National Institutes of Health had not supported the Human Genome Project that enabled Professor Yankner and the members of his lab to identify genes that cause changes in the aging brain. We would know less about ourselves, about the wonders of the universe, and about the mechanisms that sustain life.

Curiosity and inquiry lift the shroud of humanity’s ignorance, allowing us to glimpse deeper understandings and to ask—and answer—new questions. The desire to understand is among humanity’s most beautiful capacities, and it is the wellspring from which innovations flow. We must continue to reaffirm the importance of science and the indelible connection between ideas and invention, recognizing the moments of awe and elation that encourage us to push on the frontiers of knowledge and seek the next horizon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Yankner".

wise, it is a classic case of the blind leading the blind.

MICHAEL PRAVICA, PH.D. '98
Las Vegas

SCARRY SAYS and Lambert agrees that "We got rid of Congress and the citizens" as support for their proposition that nuclear weapons and democracy cannot co-exist.

First, they do co-exist and have for many of the more peaceful decades in human history.

Second, if an ideal resolution of the conflict between war and democracy (hardly new) is the gradual reduction, to zero we hope, of nuclear weapons, that program will be more likely and more energetically pursued by democracies than alternative forms of government. See Obama.

Third, Congress has not "abdicated" its function, nor have we citizens. Congress rightly refused to declare war in any conflict since World War II because it wisely recognized how that would transform the conflict into Armageddon. We risked all against fascism for good reason. No equivalent challenge has presented itself, and our Congress and our citizens have recognized the difference, thank God.

Nuclear-weapon existence is a fact. We address that fact best within our democratic ideals and procedures because therein lies our best hope.

BRUCE A. McALLISTER, LL.B. '64
Palm Beach

THANKS VERY MUCH for the article about Elaine Scarry's book on nuclear weapons. Although the Cold War has ended, these weapons remain to be dismantled and until then they threaten all of us. I'm in complete agreement with Scarry that democracy and n-weapons are incompatible.

As a Quaker who has spent many years of my life struggling against these weapons, I would take the analysis one step

further. Our most basic biological (and theological) imperative is survival and since these weapons threaten that, they must be considered evil in the most fundamental sense. In order to finally get rid of nuclear weapons, as Scarry urges, we must come to perceive the construction, holding and planning, and of course the use of these weapons as morally wrong. As a colleague of mine once wrote on the wall of a highway underpass, "It's a sin to build a nuclear weapon."

A corollary is that we must also close down the nuclear-power industry. All nuclear fission reactors produce plutonium in their waste fuel and this can be reprocessed to separate the material for a weapon. Again, the huge amount of power which a nuclear weapon places in the hands of a small group of people creates a temptation which we as humans cannot resist.

I also agree that of course we humans can take apart the nuclear weapons. The power of people working together may be the only power stronger than a nuclear weapon. My suggestion is that the United States close all of its nuclear power plants and challenge the rest of the world to do the same, while pursuing international negotiations to lower n-arsenals to zero within less than a generation.

WILLIAM W. SMITH III '69
Jamestown, R.I.

ANIMAL RESEARCH

PROFESSOR SEUNG-SCHIK YOO's research on computer-mediated brain-to-brain connectivity ("Fusing Faculties of Mind," March-April, page 8) provides another reminder of the startlingly sophisticated work being done by Harvard's talented faculty. And yet, as this project is described as being undertaken to better comprehend empathy and connectivity between subjects, I cannot wonder if it is compromised from the outset by its very methodology. Confining and subjecting a non-volunteer (in this case members of the species *Rattus norvegicus*) to an albeit minimally invasive experimental procedure seems to almost inescapably deny a basic empathetic acknowledgment that the rodents would prefer not to be there at all. If, as Yoo says, his research "is more philosophical than practical," perhaps he ought to acknowledge the increasingly orthodox ethical opinion that the abuse of non-human ani-

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mals to satisfy what he himself describes as “boyish curiosity” is indefensible and instead conduct his trials on willing human volunteers. Confinement and unidirectional manipulation seem at the least to be a circuitous route towards empathy and, more likely, a dead end.

DR. NANCY SCHNIEDEWIND, M.A.T. '70
New Paltz, N.Y.

HOW LIBRARIES SERVE

TOZZER LIBRARY staff members are looking forward with great excitement to our move into our new building on Divinity Avenue in a few short months for all the reasons given (Brevia, March-April, page 22). I would only argue that adding more collaborative spaces does not mean that without them in our very outdated 40-year-old building we were merely a “storehouse” for print volumes. I know all the thousands of faculty, students, and scholars Tozzier Library has served over our almost 150-year history would agree. And the role of academic libraries is not so much changing in my view but rather expanding, since we are expected to do all the things we’ve always done, including identifying and acquiring a huge amount of material appearing only in print, plus much more.

JANET L. STEINS
Associate Librarian for Collections
Tozzier Library in William James Hall

ATTENTIVE SCHLESINGER

ABOUT THE LIFE of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (Open Book, March-April, page 57): I had a seminar with Schlesinger during my graduate year in history at Harvard in 1959-60. In my mind’s eye I see him, in seminar sessions in the grey of late fall afternoons, discoursing informally on the writing of history. I wrote a long seminar paper for him, for which he provided detailed comments. I also took his course in American intellectual history.

Later, as a law student, I wanted to do a graduate year in law at Harvard. I wrote Schlesinger, who was then in the White House, asking if he would recommend me for that graduate program. I mailed the letter on November 20, 1963. After a couple of weeks I assumed that because of the assassination of President Kennedy, he would not be writing a recommendation.

But in mid-December, I received a note on White House stationery. Schlesinger



JIM HARRISON

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commented that I could appreciate that he had been exceptionally busy but advised me that he had in fact written a recommendation for me. I subsequently learned that his letter had been a factor in my admission to the graduate program, with an accompanying fellowship. I’m now well into my fifth decade in law teaching, and that experience still provides extra incentive for my long-time practice: to put letters of recommendation ahead of everything else, including current manuscripts.

After my first year as a law student, while interning at the National Labor Relations Board, I was able to get an appointment with Schlesinger in the White House. I brought along my copy of his *The Coming of the New Deal*, which he autographed. I recall his appraising eye as he turned the pages of my Book-of-the-Month Club edition, with obvious interest in the very texture of the book.

MARSHALL S. SHAPO, A.M. '61, L '65,
S.J.D. '74

Vose Professor of Law
Northwestern University School of Law

“BELLBOYS”

RE: YESTERDAY’S NEWS (March-April 2014, page 20). The entry for 1939 lists amusing

nicknames for undergraduate houses, including “Puritans” for Winthrop and “Elephants” for Eliot. However, the nicknames are not as innocuous as they sound. My father, Charles H. Robbins ’42, lived in Lowell House, which acquired the nickname “Bell-boys.” At the time, Lowell House was where all the students on scholarships lived.

ELIZABETH ROBBINS, M.D.

BOUNDARY BLOODSHED

BELLIGERENT THREATS over the proposed U.S.-Canada boundary settlement of 1831 may have been “inflated humbug” (“Boundary Issues,” *Treasure*, March-April, page 76), but they sent 20,000 militia to the Maine-New Brunswick border in the 1839 “Aroostook War.” Maine’s Governor Fairfield was urged “to become second only to Moses and Washington [and] overrun the whole of Canada.” So bellicose was New York that “any sympathy with the ‘Peace Party,’ will ruin a man unto his third or fourth generation.” In Boston whiskers were curling and mustachios growing, because those lacking them “cannot with a good grace shout war! WAR! WAR!” Hawks assailed squeamish Governor Everett, Harvard’s future president: “Ye Yankees of the Bay State,/With whom no dastards mix!/ Shall Everett dare to stifle/The fire of seventy-six?” Maine lost two men: a soldier died

of measles; a bullet fired to celebrate peace ricocheted and killed a farmer.

DAVID LOWENTHAL '44
Berkeley

EVICITION

I APPRECIATED the article on eviction ("Disrupted Lives," January-February, page 38), but was dismayed by the letters from readers who prescribed the nuclear family, a high school education, and a fast-food job with no benefits as routes out of poverty (March-April, page 2).

As a teacher, I have seen students who stayed in high school and yet are barely literate—it doesn't matter how hard you work if your school cannot provide a quality education. I assume that those readers who promoted "staying in high school" as a solution are all ardent advocates for public education themselves, doing everything they can to support public schools in the poorest areas of the cities in which they live.

As for escaping poverty through a fast-food job, readers might consult the McDonald's Corporation's own "suggested budget" released last year, which showed

that someone working two jobs for 71 hours a week at minimum wage would still be unable to afford gas or heat.

Regarding nuclear families, I'm not from one myself, but I did have access to a quality public school system, as well as family who had been union members for two generations, able to bargain for decent wages, benefits and retirement—one of the most effective ways in which the poor have improved their lot, historically, and yet one which conservatives usually fail to mention, oddly enough.

The bottom line is that people can escape poverty, but they need those of us who have had the luck to attend elite institutions to join them in advocating for quality public education, a living rather than a minimum wage, and the restoration of a strong social safety net that guarantees freedom from food insecurity, universal access to health care, and pre-K childcare for working parents. The rest of the developed world does it; we could do it, too.

DR. TARA KELLY '91
Durham, N.C.

BIGGER DATA

IN his otherwise admirable article, "Why 'Big Data' Is a Big Deal" (March-April, page 30), Jonathan Shaw quotes Curtis Huttenhower as saying that commercial antibiotics "didn't exist until about 50 years ago." In fact, the first commercially available antibiotic, Prontosil, was developed in 1932, and its discoverer won the 1939 Nobel Prize, 75 years ago. Another early drug, tyrothricin, was widely used during the Second World War.

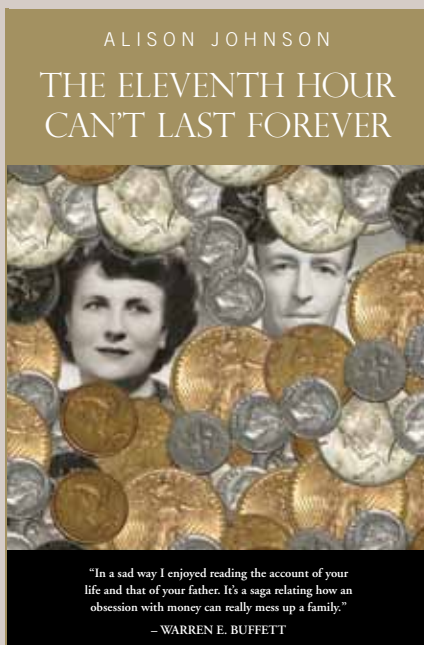
This is more than a quibble about whether or not 70 or 80 years is "about" 50 years. I can remember clearly what I was doing 50 years ago as a high-school student. When I reach 80, I may not remember much of anything.

JOHN W. FARLEY '70
Las Vegas

Editor's note: We neglected to fact-check our sources fully enough, apparently. (For more on antibiotics, see this issue's cover story, beginning on page 40.)



Visit harvardmag.com/extras for additional letters



The Eleventh Hour Can't Last Forever

This tragic/comic memoir begins in this way:

"In a sad way I enjoyed reading this account of your life and that of your father. It's a saga about how an obsession with money can really mess up a family."

— Warren E. Buffett

Two tons of silver and gold coins, hundreds of thousands of nickels, dimes, quarters, and gold pieces. They were under our beds, in the kitchen cupboards, up in the attics, . . . in holes in the ground. My father was obsessed with gathering up these coins and hiding them away in any likely spot in the houses and garages and store buildings he owned in our tiny town on the Nebraska prairie. Nothing could shake his belief that the total collapse of the American economy and government was just around the corner.

Read excerpts, view photos, and purchase on www.alisonjohnsonmemoir.com or Kindle.

I FOUND THE “big data” article a good read; I certainly learned a lot from it. However, at the end, I noticed an historical error: you say, “From Copernicus using Tycho Brahe’s data to build a heliocentric model of the solar system...” No way! Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), whereas Copernicus (1473-1543). Obviously, Copernicus built his heliocentric model before Brahe was born. The astronomer who used Brahe’s data, particularly that for Mars, was Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), which led him eventually to propose that the planets travel on elliptical orbits about the sun, with the sun at one of the foci of the ellipse. Ironically, Brahe gathered his data to *refute* Copernicus, since the heliocentric model cast doubt on the Bible, and Brahe was a staunch Lutheran for whom the Bible was the ultimate authority.

FRANK R. TANGHERLINI '48
San Diego

CITIZEN SOLDIER

I DID A double-take when I saw the piece “Citizen Soldier” about Seth Moulton joining the U.S. Marines and fighting on the ground in the Mideast (The Classes,

March-April, page 64I). No, this cannot be *Harvard Magazine* in 2014, I thought to myself! Sincere kudos to Moulton for walking the walk and marching to the tune of his own drummer.

WILLIAM S. PATTEN '70
Mount Desert, Me.

LOVING LIVING IN L.A.

AS A FORMER Harvard student who is now a professor at the University of Southern California, I was very interested to read Noah Pisner’s “The Undergraduate” column (January-February 2014, page 31) about transferring from USC to Harvard. But seriously: some random guy tells him “No one reads in Los Angeles,” and he accepts that as gospel? Time to work on those critical thinking skills!

I loved Harvard, and I love USC. But I can tell you from personal experience: it’s much nicer in February to sit outside in the sun, reading a good book, than to huddle inside under a blanket, avoiding frostbite.

TODD BRUN '89
Pasadena

HURRAH FOR HUMANITIES

I AGREE WITH Drew Faust’s comments on the importance of humanities for a “successful life” (The View from Mass Hall, March-April, page 3). However, I think she has left out the most important aspect of a liberal arts education versus majoring in something “useful.”

Let me explain: I majored in economics, the dullest possible subject, to help prepare for a “useful” career. Only one good thing came out of it: I wrote my thesis on the “Stock Market Predictions of Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Beane.” They were terrible.

On the other hand, I have had a most “successful life” because of a liberal-arts education. It has led to a life-long enjoyment and love of history, French, fine arts, Shakespeare, music, and the general course on the sciences. Of course, I should add my thanks for English A.

W. M. GLASGOW '50, M.B.A. '52
Houston

ROBERT FROST

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LETTERS

major poet and pioneering teacher in the twentieth century ("Extracting the Woodchuck," January-February, page 44). The best assessment of his work probably comes in poet Randall Jarrell's essays.

ED BARN '70
Middlebury, Vt.

First manager of Robert Frost Farm State Park
in Derry, N.H.

ALTERNATIVE GIVING

WITH HARVARD knocking on our doors for contributions to the Harvard Campaign, we think it is vitally important to alert fellow alumni to the recent launch of the Harvard Social Alternative Fund. As previously reported, responding to pressure from students and alumni, the Corporation Committee on Shareholder Responsibility (CCSR) inaugurated a Social Alternative Fund on July 1, 2013. The Corporation Committee has selected the Parnassus Equity Income Fund as the investment vehicle. Managers at the Parnassus fund give special consideration to environmental, social and governance factors when making investments (www.parnassus.com).

We do not believe that the University is going to do much, if anything at all, to promote the Social Alternative Fund. Thus we want to explain how alumni can earmark contributions to the Campaign to be invested in the Social Alternative Fund: The primary avenue for giving will be online through the HAA website. (Go to "Make a Gift"; select the Social Alternative Fund.) Gifts to the Social Alternative Fund will still receive class credit even though they fall outside the Harvard College Fund.

NINA GARDNER '82

Washington, D.C.

BARBARA GILLETTE '82

New York City

HELENE MARSH '82

Tiburon, Calif.

CORRECTION

IN THE Harvard Portrait of Huntington Lambert, Harvard's new dean of continuing education and University extension (March-April, page 19), it was reported that Harvard is now offering HarvardX online courses for credit. In fact, *one* HarvardX course is being offered with additional student services, but enrolled learners earn certificates of completion, *not* course credit, through the division of continuing education.

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