Cambridge 02138

Academic class gaps, "Fair Harvard," final clubs

LINGUISTIC SIGNS

I READ "A Language Out of Nothing" (by Marina Bolotnikova, May-June, page 50) with great interest. I was thrilled to see that ASL has returned to Harvard, and that the University embraces what has always been obvious to me: ASL is a language. That idea was once treated with hostility. While an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland in the late 1970s, I debated my linguistics professor over the validity of her pronouncement that hearing children of Deaf parents "suffer from retarded language development." As none of the CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) I knew (including my sister, my three cousins, and numerous friends) suffered from "retarded language development," I pressed for the empirical evidence in support of her statement. She admitted she had none; she had deduced it must be so because, in her mind, ASL was not an actual language. To some, her statement could be viewed as one born of sloppy scholarship. To me, it reflected the same unfortunate and uninformed bias against and condescension toward Deaf people I had witnessed my entire life.

I have tried on occasion to explain the beauty of ASL to those who see only hands waving aimlessly in midair, but it is as difficult as explaining to my mother what Celine Dion sounds like. ASL conveys the sublime in ways the written and spoken word cannot. My mother could not read aloud to me, but her hands, her facial expressions and her body movements wove a moving tapestry that none of my less fortunate childhood friends (those with hearing parents) could understand. When her hands flung wide, she was shouting with joy. When they pulled in tight, she was whispering furtively. I didn't hear what happened as the story unfolded, I lived through it.

The fact that ASL is entirely visual certainly distinguishes it from spoken languages, but does not make it any less a language. ASL's differences should be studied, not denigrated. I'm glad Professor Davidson, with Harvard's support, has chosen to do so.

ANDY SHIPLEY, J.D. '84
Vienna, Va.

I READ WITH interest about the emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language, but I question one passage: "[R]esearchers from linguistics and other fields have come to doubt that a language instinct even exists, pointing out, for example, that it takes children years to successfully acquire a language, and they pick up the rules piecemeal, not systematically." That ran counter to what I wrote about [then Lindsley professor of psychology] Roger Brown for the magazine in the September-October 1990 issue.

Brown was the first to study in a systematic way how children learn language. He and a group of his graduate students recorded the speech of three children ranging in age from 18 to 27 months, one of them for 11 months, the other two for several years. The three children, from different social and economic backgrounds, exhibited a similarity in the way they acquired language that Brown likened to the biological development of an embryo. In a book titled *A First Language* he described and explained what the recordings revealed. I quote from the article:

He identified fourteen morphemes

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that children learning English acquire essentially in the same order, ranging from the present progressive (-ing) and the prepositions in and on, which are the earliest to appear, through the past tense, the possessive, and the definite and indefinite articles (a, the), to auxiliary verbs, at first uncontracted (as in "that is"), then contracted (as in "that's").

To Brown there was no doubt that we are born with a language instinct. How else to account for the remarkable similarity in the ways children acquire English? Brown's research methods have been applied to children learning other languages, with similar results.

John de Cuevas '52
Cambridge

7 WARE STREET

Trump to Research: Drop Dead

President Donald J. Trump's initial spending plan for the fiscal year beginning October 1, "America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again," unveiled in mid March (and its May elaboration), proposed much more money for the Pentagon, and much less for diplomacy and environmental protection. In the succinct view of Office of Management and Budget director Mick Mulvaney, "You can't drain the swamp and leave all the people in it." But legislators noted that they would have something to do with determining the nation's priorities; according to Senator Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican, "The administration's budget isn't going to be the budget."

If "swamp" is used in a different sense—the miasma of the unknown, the source of diseases and other threats to human well-being, or your metaphor of choice—the budget would impose a disaster on universities and all who benefit from the research conducted there, likely hobbling long-term economic growth as well. One headline figure: Trump proposed chopping National Institutes of Health funds by $5.8 billion, or 18 percent.

Health and Human Services secretary Tom Price subsequently testified before Congress that that sum could be saved without damaging research per se by trimming, or eliminating, overhead reimbursements to research institutions—so-called "indirect costs." *Direct* grants pay for the scientists and staff members who do the experiments. *Indirect* reimbursements pay for the structure within which they work: institutional operating costs, buildings, libraries, and so on. Do away with the latter, and good luck conducting the former en plein air, so to speak.

The sums are not trivial. The rates of reimbursement, based on each institution's costs, are negotiated every several years. In the fiscal year ended June 30, 2016, Harvard received $435.8 million in direct support for federal sponsored research—and an additional $161.5 million in indirect support: about 37 percent beyond the direct research costs, or 27 percent of *total* federal support. But "wet lab" research already operates at a loss; Harvard compensates with endowment funds and other revenues. Higher-education advocates point out that curbing or eliminating indirect-cost payments would decimate many public universities' research: they simply could not cover the resulting losses—not a particularly populist outcome.

This upending of research is unlikely to survive congressional scrutiny. (Indeed, in the near term, Rubio was right: the congressional budget for funding through September 30 *increased* NIH's fisc by $2 billion.)

But the deliberate, or inadvertent, targeting of indirect costs as expendable frills ought to be doubly troubling. As a political message, it may resonate among audiences unschooled in how research is paid for, or unsympathetic to the researchers who conduct it.

Closer to home, places like Harvard, renowned for making consequential discoveries, but at high costs (some schools' nominal indirect-cost rates approach 70 percent—but generate less in practice), need to speak up in support of research, of course, but also to be acutely aware of expenses. The Trump budget is another challenge, among several, to University revenues—a frequent topic for Harvard's leaders . The new science and engineering complex arising in Allston (a billion-dollar project, in which Harvard hopes productive research will proceed, and be reimbursed, for decades) is described as more efficient and cost-effective than the four-building design originally envisioned. In a much more challenging environment for research funding, that kind of value engineering needs to become gospel across the institution. That is even more the case for disciplining administrative expenses—now, and perhaps for decades to come.

—John S. Rosenberg, *Editor*

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HM For additional letters on class, final clubs, and more, visit harvardmag.com.

Thank you, Marina N. Bolotnikova, for your article. How true that "The study of language has shown that there is no need to discriminate against people who use signed languages."

How sad that this message is not widely understood. The default paradigm is that everyone hears, or should hear, and signed languages, although fascinating, are associated with "impaired" people.

Professor Davidson's work, her hope that ASL can be "a more natural part of what's going on," promises to chip away at Audism, which spawns discrimination leading to police brutality, denial of communication access in health care, employment, education, or lack of access to the arts, cinema, and a plethora of other situations.

We inherit a longstanding practice of linguistic and cultural oppression, where the powerful seek to limit language and cultural expression other than their own, and force assimilation—in this case, auditory-vocal over visual-gestural. ASL signers form what can be thought of as a large country without borders. Distinct sign languages in other parts of the world mirror this position, though Harvard excludes them all equally.

Absurdly, ASL does not meet Harvard's foreign-language requirement. This foreclosed my option about 15 years ago to pursue a degree as a staff member part time in the Extension School. My credits in ASL from Northeastern University could not be transferred, my study of linguistics stalled, as further years becoming proficient in another language was impractical.

Let us hope ASL will be soon be honored as a foreign language thanks in part to the initiative of Davidson and her department.

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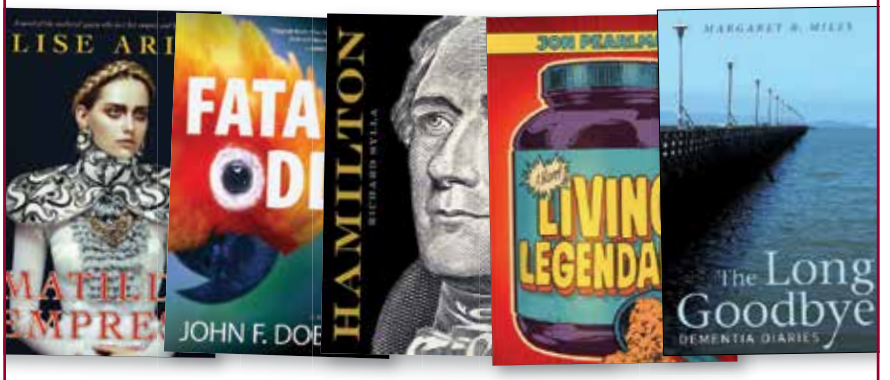

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courses and events were classes taught by visiting scholar Marie Jean Philip, a Deaf woman who was studying for her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at Boston University while teaching ASL courses at Harvard in the early 1990s. She was an ambassador from the country of the Deaf, much loved and honored by Harvard students. Philip was a credit to the University; with her passion for teaching, academic ingenuity as a cultural anthropologist to promote understanding of culture as well as language, and her staunch defense of Deaf children's right to learn ASL.

Rachel Herman
General cook, Lowell House
Billerica, Mass.

I come from a family of genetic and cultural deafness that has worked for generations to advance the rights of the Deaf community. Marina Bolotnikova's article on linguistics and American Sign Language was simply superb. Her article and the research she describes will go a long way toward promoting justice for and recognition of the Deaf community. Linguists since William Stokoe have long discovered what some in the medical community have not yet accepted; that for the educational advancement of the Deaf community, Deaf children need to be exposed to American Sign Language and Deaf culture early in addition to any other approach.

Jacob Buchholz '09
Pomona, Calif.

ACADEMIC CLASS GAPS

Being one of the college-educated (and then some) whites who voted for Donald Trump, "Harvard's Class Gap" (by Richard D. Kahlenberg, May-June, page 35) was all I expected it to be from the first paragraph to the last. The worldview of the author and the other self-proclaimed "elites" for whom he speaks has virtually no similarity to mine, which is shared by roughly half of those who voted in the election.

The condescending conviction of the "elites" in the vast superiority of the "elite" worldview is astonishing. The "class gap" is a misnomer. Those who voted for Trump are not a "class." We are not all white, we are not all blue collar, we are not all poor, and we are not all without college educations. The "gap" is not a gap, but an unbridgeable gulf between the progeny of Burke and Adams, and the progeny of Rousseau and Marx. A better name for the "elites" is the utopians. All utopians begin on the left and eventually move to the totalitarian right. Inside every utopian is a religious zealot. Unfortunately, the utopians now control our entire educational system and can convert the vast majority of their students (80 percent at Harvard!) to their faith in a free lunch, without opposition from those who have experienced otherwise.

The utopians' iron hand in velvet glove revolution faced a conservative counterrevolution in 2016. The United States are no longer united, and we are no longer one country. We are a house divided against itself in which a civil war is unfolding. Not being utopian and zealous, and being opposed by all ivory tower dwellers, the conservatives are likely to lose, while the utopians seize total control of the house and enforce uniform obedience to their mythology. There goes the last best hope. Too bad. I'm glad I didn't entirely miss that won-

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derful historical anomaly of freedom and democracy.

Stan Prowse, J.D. '73
Carlsbad, Calif.

I applaud Kahlenberg for chronicling "Harvard's Class Gap." Harvard needs to take affirmative action to fix this appalling lack of diversity. The gap extends beyond class and politics. I noted in the same issue ("Yesterday's News," page 22) that 40 percent of freshmen in 1952 were enrolled in ROTC. Today, less than one half of 1 percent of the graduating class serve in the military. The nation suffers when Harvard students eschew and left-leaning, elitist faculty members discourage careers in the armed forces. The result: Harvard's influence is largely absent in the development of military strategy and operations, a major instrument of national power that has life and death consequences.

Lawrence Spinetta, M.P.P. '95
Austin

I take vehement exception to the article's calling America's white working class "Donald Trump's 'forgotten' Americans." They deserve far better than to be labeled his. They aren't his. To get elected, he conned millions of them. Now, with policies that favor the wealthiest Americans, he is screwing all of them. You could say that he has forgotten them...but, then, he had them in mind only very briefly and only for his benefit.

James Parry '64
Darien, Conn.

The most significant article I've read in any Harvard publication since graduation from the Law School. Everyone, especially the political elites as well as the rest of us know-it-alls, should take Kahlenberg's points to heart or we will not be able to save our democracy. How easy it is to live smugly in a bubble these days.

Frederick Sterns, J.D. '54
Plymouth, Mass.

I do not agree with Kahlenberg's premise that universities such as Harvard should don hair shirts for failure to be interested in admitting more students from working-class families. The fundamental purpose of financial assistance for undergraduates is to include students who are qualified and well motivated but cannot afford to attend without aid. This includes students from working-class families. How many more students from working-class families must Harvard and other universities admit to prevent another Trump from becoming president?

Robert W. Raynsford, Ph.D '66
Washington, D.C.

SPEAK UP, PLEASE

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"FAIR HARVARD"

The last thing that anyone could expect to find in Harvard Yard in 2017 is a living, breathing Puritan. And yet the very word, or idea, of *(please turn to page 73)*

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LETTERS *(continued from page 7)*

such a being is apparently too much for today's Harvard to endure. The news [see page 68] that Harvard would be holding a contest to change the last line of "Fair Harvard," which includes the phrase, "Till the stock of the Puritans die," raises the school, its students, and its administration to a new level of caricature.

I have to wonder how, as a scholar of history, President Drew Faust can sanction with ease the editing of a song written over 180 years ago, and also the eradication of the school's founding sect from collective traditions. The line simply notes an optimism that the institution will last throughout history—indeed, as recipients of a Harvard education, every student and graduate is an intellectual heir of those original founders. Shall we disregard them now simply because they were white, or Christian, or "intolerant" by twenty-first century standards?

Furthermore, where do we stop? If we can edit music, why not literature? Why not art? Shall we paint over undesirable faces represented in hallway portraiture across campus? Shall we tear out pages from books assigned for classroom reading, when the content doesn't square with modern norms?

Please, Harvard, get a grip, before you begin to do exactly what you've always professed to stand against.

William E. Pike '95
Greencastle, Ind.

FINAL CLUBS

Your May-June John Harvard Journal prioritized the "Social Club Saga" as the lead article (page 18). I want to share a few thoughts about the larger issue that led to sanctions on students belonging to single-gender organization.

Times have changed since I graduated in 1972. The club I belonged to (The Fly) was no more a bastion of male privilege than the two sports teams I participated on, which in spite of coeducation today, still function as single-gender programs. The surveys whose responses referenced club membership as correlated with sexual assault, also pointed to athletic team participation being correlated. Judging by recent headlines across the country, sports teams are getting at least as much negative exposure for bad behavior as fraternities. Yet there is no casual mention at Harvard of single-gender sports teams being "odious" [to quote the authors of the article] and no larger effort to eliminate them.

In 1972 the Fly Club was as diverse as the all-male university we attended. We had several black members and international boys from Mexico, France, England, Hong Kong, and Liberia. Through the club, I got to know law students and lawyers, business students and business people, future politicians, authors, journalists, capitalists, and others. I paid for my club dues with my summer earnings and had little left over to spend, but it was worth it. It was a unique class leveler.

Girls were allowed in the club only as visitors to a tiny guest room inside a separate entry, where they had to be signed in and out during restrictive hours. For social life with women, we were drawn back to Harvard's Houses, where there were no restrictions on overnight guests or parties that I recall.

In a recent conversation with under-

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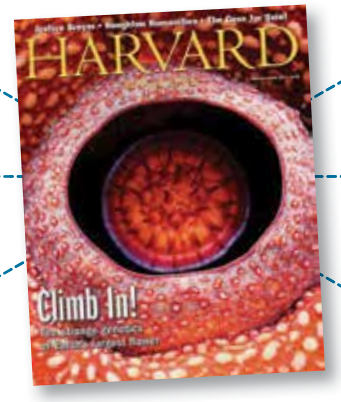

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graduates at the club, I came to understand that socializing in the Houses has been cramped—if not stifled—by virtue of the number of undergraduates now housed. This resulted in more liberal use of club facilities for co-ed functions. I have no doubt that social functions at the Fly Cub are now better controlled than many or all that students have attended at Harvard: guest lists are strictly enforced, bartenders, bouncers, and strict codes about alcohol consumption cut off anyone inebriated and provide chaperones to make sure those who've had too much to drink get home safely. Learning to drink alcohol responsibly is something that may not happen outside such a structured environment.

I expect that what brought the University's initial focus and wrath on to final clubs —sexual assault—is not now a problem as a result of the Fly Club. No surprise that, having targeted final clubs as a large contributor to the sexual assault problem, the dean and the president expanded their complaint with clubs to be one they thought that popular opinion would embrace: *exclusivity* and *male privilege*.

The issue of *male privilege* needs to be seen in the context of changing times. Fifty years ago, George W. Bush at Yale could amuse himself with pranks and dice and secret rituals, expecting that after four years of loafing and partying his family name and connections would get him where he wanted to be. Today, employment recruiters are screening potential candidates by their numbers: GPAs.

As for exclusivity, all elite institutions, their courses, and their extracurriculars are selective. Most of the country sees this as elitism, regardless of what Harvard says it is. Club members are selected on the basis of character and personality. One does not need wealth or privilege to become a member in a final club. Many clubs are able to help students who can't afford the full dues.

The fact that the authors of the article allowed a balanced article to include this phrase—"a gender-exclusive social club may be odious"—says much about the broad-scale characterization which the University has drifted into making about organizations which for over a century have served Harvard students and graduates, some of whom who have gone on to become celebrated U.S presidents, senators, representatives, and governors, including a living governor of our state, Massachusetts [who later resigned]. And let's not forget former Harvard administrators....By virtue of membership alone, are these leaders and the many others to be lumped together with founding fathers who owned slaves?

Trying to make gender separation on campus go away completely is not going to help educate this generation to meet the challenges of this decade, let alone this century. I believe that males need to come to understand the unearned privileges of "maleness" in our culture. I also believe women need to understand the important role their gender plays and has played in our culture. But I don't believe this kind of understanding is inhibited by virtue of choosing to spend some time in the company of others of their gender. It might even be helped. There will be problems, and attitudes will need to be adjusted. Sanctions are not the way to accomplish this.

Edward R. Devereux '72, Ed.M. '78
Needham, Mass.

Trying to make gender separation on campus go away completely is not going to help this generation meet the challenges of this decade.

The push by the administration to penalize students who join final clubs is despicable. As a Jew who graduated from a public high school, I could not have joined a final club even if I had wanted to. I did have close friends who found such membership a valuable part of their undergraduate experience. To deny students that possibility is typical left-liberal tyranny. Remember the principle: I can disagree with what those students want to do while defending vigorously their opportunity—indeed, their right—to do so.

John P. Blass '58, M.D., Ph.D.
New York City

As an alumnus of a final club, I appreciate the latest article and wish to comment on the position of Professor David Haig. Not incidentally, of my most lasting friendships from Harvard, many are club alumni.

The whole idea of a loyalty oath of any kind being mandated by the administration is a travesty. Had I known of such a thing when I was 18 and applying for admission, it would likely have sent me to Dartmouth (heaven forbid) or Berkeley. This is not Nazi Germany.

America has freedom of expression I believe; it is impossible (and unnecessary) to force anyone into practicing politically correct gender balance.

I applaud Haig's objections and hope he and his colleagues can kill this cancer before it spreads.

Bertram G. Waters III '60
Brookline, Mass.

I was moved to respond by the independent reporting during the past year on the USGSO [unrecognized single-gender social organization] social-club saga. As a member of AD Club and a participant in University organized sports, lacrosse and hockey, I am dismayed at the way the University/College administration has handled this.

I read with interest and admiration the piece on "Exclusivity from the Inside" [The Undergraduate, May-June, page 27] by Lily Scherlis which addresses this broad topic, but leaves the question open for debate (contrary to the College's actions).

The very notion of an oath to be administered to undergraduates as a requirement to participate in University organizations horrifies me. Did we not learn from the McCarthy era?

Joe Prahl '64, S.M. '68, Ph.D. '68
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

INSIDE *THE ADVOCATE*

I haven't seen anything as deliciously chilling as Lily Scherlis's vivid report on life inside the *Harvard Advocate*'s "crumbling white clapboard home on South Street" (The Undergraduate, "Exclusivity, from the Inside," May-June, page 27) since I read Kenneth Grahame's account of how the stoats and weasels behaved after occupying Toad Hall.

Paul Alkon '57
Los Angeles

C'mon Harvard, lighten up! So Harvard has clubs for men only! Horrors! The dean is leaning over backwards so far his feet are off the ground. How about a little laissez-faire? You remind me more of our early, bossy Puritan forefathers than twenty-first-century liberals

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(or is "liberal" a bad word now?). Down with deanly meddling and purity oaths.

To top this off, The Undergraduate, by Lily Scherlis, writes with guilty feelings three pages about the clubbiness of *The Advocate* and scarcely mentions publishing a literary magazine. One would like to think that literary talent would be their aim. A non-Harvard person would be left wondering what function *The Advocate* served. I suspect than an undergraduate who had serious literary ambition would ignore *The Advocate* altogether. Time will tell.

Wanna bet?

Shane Riorden '46
Newtown, Pa.

FAN MAIL

The May-June 2017 issue was so outstanding....The thorough coverage, fine range of all important and interesting topics, writing and editing...really top flight. Will file for reference.

Diane B. Wunnicke '62
Denver

I just wanted to say that your one-page brief lives section has been my favorite in the magazine for 40 years. I never skip it. Sometimes it's the only thing in an issue I read. I think it could be a pretty interesting book that assembled them all together under one cover.

Dan Flath, Ph.D. '77
St. Paul, Minn.

ERRATA AND AMPLIFICATIONS

Curatorial correction: The May-June Treasure ("Anthropology Anew," page 80) misspelled the name of Peabody Museum curator Diana Loren; we apologize for the error.

Author's alterations: Daniel Ziblatt, whose book was reviewed ("Making Liberal Democracies," May-June, page 64), wrote to advise that the title changed in production; the correct title is *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*.

Theatrical credits: Conn Nugent '68 wrote to point out that the profile of James Bundy '81 ("Dual Dean," May-June, published on page 68, as it happened) failed to identify John Weidman—whom Nugent identified as "collaborator with [Stephen] Sondheim on *Pacific Overtures*, with Susan Stroman on *Contact*; Tonys, Emmys, commendations galore"—as a fellow member of the College class of 1968. Weidman was profiled himself in "Storytelling with Sondheim" (January-February 2011, page 15).

Designer's data: In case any readers were confused, Justin Lee (profiled in "How Buildings Move People," May-June, page 60) is an architect in practice in Somerville, Massachusetts, who designs exhibitions for the Harvard Art Museums. He is not a member of the museums' staff.

Date of death: Elaheh Kheirandish, Ph.D. '91, noted that Alhazen's date of death falls post c. 1040-1041, rather than the 1039-1040 given in the catalog for the Houghton Library exhibition covered in "An 'Enchanted Palace,'" March-April, at page 40.

At sea: Jonathan Kutner, M.B.A. '59, of Dallas, which lies a goodly distance southwest of Cambridge, writes to note that Brevia (May-June, page 25) rendered Yale afloat ("stirrings to the south*east*"); recent fact-checking conducted on foot confirms that New Haven remains terrestrial—and even if climate change raises the sea level *a lot*, it will still remain south*westerly* of Harvard.

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