

Yesterday's News

From the pages of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* and *Harvard Magazine*

1929 The Law School's Institute of Criminal Law opens, to study practical ways—including consultations with psychiatrists, social workers, and doctors—to deal with criminals, as “mere punishment...does not yield adequate results.”

1954 Half a year after defending Harvard against Senator Joseph McCarthy, President Nathan Pusey draws more than 500 people to the National Press Club's luncheon in his honor; his speech on “Freedom, Loyalty, and the American University” and his willingness to answer all questions earn a “remarkable ovation.”

1969 Eighteen students have signed up to concentrate in the newly created field of Afro-American studies.

A representative of Students for a Democratic Society receives last-minute permission to speak at the Morning Exercises [see page 4], and attacks Harvard, calling the Commencement ceremony “an obscenity” and “an atrocity.” Subsequently, he,

about 30 seniors, and some hundred others walk out to hold a brief counter-Commencement and listen to an address by philosophy professor Hilary Putnam.

1974 About 125 Radcliffe seniors organize a demonstration during Commencement week, wearing armbands, placards on their backs sporting equal signs, and bright yellow ribbons atop their caps. Their four demands are: equal admissions; equal job opportunities; equal facilities and finances for athletics; equal distribution of fellowship funds.

1979 The success of National Lampoon's *Animal House* prompts Universal Pictures to offer \$500 to sponsor a toga party in South [Cabot] House. Dean of students Archie Epps vetoes the proposal.

1989 South African archbishop Desmond Tutu, LL.D. '79, running as a petition candidate for Harvard-Radcliffe Alumni Against Apartheid, gains a seat on Harvard's Board of Overseers.

tricky, Lemann writes, as they navigated the law laid down by *Bakke*; their desire to increase enrollment of underrepresented black students; and the dictates of the academic, meritocratic admissions hurdles represented by the universal adoption of SATs and similar metrics (see *The Big Test*).

Integrating elite schools, and the leadership cohort whom they educate, “has been a success,” he finds. “It would be a mistake, though, to assume that affirmative action is now safe.” Lemann notes the current litigation, recent Department of Justice actions opposing affirmative action in admissions, and the populist politics of the present moment. More enduringly, “Applicants and their families see an admissions slot as a golden ticket that universities should be duty-bound to offer to those who deserve it most. Universities see admissions as an exercise in institutional curation, requiring the subtle balancing of subjective cultural, political, and economic factors.” Even if they end up enrolling at *another* elite school, for students rejected from their first choice, he continues, “that doesn't mean it's possible to achieve comity between applicants and admissions offices. It isn't. Many people are going to wind up feeling wronged.”

That is a formula for continued disputes over admissions—particularly given that “the value of racial diversity is assumed” on elite campuses, where the principal question is how to achieve *more* and more effective (inclusive) diversity. From other perspectives—in litigation, initiative campaigns—“another set of questions emerges. Why should it be permissible to consider race in the operation of institutions, even as a positive factor? Why should a black applicant from an economically privileged background get a place that might have gone to a poor white applicant?”

Such questions, Lemann warns, “will surely reappear.” Given the persistent effects of centuries of racial discrimination in the United States, and selective universities' commitment to lessening those effects on their campuses and in the wider society, “no one should make the mistake of believing that the battles over affirmative action have ended.” That is true no matter what Judge Burroughs rules, or the ultimate disposition of SFFA's Harvard and UNC cases: if current admissions practices are prohibited, universities will assuredly pursue alternatives, even as they maintain that such workarounds are inferior and socially counterproductive.



Illustration by Mark Steele