

city, bearing advisories that fluctuated between “Very High” and “Serious,” a distinction between severely aggravated asthma and premature death. Friends posted photos of childhood homes, blackened in the blaze or simply disappeared. Images of farm workers picking fruit against a beet-red sky were shared and re-shared: people who couldn’t simply move away, or find a new home.

Those images might have incited despair, anger, or apathy, as they did for some of my friends. But I could read their larger meaning, because at the activities fair my freshman year, I’d found a group of people who taught me how.

THE TABLE was manned by two sophomores. The only thing that seemed “environ-

mental” about their display was a tiny hand-drawn image of Earth. The students, Naima and Sidni, began to talk about “divestment.” Had I heard of the campaign? (I had not.) They continued, undeterred. Dis-investment, or divestment, draws on a long history of boycott tactics. Rather than rely on any one individual’s purchasing power, the campaign tries to flex participants’ collective muscles from within an enormous corporation. If Harvard, the wealthiest university in the world, could be persuaded to stop investing its endowment in fossil-fuel industries, it would send a powerful political and economic message.

The most liberating thing about the campaign, Naima added, was that it enabled students to represent their communities *within* an institution: to convert the advantages of

attending a large university, which so often meant complicity, into action. Naima came from New York City, recently savaged by Superstorm Sandy. That disaster, combined with her work at a Harlem community-resiliency organization, had informed her decision to join the divestment campaign. Three years later she would accept a place at Harvard Law School to study public-interest law.

But this was getting too far ahead. Did I want to come to a mixer?

THIS PAST YEAR, I stood on the other side of the recruitment table. I was the one distributing buttons and analogies to anyone who would listen. Now, the students I spoke with were a little more familiar with the case. More than 400 graduating seniors pinned orange squares on their caps for a joint protest by the campus fossil-fuel and prison divestment campaigns, together interrupting the Class Day exercises with their calls to “Disclose, divest, or this movement will not rest”; a standing ovation greeted Al Gore’s exhortations for immediate climate action [see [harvardmag.com/gore-19](http://harvardmag.com/gore-19)].

Four years ago, such support seemed impossible. In 2016, the *Crimson* editorial board opined that “Divestment is a profoundly hypocritical answer”—arguing that societal change is impossible until complete individual change is made. And although the editorial board reversed its stance on divestment this past spring, the popularity of their earlier reasoning remains.

Sometimes, the counterarguments slip out as a kind of first-world elitism. In my section for Earth and Planetary Sciences 20: “Earth Resources and the Environment,” after students pointed out that nuclear energy should replace our dependence on carbon-intensive fuels, someone raised the environmental and human price associated with the technology. “Easy,” said the boy across from me. “Just ship the waste to Africa. They’ll use it for development there.”

In grappling with such casual and unconscious environmental racism, I wrestle with a split I have

## New Fellows

**Joining** the editorial staff this fall as the 2019-2020 Berta Greenwald Ledecy Undergraduate Fellows are seniors Julie Chung and Drew Pendergrass. They will contribute in print and online throughout the academic year, taking turns writing the “Undergraduate” column, beginning with the November-December issue, and reporting on other aspects of student and University life, among other responsibilities.

Chung, a proud first-generation collegian from Los Angeles and Adams House, is a social anthropology concentrator who interns at the Harvard College Women’s Center, served as associate editorial editor for *The Harvard Crimson*’s editorial board, and writes personal essays and short fiction as well. She spent the summer in Honolulu, at the University of Hawai’i medical school’s Department of Native Hawaiian Health, where she investigated the relationship between traditional Polynesian canoe voyaging and health while conducting senior-thesis research on making scientific knowledge more accountable to people.

Pendergrass, of Huntsville, Alabama, and Pforzheimer House, is a joint physics and mathematics concentrator with a secondary field in English. He has served as publisher and assistant U.S. politics editor of the *Harvard Political Review* and as associate editor and comp director of *Fifteen Minutes*, the *Crimson*’s weekly magazine. He does research at the Harvard Chan School, analyzing the way



droughts change the global food-trade system, and has published as lead author research he did at the Harvard Paulson School on the impact of climate change on air pollution in Beijing. He spent the summer in Princeton, where he ran climate models on a massive super-computer cluster for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The fellowships are supported by Jonathan J. Ledecy ’79, M.B.A. ’83, and named in honor of his mother. For updates on past Ledecy Fellows and links to their work, see [harvardmag.com/ledecy](http://harvardmag.com/ledecy).