Letters

Cambridge 02138

Ye olde cocaine, philanthropy, loss, inciting the Diploma Riot

RETO COVER
The September-October cover sports images of two early humans and the headline “Mankind Emerging.” Apparently, the staff of Harvard Magazine are unaware that womankind was emerging at approximately the same time. In the United States, anthropology and a number of other disciplines have adopted a more inclusive term, “humankind,” which has been in widespread use for at least a decade. Am I to conclude that the prestigious Harvard University is unacquainted with this trend? Perhaps you should have used the words “Boys Emerging.”

SANDRA GRAY
Associate professor of biological anthropology
University of Kansas

The cover is so twentieth century!

LIGIA GIESE ’91
Berkeley, Calif.

9-11-2001
The staff of Harvard Magazine shares the horror and grief caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11 against New York City and Washington, D.C.—events eloquently captured by Joseph B. Martin, dean of Harvard Medical School, as “the tragedy of lives lost and freedom impugned.” A brief report on the University’s reactions, and the opinions of faculty experts, appears at page 64. Obituary notices for victims from the College and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences will appear in the January-February issue, and will be posted on the website (www.harvard-magazine.com) then. —The Editors

RADCLIFFE CENTER CONTINUES
Your excellent article about recent changes at Radcliffe (“Radcliffe Ramps Up,” September-October, page 57) contains an error, a statement that “the Public Policy Center will be phased out.” The Public Policy Center (not Institute) continues to carry out its ongoing grant work, and we have no plans to eliminate it.

We are rethinking our engagement in social science and public policy with the intent of strengthening, not diminishing, these commitments. Katherine Newman’s arrival as dean of social science to lead these initiatives is part of this reframing effort. She will be developing long-term plans for social science at Radcliffe during the coming year. Part of this process will involve defining what sorts of administrative structures will best facilitate our goals in these areas, and she will be thinking through how to maximize the opportunities for social science that are offered by the Radcliffe fellowship program, the Murray Research Center, and the tradition of public policy at Radcliffe.

We continue to be committed to re-

President: Daniel Steiner ’54, LL.B. ’58

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search that has significant implications for public-policy questions, and we are seeking a new configuration of our efforts that will integrate and maximize our resources in light of our new identity and mission as an institute for advanced study.

Drew Gilpin Faust
Dean, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study
Cambridge

What Elizabethans Put in Their Pipes

The Reference to Cocaine in “Shakespeare’s Tenth Muse” (September-October, page 16) is mistaken. Cocaine could not have been found by archaeologist Nikolaas van der Merwe and his colleague Francis Thackeray in seventeenth-century artifacts dug from sites in Stratford-on-Avon because it was unknown at that time. The alkaloid cocaine was not isolated from the coca leaf until 1860. It is barely possible, but extremely unlikely, that coca leaves were to be found in England in the seventeenth century. In contrast with tobacco, coca did not become a significant export product, and Europeans never used it until the nineteenth century, when it was incorporated into medicines. At most, a few specimens might have been brought to England by curious travelers in the sixteenth century, and the leaves probably would have lost their potency during the sea voyage.

Lester Grinspoon, M.D. ’55
Associate professor of psychiatry emeritus
Boston
James B. Bakalar ’64, LL.B. ’67
Cambridge

Editor’s note: Grinspoon and Bakalar are the authors of Cocaine: A Drug and Its Social Evolution.

A reply by Nikolaas van der Merwe and Francis Thackeray: Grinspoon and Bakalar are correct in saying that “the alkaloid cocaine was not isolated from the coca leaf until 1860,” but this does not mean that the effect of substances derived from coca leaves was not recognized by Europeans in the seventeenth century. The Spanish conquistadors would not have understood the chemistry of coca leaves in Peru at that time, but they would have known the effect of coca leaves.

We were surprised to find cocaine in two seventeenth-century pipe specimens from England, [including one from Harvard House, the home of John Harvard’s mother.] and, therefore, repeated the analyses. Our forensic collaborator, Inspector T. van der Merwe, suggested that the results could be consistent with a practice of smoking leaves of Erythroxylon (coca) in clay pipes in Europe in the seventeenth century.

We were concerned about contamination of the pipe specimens after excavation. The pipestem from Harvard House, however, had been recently excavated and not cleaned in any way. Its bore, from which the analytical sample was extracted with solvent, was clogged with dirt from the garden. We can think of no mechanism by which it could have been contaminated, unless High Street in Stratford-on-Avon has cocaine in its water supply.

On Trustees for the Poor

Responding to my letter on philanthropy (July-August, page 5), David Timmons writes (September-October, page 6) that Andrew Carnegie envisioned a day when “the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor... administering [wealth] for the community far better than it could, or would have done for itself.” Is this an ideal to strive for? Do we also believe that poor people wouldn’t know how to handle money if they had any?

Carnegie makes an interesting exemplar. The steelworkers who were the source of his fortune labored in filthy and dangerous conditions for 12 hours a day, seven days a week. Their only day off each year was July 4, presumably so they could celebrate their freedom.

Joseph Frazier Wall, Carnegie’s biographer, says that he wrote of philanthropy: “and besides, it provides a refuge from self-questioning.” Maybe all those libraries helped Carnegie forget that while Pinkerton guards were bashing in the

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Board of Incorporators

This magazine, at first called the Harvard Bulletin, was founded in 1898. Its Board of Incorporators was chartered in 1924 and remains active in the magazine’s governance. The membership is as follows: Daniel Shein ’34, LL.B ’38, president; Stephen J. Bales, AMP ’94, William I. Bennett ’62, M.D. ’69, John T. Bethell ’54, Fox Butterfield ’61, A.M. ’64, Charles C. Cabot ’51, LL.B. ’57, Jonathan S. Cohen ’83, Philip M. Cronin ’53, J.D. ’56, John de Cuevas ’52, Casimir de Rham ’46, J.D. ’49, James F. Dwinnell III ’62, Anne Fadiman ’74, James O. Freedman ’75, L. 80, Benjamin M. Friedman ’76, Ph.D. ’77, Robert H. Giles, Nf ’66, Owen Ginberg, Ph.D. ’62, James Glassman ’83, Adam K. Goodhart ’90, Max Hall, Nf ’90, Brian R. Hecht ’91, Sarah Blaffer Hattery ’88, Ph.D. ’75, Ellen Hume ’90, David O. Ives ’94, M.B.A. ’95, Bill Kovach, Nf ’90; Florence Ladd, BI ’72, Anthony Lewis ’48, Nf ’57; Henry Lyman ’37, Scott Malkin ’80, J.D./M.B.A. ’83, David McClintick ’82, Harriet Rorvo ’98, Ph.D. ’99, Robert N. Shapiro ’72, J.D. ’78, Theda Skocpol, Ph.D. ’75, Peter A. Spiers ’76, William O. Taylor ’54, Sherry Turkle ’89, Ph.D. ’76, Robert H. Weiss ’54, Elizabeth Winship ’43, Jan Ziolkowski.
Not all philanthropists are fueled by guilt. Donors have many motivations, some of them noble. The nonprofit world revolves around these varied interests and desires. But the problem isn’t that some people have more money than they know what to do with. The problem is that so many don’t have what they need. Charity is not a solution.

Timmons’s letter suggests that successful businesspeople can deal with social issues better than the government does with its “various ill-considered public-works projects.” Which projects does he mean, I wonder? Head Start? Food stamps? The Occupational Safety and Health Administration? If there’s one thing most rich people know absolutely nothing about, it’s poverty. Should they really be designing programs concerning something they don’t understand?

I don’t mean to say that philanthropists are wrong to try to help. There’s a role for everyone to play in rectifying the injustices of this world. But poor people, not rich people, should be the ones we listen to about what needs to be done. What the rich can do is clear. They can pay all their workers a living wage and decent benefits, allow them to join unions without interference, and make sure that they share in the profits their labors create.

Ultimately, however, the only solution is deep structural change. The poor aren’t doing very well on crumbs from the rich man’s table. If we don’t create an economic system that gives people what they need, sooner or later they will come and take it.

Jane Sass Collins ’71
Medford, Mass.

It’s all very well to report, as does David Timmons, on the philanthropies of Andrew Carnegie and his view of the duty of the millionaire as “but trustee for the poor.” But even Carnegie gave only the things he was interested in—so gifts for public schooling, sewers, municipal police, repairs of fire engines did not generally show up on the lists of private philanthropies. And his great wealth came in large part from the backs of very low-paid workers, many of whom would have benefited more from higher wages than public libraries. Today it is hard to see many trustees for the poor among our current megamillionaires.

The complaint by Burt Kozloff (“Letters,” September-October, page 8) raised against the straw man who supposedly says, “I can spend your money better than you can” is simply childish. If we accept the premise that each individual alone should have final say about the spending of his money, then there is no central government, no community, and no society. This is the world of the gated retirement homes.

Leonard E. Opdycke ’51
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Timmons’s letter mischaracterizes Carnegie’s 1889 article “Wealth.” Rather than arguing against the estate tax, Carnegie was a strong proponent for it, writing that, “Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest.” For Carnegie, the estate tax would enhance entrepreneurship by ending the practice of bequeathing enormous legacies on an individual’s heirs, and giving them instead incentives to create wealth for themselves. Furthermore, the estate tax would be a boon to philanthropy. As Carnegie stated, it “would work powerfully to induce the rich man to attend to the administration of wealth during his life, which is the end that society should always have in view—...”

The estate tax impacts only the very wealthiest of our citizens, while its repeal inhibits entrepreneurship and hurts philanthropy. A U.S. Treasury study estimates that the current repeal of the estate tax, when fully in place, will decrease donations to charitable institutions by $4 billion per year. At this time of need in our nation’s history, I would hope that the present administration and Congress see fit to heed Carnegie’s words, and reconsider the repeal of the estate tax.

Gregory Matthew Stankiewicz ’84
Cambridge

DEALING WITH LOSS
I was deeply moved by Kirstin Butler’s essay, “Loss” (“The Undergraduate,” September-October, page 72). My own beloved mother just passed away in mid July, and, like Butler’s, she succumbed to cancer.

Much of this article is about the author’s attempt to camouflage her grief from other people in the Harvard commu-
nity. It is true that even in our oh-so-candid society, bereavement still remains an oddly taboo subject. It disconcerts people greatly. Nevertheless, the greatest comfort I have found lately has come from opening my heart to those around me, many of whom have lost loved ones too. Sharing experiences, asking people what helped them through the worst parts of grieving, and knowing that I’m not alone have all been hugely important pieces of the puzzle I’m putting together. It’s crucial to know that we can be accepted and respected by others when we are in the midst of our sorrow, as Butler discovered.

Judith Bass ’80
Stoughton, Mass.

ROCK PRIDE IN VERMONT
“The doris stone” (“Ball of Mystery,” July-August, page 92) is a pale echo of the fabulous UVM Boulder. The University of Vermont here in Burlington has long possessed a perfect granite sphere of natural origin. Evidently the product of aquatic rolling in a glacial hole, the boulder is not booty from a third-world country: it was unearthed during nineteenth-century railroad construction in the Green Mountains. Not cloistered in a small garden, as is the Costa Rican rock at Harvard’s Peabody Museum, the boulder is instead a prominent fixture on College Row in front of the Old Mill, which was dedicated by Lafayette.

Samuel H. Press, M.P.A. ’97
Burlington, Vt.

NOSTALGIC IDEALIZATION
Professor svetlana boym’s recent work, The Future of Nostalgia (“Hypochondria of the Heart,” September-October, page 15), seems to underemphasize one major role of nostalgia: that of idealization. The longing for times bygone or an idealized homeland, for example, plays a vital role in the historical construct of those who are separated, through age or...
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PREFERENCES RE: APPLES
I CERTAINLY AGREE with the main point of “Purse Strings of the Heart” (September-October, page 11): economists surely should take into better account the psychological variables that impinge strongly on economic behavior. However, the illustration of Professor David Laibson’s theory of hyperbolic discounting seems wrong. He posits that given the choice, people prefer a single apple today over two tomorrow, but prefer two apples in 100 days over a single one in 99 days. He ascribes this preference to a greater value assigned to an apple in the short run than in the long run. A more plausible explanation is that two days is twice as long as one day and is clearly perceived as such, whereas 100 days is only a bit over 1 percent longer than 99 days. Hence, the same one-day delay is perceptually much more salient for the short than for the long wait. In general, the ratios of perceived magnitudes are more important than their differences. This notion is embodied in what is probably psychology’s most general and most widely accepted law. Weber’s law states that the just-perceived difference between two perceived magnitudes is proportional to their absolute value: it takes less of a difference to see which of two noses is longer than to see which of two lamp posts is taller. BERTRAM SCHAFER, PHD ‘58 Brookline, Mass.

SCRUPLES ABOUT ANIMALS
L. KEMMERER EXPRESSES “a deep moral conviction against manipulating—let alone killing—other creatures for education or science” (“Letters,” September-October, page 9). But why is his/her expression of concern limited to only those two domains? I see two possibilities. The first is simply that education and science were the topic of “A Life with Lycaenids,” the article that prompted Kemmerer’s letter—and hence were directly germane. In this case, Kemmerer’s opposition to manipulating or killing creatures also includes a revulsion against eating meat, dairy products, eggs, or fish; wearing leather or wool; setting a mousetrap of any sort; and sterilizing a pet. Kemmerer specifically criticized the scientific study of insects, implying an equal disdain toward eating honey, using a flyswatter, or combating a cockroach infestation in your apartment. It is an entirely self-consistent point of view based on deeply held principles that the rest of us must tolerate, listen to, and respect. Nevertheless, it is very much on the fringe. While fringe ideas do sometimes take over the mainstream, it is rare, and your readers should be aware that Kemmerer’s condemnations might ex-
tend to much of their everyday lives and cultural practices.

The other possibility is that Kemmerer’s opposition to manipulating or killing other creatures really is limited to just education (meaning science education) and science. Thus, it’s okay to castrate a calf, feed it rich grains to fatten it, kill it, grind up its flesh, and eat it—all because you like the taste of hamburger—yet it is somehow immoral to test the safety of a new AIDS medicine on rats before giving it to people. The only consistent theme here would be antiscience. It deserves no respect. It is merely thoughtless anti-intellectual bigotry.

Kevin Jon Williams ’76, M.D.
Wynnewood, Pa.

RANDALL THOMPSON’S HARD LINE

Randall Thompson, the subject of your “Vita” for July-August (page 46), earned Igor Kipnis’s gratitude, Kipnis tells (“Letters,” September-October, page 6), for permission to perform on the harpsichord in class. But Thompson did not think that Harvard students should be given time and support for professional training in performance.

He wrote that “playing a musical instrument is nothing more or less than a social grace.” This was in a letter responding to my expression of concern that Harvard was ending its agreement with the Longy School of Music in Cambridge under which music majors could take a reduced course load in order to continue their performance preparation, extend their undergraduate years from four to five, and earn both a Harvard or Radcliffe A.B. and a soloist’s diploma from Longy. I had written because I was both a recent Harvard graduate and husband of an undergraduate then finishing her studies of cello at Longy, Judith Davido ’50, one of the few undergraduates who successfully completed this demanding but rewarding regime. Regrettably, Thompson’s decision stood and this valuable program ended.

Sumner M. Rosen ’48
New York City
LETTERS  
(continued from page 12)  
stripped by the repeated emphasis on Harvard’s preeminence. This might lead one to believe that Harvard has no peers and that only its graduates are the most accomplished. Then I read Time’s issue profiling America’s best in science and medicine (see page 81). Not one of these individuals received an undergraduate degree from Harvard, including the distinguished University Professor E.O. Wilson.  

THE RABBLE-ROUSER’S SPEECHWRITER  
In 1961, as a first-year law student, I became an associate member of the Signet Society. One fine spring day while I was lunching there, someone announced that Philip Stone, whom I then knew only slightly, would be willing to deliver an oration on the steps of Widener Library at a “riot” protesting the change from Latin to English in Harvard College diplomas, the oration John Sando recalls in his letter (September-October, page 10), but only on the condition that someone else write it. There was considerable discussion about who might undertake such a task. Then someone said, “David, you know Latin, don’t you?” “Yes,” I replied, somewhat immodestly since, though I had been a Latin major in college, I had not formally studied the subject for six years. The next question, of course, was, “Can you write this?” Compounding immorality with foolishness, I said yes, but muttered something about not wanting the Law School to find out about this extracurricular activity.

I returned to my apartment and in the course of a few hours, did what I had said. I cannot recall to whom I gave the finished product; there was apparently enough time for someone to transcribe my handwriting onto something that looked like parchment. That evening the oration finished, Phil was besieged by the press. Someone asked him whether he had written the oration himself, and he answered that David Berman, a graduate student, had written it. My phone rang constantly for the next week. I was more than a little afraid to answer it. Though I frankly enjoyed the notoriety connected with being the author, I had no idea what Dean Griswold would think of a law student who took any part in fomenting an undergraduate riot.  

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