Cambridge 02138

Witchcraft, awful architecture, first flight, slavery reparations

PYRAMID BUILDERS
I read with great interest “Who Built the Pyramids?” by Jonathan Shaw (July-August, page 42), describing Mark Lehner’s magnificent discovery of the lost city of the pyramid builders.

The article leaves intact the usual theory of construction, that the blocks were quarried, then pushed or pulled into place using rope and inclined planes. Some of the blocks weighed nine tons, and there seem to have been bigger ones at Pharaoh Khufu’s chamber, more than 15 tons, as heavy as a bulldozer. They would have been a problem no matter how much rope and wood the builders had.

There is another theory, propounded by French chemist Joseph Davidovits, that the blocks are concrete. Some of the arguments offered—air bubbles in the stone; jumbled fossils, rather than layered as in natural limestone; waves in the stone; unusual minerals in the stone; less-dense top portions—are rational and scientific. The theory is not accepted by all, but it is important enough to be mentioned.

Edmund R. Helffrich ’49
Allentown, Pa.

Mark Lehner replies: Davidovits’s hypothesis does not stand up to on-site observations. First, if concrete, the blocks certainly were not poured in molds, because they have no standard sizes. To this Davi-dovits himself once responded, as we chatted about his idea at the northwestern foot of the Khafre Pyramid, that the blocks could have been poured in forms built successively ad hoc against the previously poured and set block. A single seam between adjacent stones can range anywhere from a few to 20 centimeters wide at the top, to millimeters or direct contact between the stones, to several centimeters wide at the bottom. The irregularity of a single seam is because none—not one—of the blocks is square, and few of the blocks even have a single flat face. If the builders poured the material of these stones, which comprise part of the core of the pyramid, they would have to have poured into irregularly shaped bags! In fact the masonry is even more irregular than I have so far indicated, with limestone chips of all shapes and sizes stuffed into interstices between stones.

Further, the outer casing stones at the top of the pyramid are not flush, so it is highly unlikely that these pieces were poured as liquid concrete and set in place.

Where pyramid core or casing stones are not smoothed, the surfaces often show the marks of chisels, picks, and hammers, suggesting the builders shaped them with tools, which also renders the hypothesis of poured concrete improbable.

My observations make the concrete-pyramid-stone hypothesis highly improbable to me. I think it, like so many pyramid-building ideas, deals with a mental template pyramid, composed of rather
standard, or at least regular, courses and blocks. The actual fabric and texture of the pyramids is something quite different.

The person who “painstakingly reconstructed” the boudoir furniture from the tomb of Queen Hetepheres (page 46) was not the excavator, Professor George Reisner. He caused them to be reconstructed, by master furniture craftsman Joseph Gerte of Boston—father of Albert Gerte ‘41 (who assisted in the reproduction work) and my great-grandfather.

Jeremy A. Blumenthal ’91, Ph.D. ’02
Cranford, N.J.

ROOT PROBLEM: SHEER NUMBERS
Jody Heymann’s “Families on the Edge” (July-August, page 50) makes many good points about challenges to families. She leaves unsaid that every problem she discusses is partly rooted in sheer numbers of people—locally and globally.

At least we should remind people of the relationship between population size and many human problems, and emphasize the importance of trying to contain future population growth. If we do not do this, I expect nature will do it for us.

Richard Larkin ‘64, M.B.A. ’66
Bethesda, Md.

I WOULD ADD to Heymann’s solutions the provision of adequate family-planning services. It is a national disgrace that the present Bush administration has withdrawn U.S. support for international family-planning programs.

M.P. O’Meara, M.D. ’50
San Carlos, Calif.

SPEAK UP, PLEASE
Harvard Magazine welcomes letters on its contents. Please write to “Letters,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or send comments by facsimile to 617-496-0324, or by e-mail to yourturn@harvard.edu, or use our Internet site, www.harvard-magazine.com. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.

not respond to the current “pannick fear” the way the Salem elders did.

Our administration has, indeed, much improved on the judicial procedures of the seventeenth century, when the accused was allowed to confront his accusers. Zacarias Moussaoui, currently being tried under Bush’s USA PATRIOT Act will not be allowed to question the person who has sworn he is a terrorist—won’t even be allowed to see him. Yes, we’ve come a long way from witch trials.

John A. Broussard ’49
Kamuela, Hawaii

Professor demos seems unable to resist the temptation to bend the powerful metaphor of the Salem witch trials to fit his prejudices about the role of the U.S. government in confronting contemporary international terrorism. The metaphor fails badly as an aid to understanding the truth, however, because, in the case of the Salem witchcraft trials, there was obviously not a shred of rational evidence for the allegations of witchcraft. In the case of international terrorism, few people the world over would say we are addressing a maladie imaginaire. While there may be legitimate public dispute about how to address actual terrorism, Demos’s witchcraft reflections suggest that there exists such a degree of wrong-thinking on the subject as to preclude civilized discussion on the terrorist question and possible responses to it.

Jerome A. Collins, ’57
Kennbunkport, Me.

WITCHCRAFT AND TERRORISM
John demos’s review of Mary Beth Norton’s In the Devil’s Snare, on the Salem witch trials (“Witchcraft, War, and ‘Pannick Fear,” July-August, page 20), ended with the hope that our justice system will address the temptation...

HARVARD’S AMICUS BRIEF
Quentin L. Kopp (“Letters,” July-August, page 4) criticizes the University for filing an amicus brief in the Supreme Court in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases. As a private institution, he writes, Harvard is in a different position from public universities such as Michigan—so its intervention was “a kind of meddlesomeness, signifying either political correctness or plain officiousness.”

But a federal statute, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, forbids racial discrimination “in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” The statute applies to Harvard and other private universities that receive federal money; virtually all of them. If the Supreme Court had found the Michigan Law School admission system unlawful, instead of upholding it, Harvard’s admission program
Making a bequest is often the best option for individuals who want to create an enduring legacy at Harvard. Our planned giving professionals can help you shape your intentions to best meet your objectives.

NAUSEA ON THE CHARLES
You report (“Over 91-Acre Allston Purchase, a Fresh Political Maelstrom,” July-August, page 67) that there was concern about Harvard’s ability to responsibly develop the large, recently purchased parcel adjacent to the river in Allston. This talk was likely the result of viewing the apparition emerging behind the Business School next to the river. This massive housing structure, One Western Avenue [see page 71 in this issue], looks across the Charles to Jose Sert’s graduate student housing (a project which has had critics) and makes it look like Brattle Street in comparison.

My father was known to make wisecrack characterizations about some of the College’s more modern design efforts. He likely would have dubbed this monstrosity “Nausea on the Charles.” With its uncontrolled use of brick and block of every shape and hue, its cutesy uneven window treatment, and the bleak swirling of bricks as installed, it reminds me of a very large Italian meal which, having been joined by an excess of wine, is deposited on the sidewalk. My only thought is to plant massive amounts of fast-growing ivy to hide the damn thing.

John H. Finley III ’58, M.B.A. ’63
Boston

CONTROL VOLUNTARY SPENDING
“Tuition takes off” (“Brevia,” May-June, page 57) reports the ever-escalating bill for tuition, room, board, and fees at the College. Private universities seem to engage in a voluntary cycle to reinvest in the finest facilities on the basis that they are needed to attract the finest professors, who are needed to attract the finest students. The burden of these wholly voluntary decisions falls directly on the middle class and precludes their children from participating. It similarly precludes all but the wealthiest international families.

The cycle has to be controlled. More of the endowment needs to be allocated to the operating budget. Personnel costs, particularly now in the face of global price deflation, do not have to rise every year. The governing boards should reflect on their larger social obligations to bring the levels of voluntary expenditure more in line with the realities of the external world.

G. Mansfield, M.B.A. ’74
Hong Kong SAR, China

MORE ABOUT du PONT
While Henry Francis du Pont planned magnificent gardens in the British style of “educated nature,” he was in no way responsible for the children’s Enchanted Woods, as is stated in Shirley Moskow’s “Vita” (July-August, page 40). The woods are a rather recent addition to Winterthur, part of a multifaceted attempt to make the place more accessible to the general public.

Philip A. De Simone, G ’71
Pleasantville, N.Y.

Shirley Moskow’s entertaining “Vita” doesn’t tell the reader anything significant that was not related in Ruth Lord’s fine biography of her father, published four years ago. And of course the book tells a great deal more than does Moskow’s one page. Henry F. du Pont and Winterthur (Yale) received many favorable reviews. Why then did Moskow not even acknowledge the book which could have been the complete bibliography for her little piece?

Richard B. McAdoo ’42
Cambridge

Shirley Moskow replies: Ruth Lord’s book is more complete than my short article. However, there is information in the article that is not in the book. Every writer makes choices. I used many sources, among them materials obtained during a visit at Winterthur, newspaper and magazine files, the Internet, books, and volumi-

ADDENDA
A report (“Brevia,” July-August, page 78) that Robert A. Caro, NL ’66, had won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in biography, and that Nicholas Dawidoff ’85 had been a runner-up in that category, neglected to note that the other finalist in biography was also a Harvard affiliate: Lewis Lockwood, Peabody research professor of music, for his Beethoven: The Music and the Life.

Also in “Brevia,” the caption to the architects’ rendering of the School of Dental Medicine’s building under construction might have noted, but did not, that Rothman Partners Architects designed the new facility.
nous class notes in the Harvard Archives. I also read Lord’s book. Perhaps I could have mentioned the book, but I was limited by space and trying to include as much information about du Pont himself as I could. I cited the *Saturday Evening Post* because I quoted from the magazine. On the Enchanted Garden, I stand corrected.

**GUARDING AGAINST BOMBS**

Here in Chicago, the feds have put some reasonably nice-looking bollards (“Sidewalk Bulwarks,” July-August, page 14) around the Dirksen Federal Building: some kind of stone, squarish, about waist-high, and pretty civilized. As I was contemplating them, I realized suddenly what they reminded me of. Stonehenge isn’t an astronomical clock or a large-scale face of a goddess. It’s a circle of bollards, protecting something in the middle (now archaeologists can start trying to figure that out) from drive-by chariot bombings!

Marian Henriquez Neudel ’63, Div ’67

**UNIVERSITY, CORPORATE ALLIES**

Derek Bok decries the increasing involvement of corporations and commercial interests in the affairs of universities (“The Purely Pragmatic University,” May-June, page 28). He states: “The encroachment of commercialization on educational values is particularly unfortunate because it depends, at bottom, on a willingness to take unfair advantage of students.” I respectfully disagree.

Corporations and other commercial interests in our country are what has made this nation rich and powerful, and its citizens among the wealthiest that the world has ever known. We build the industry, the roads, bridges, and universities; we pay for the government, we employ the citizens, and we generate the technology that is the hope of mankind, from science to medicine. You are not separate and apart from us; we are one.

Bok warns that commercial interests have a corrupting influence on universities, bending their integrity and thrashing their purely academic interests. Again, I disagree. There is a symbiotic relationship between universities and employers. You train the workforce, we provide them with employment, they donate money to the university (as do we), and you train the next generation for the workforce. No fortress needs to exist between us. You
are welcome within our walls, and we
have dined at your collective table.

Universities are at their best when they
respond to the needs of the commercial in-
terests, the military, and our society. Acad-
emic interests, if anything, need to become
more responsive to these institutions, not
more guarded. We, in turn, try to meet
your needs, and I have not known a shy
university that hesitates to ask for dona-
tions from corporations or wealthy alumni.

Certainly there must be balance, and ex-
cessive commercialization must be curbed
and prevented. Yet, more often than not, it
is the university that is not meeting the
needs of industry and government, not the
other way around. We need more technical
workers who have been trained in the
most advanced methods. We need people
who have been trained to be practical and
productive. We need graduates who have
been taught to be proud of their country
and their military, and who are eager to
serve both. Meet these demands, and you
uplift the nation and its people.

We commercial interests are not the
enemy, nor do we seek to make you one. To
engage us further, to understand our
needs, and to befriend us warmly is a much
better foundation upon which to build a
mutually beneficial relationship. Don't
take our money with one hand, and shake
your fist angrily when we turn away!

As a vice president in a Fortune 500
Company, as a Law School graduate, and
as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve, I
have hired and supervised many gradu-
ates from many universities. I have visited
many colleges, and I have seen a great
many graduates who were left unpre-
pared for civilian and military employ-
ment by their expensive universities. The
solution is not in building a better and
taller ivory-towered castle; in my opinion,
it is in a closer embrace.

I firmly state that the perceived en-
croachment of commercialization on edu-
cational values is not based on a willing-
ness to take unfair advantage of students.
In part it may be based on a desire to create
personal and corporate wealth, in part it is
based on a belief that exposure to capital-
ism and commercial interests will benefit
students and the universities that educate
them. Let the haze clear from your cannon
fire, and look upon the faces of your allies.
Please do not fire upon us again!

Charles Facktor, J.D. ‘90
Alpharetta, Ga.
FIRST FLIGHT IN NEW ENGLAND

John Lenger’s article on aviation pioneers (“Conquest of the Air,” May-June, page 32) provided a thorough, entertaining account of the 1910 Harvard-Boston Aero Meet. He did not mention events on the North Shore of Massachusetts earlier in the year that included some significant aviation firsts and that also had Harvard connections.

Most importantly, the first airplane flight in New England occurred almost two months earlier than Lenger reported. On February 28, 1910, the Herring-Burgess #1 biplane, piloted by Augustus M. Herring, took off from the frozen surface of Chebacco Lake in Hamilton. The host for the flight was Norman Prince ’09, LL.B. ’11, a Law School student who, as legend has it, invited W. Starling Burgess ’01 and Herring to try out their flying machine at his family estate while his parents were in Europe and young Prince was supposed to be studying. (Prince later cofounded the Lafayette Escadrille, a corps of American aviators who flew for France prior to the U.S. entry into World War I. He was killed in a crash on a mission in 1916.)

Burgess (1870-1947) completed his undergraduate studies at Harvard but left without receiving his diploma. The Marblehead yachtbuilder became interested in aviation following the first public demonstrations by the Wrights in 1908. In early February 1910, Burgess displayed his first aeroplane at the Boston Aero Show held at the Mechanics Hall on Huntington Avenue, a noted center of interest in aviation. Herring had been experimenting with flying machines since 1895, when he began testing gliders on the south shore of Lake Michigan with Octave Chanute, considered the father of aviation. The inventive, ambitious Burgess and the mercurial but persistent Herring were a good match in this endeavor—Burgess provided the craftsmanship; Herring the aeronautical knowledge.

Following the single flight on Chebacco Lake, Burgess moved his operation further north, to Plum Island in Newbury. During the spring and summer of 1910, the Plum Island aviators thrilled the local populace with test flights over the marshes and dunes. (One of the better flyers, William Hilliard, was reported by Lenger as the pilot of the first airplane flight in New England. The date reported by Lenger, April 17, is indeed the date of the first flight at Plum Island, but the pilot of that first flight was again Herring, not Hilliard.)

The Herring-Burgess biplanes were not particularly airworthy, but at the September Harvard-Boston Aero Meet, Burgess’s craftsmanship impressed the best aviators in the English-speaking world—the Wright Brothers and Claude Grahame-White. The Wrights and Burgess signed the first known aircraft manufacturing license, and Burgess built Wright flyers for several years thereafter. Grahame-White, the dashing English aviation hero wonderfully described in Lenger’s article, purchased several of Burgess’s airplanes, believing to be the first export of airplanes from the United States. Burgess went on to design and build more than 100 airplanes, including the world’s first flying wing and the first airplane to both take off from and land on water.

The events of 1910—and later Burgess aircraft—are documented in a photographic display in the Burgess Aviation Museum.
REPARATIONS

In "The Price of Slavery" ("Right Now," May-June, page 12) Harbour Fraser Hodder reports about a survey conducted by Professor Michael Dawson and others in which blacks and whites were asked whether they support federal initiatives—apologies and monetary payments—to address past wrongs.

Securing reparations for the descen-
dents of American slaves has been an on-
going attempt, by organizers of those
congregations to be "outside the conventional
electoral system," to raid the U.S. Tre-
asury. "Regarding monetary reparations to
descendents of slaves," Hodder writes,
"two out of three blacks voiced support,
against a mere sliver (4 percent) of the
white respondents...." Well, no kidding.
This isn't a "racial gulf of 63 points," it's a
taxpayer gulf, a point supported by the
survey result that "more affluent blacks of
both sexes are less likely to support fed-
eral payments for...slavery...."

Dawson expresses "surprise" at the
"visceral reaction" this issue provokes.
The "visceral reaction" is that of a person
whose pocket is about to be picked.
Completely ignored in squaring ac-
counts are the following:
—The more than 500,000 white lives in
the Civil War taken in the struggle to end
slavery—a blood payment.
—The trillion or so taxpayer dollars al-
ready spent in the "War on Poverty" and
similar government programs (not to
mention the multimillions spent by pri-
vate charities), which largely accrued to
the black sector of the population.
—The amount, and basis for discrimina-
tion, of reparations, viz., how a blood rela-
tionship with a particular slave may be es-
stablished, given the paucity of records and
the passage of time, and, in the absence of
records, what might be the "presump-
tions" of slave ancestry necessary to estab-
lish a draw on the Treasury. These issues
are pregnant with further divisiveness.

It seems to me that people of good will
and their elected representatives can for-
mulate an expression of national sorrow
and regret for the fact of slavery in the
United States. Monetary reparation is an

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Museum at the Plum Island Airfield in
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EDWARD S. RUSSELL ’78
President, Plum Island Community Airfield Inc.
Byfield, Mass.
issue without a rational basis—the bill has been paid.

Frederic H. Smith III, M.B.A. '67
Peachtree City, Ga.

Hodder misrepresents both the terms of General William T. Sherman’s Special Field Orders, No. 15, of January 1865, and the land provisions of the Freedmen’s Bureau act of March 1865. She writes that the general “granted the now legendary ‘40 acres and a mule’ to 40,000 freed slaves along the Atlantic coast.” The short response to this statement is: Not quite, no, and no one fully knows. At no point in this order does Sherman promise “freed slaves,” in the general sense conveyed by Hodder’s language, 40 acres. The reserved land was to be distributed to heads of families, and in parcels of any size up to but not surpassing 40 acres. At no point does Sherman make provision to supply mules to those heads of families. A subsequent directive did make possible the loan of unserviceable mules to settlers, but this was not a provision of the original order. At no point does Sherman write of the settlement of 40,000 freedpeople. That figure appears much later, when in the fall of 1865, General Rufus Saxton estimated the number of former slaves he and his subordinates had helped settle on the reserve since its creation in January.

Hodder’s summary of the land provisions of the Freedmen’s Bureau act is perhaps even more misleading. Congress did not give, as she states, “Southern blacks 40 acres to farm for three years.” The act provided for the assignment of not more than 40 acres to every male citizen (a category that included former slaves and loyal white refugees) with the expectation that the recipients would be permitted to rent their plots for up to three years, during which they could elect to purchase the land outright from the government.

Land for the freedpeople was a hotly contested topic as war gave way to peace, and one that defies easy generalizations. Certainly, there were those in Lincoln’s, and later Johnson’s, administrations who, along with countless former slaves, understood that the best freedom would be one grounded in land. But accepting that notion in principle left unanswered the question of how former slaves would come to possess their own land. Sherman offered one extraordinarily radical re-
sponse. Congress, in March 1865, offered a more moderate proposal by limiting the acquisition of government-controlled land to male citizens of means.

SUSAN E. O'DONOVAN  
Assistant professor, Afro-American studies and history  
Cambridge

CREATIVE TOUR GUIDES

Thank you for referencing my article “Everyone's Wild About Harry” in “The College Pump” (July-August, page 92). Shortly after the article appeared in the Harvard Library Bulletin, I heard a tour guide speak yet another myth about Harry Elkins Widener worth repeating: “If Harvard ever neglects to have flowers delivered to the Widener Memorial Room, the entire library becomes the property of the City of Cambridge.”

DENISON J. BEACH  
Cambridge

THE TROUBLE WITH TENURE

It is not hard to figure out why Anita Levy of the American Association of University Professors (“Letters,” July-August, page 6) thinks so highly of tenure. Who wouldn't want a guaranteed lifetime job teaching five to six upper-level courses eight months a year in one's field of interest for very healthy pay?

But she and her colleagues are in a better position than most Americans to protect their intellectual freedom. They do not need to be set above the mob as a special class. What tenure has become is a privileged institution used by those who hold it to perpetuate their own privileges and to exclude dissenters, not all of whom are people of color by any means.

In my English department at a large state university, one woman was granted tenure six years before she had published a single book. She was, however, the close friend of the chair. When, three years later, still unpublished and with no special rewards to boast, she wanted her husband, let go from another university, to get a job, her friends managed to have one created for him. Since he was from India and dark skinned, they used the myth of his being an affirmative-action hire to slip him into a tenure-track job without peer review. Tenure is an arbitrary system, not a meritocracy.

Any freshman sociology student will recognize that power entrenched gets abused, nepotism such as this being only one of the crimes. The worst part of tenure is that while the tenured travel from conference to conference reading their papers to each other at state expense, underpaid and benighted adjuncts do the hard work of the university without protection. The creation of a leisure class requires a toiling class. Nor does tenure encourage the timid.

To find people willing to take risks, you have to go outside of the tenured ranks to teachers who, because of the oppressive atmosphere created by the Tenured Lords, put our jobs and careers at risk just by writing letters like this one.

DAVID R. WILLIAMS ’72, M.T.S. ’75  
Fairfax, Va.

IMMUTABLE SUMMER HOUSES

The excerpt from George Colt's book Big House (“Open Book,” July-August, page 24) certainly struck home. While we have remodeled our California house many times in our 30 years here, the New Hampshire house remains resolutely unchanged. There are notes about the plumbing in my mother's hand posted in the bathrooms, and years-old directions for getting to our house by my father (Nathan Comfort Starr ’17, Ph.D. ’28) in the desk drawer.

But the note the grandchildren always quote is the hand-lettered sign taped to the side of the fridge, next to the dishwasher. In big letters the sign said, “No wooden handles in the dishwasher, please.” Two years ago, when that old 1953 refrigerator died (a wonderfully designed GE, with a foot treadle for hand-less opening and rotating shelves), we bought a new one. The old fridge, with the plea about wooden handles still affixed to the side, went out to a truck to be hauled away, with the sign facing the rear. I actually waved goodbye to the sign and the fridge. I felt as though I was throwing away a piece of my mother’s personality, our family’s history. At the beginning of this summer, I wrote in heavy grease pencil on the side of the new fridge “No wooden handles in the dishwasher, please.”

And yes, there are keys in the basket by the front door that have been there for generations. No one knows what they open. Maybe someday….

PENELope Starr ’57, M.C.P. ’64  
San Anselmo, Calif.