Cambridge 02138

Exiting Iraq, Conrad Harper’s resignation, diversity

SO YOU WANT TO BE 120
Is aging necessary? (“The Aging Enigma,” by Jonathan Shaw, September-October, page 46). You bet it is, because death is necessary, too. Do you think that healthcare, Social Security, and our environment are in crisis now? Imagine what they would be like if we succeeded in extending human life expectancy to 120 years. It saddens me to see the human race grow so rapidly in knowledge while its wisdom is at best standing still. Have scientists learned nothing from the Manhattan Project? The only time to stop a bad idea is before it becomes a reality; I would ask these scientists—for the love of humanity and the planet we already over-populate—stop doing this research now.

Benjamin L. Sapers ’90, M.D. ’96
Hope Valley, R.I.

GETTING OUT OF IRAQ
John Deutch in his Phi Beta Kappa oration (“Exiting Iraq,” September-October, page 32) suggests prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Certainly the ability of the insurgent forces to assassinate Iraqis cooperating with us, to ambush significant numbers of ill-equipped Iraqi soldiers and police, and to slowly but consistently produce casualties in American forces should prompt consideration of a change in strategy and not just to “stay the course.” Continuation of the current policy may turn out to be a significant factor contributing to loss of American hegemony as the world’s only superpower.

However, some questions remain. What is to prevent the insurgents from continuing to pick off any Iraqis who seem to be leading the country on a more stable path? One could envision the successful escape of Saddam Hussein and his eventual return to power. What about the private security forces protecting some leaders? Will these highly paid individuals (numbering about 25,000), many of them former U.S. Special Forces personnel, remain? If so, they might be considered by neighboring Arab states to indicate that the United States was still involved militarily. If ground troops are removed, would U.S. air power provide battlefield support on request? Would we be willing to supply Iraqis with sufficiently powerful weapons to match the insurgents, even if that meant that they could fall into insurgent hands?

Stephen J. Seligman ’52
Briarcliff Manor, NY.

Deutch has let an opportunity slip. He failed to address with any specificity those areas where we impugn special knowledge to him. As former Director of Central Intelligence, he was responsible for producing and coordinating the flow of intelligence to the national security apparatus. As deputy secretary of defense,
he was one of the key recipients of it. Granted that most of what happened did not occur on his watch, he did bring to the pulpit a uniquely well honed understanding of the system. But apart from hinting that intelligence reorganization is probably not the answer to whatever went wrong, nowhere in his words do we find any direct opinion as to how (or more usefully whether) intelligence producers failed the country in preparing against past or future Islamist terror attacks. He did not address the even more serious questions of bias-based interference on the part of some principal intelligence recipients. Nowhere is there any reference to the politicization of the process, which may be a prime, unaddressed cause of our needing to get out of Iraq in the first place. Nor of the need to root that sort of misfeasance out of our government’s performance.

John R. Harney ’46
New Carrollton, Md.

HARPER’S RESIGNATION
The resignation of Conrad K. Harper from the Harvard Corporation (“I can no

DARWIN OVER THE TRANSOM
Two weeks before this issue of Harvard Magazine was laid out, the prepublication galley of a volume containing Charles Darwin’s four principal texts arrived at this office. It contained elegant introductions and an afterword by Edward O. Wilson, Pellegrino University Professor emeritus, offering a vigorous defense of evolutionary biology against the claims of “intelligent design.” Because this is heatedly contested ground that opposes science to other worldviews, we asked Wilson for permission to present the core of his argument. Please see page 29.

Ten days later, Higgins professor of biology Daniel L. Hartl produced a book review a couple of months before his deadline. Hartl, a leading Faculty of Arts and Sciences scholar of population genetics and evolution at the molecular and genomic level, examines an important work about the development of complex innovations from small genetic changes. This has been one of the most vexing problems in evolution (and therefore at the heart of claims for intelligent design). The book, co-written by Marc W. Kirschner, founder of the systems biology department at Harvard Medical School, draws upon new techniques to tackle problems that previously exceeded scientists’ grasp. We decided to run the review in the same issue (page 22): a laboratory-floor complement to Wilson’s more philosophical perspective.

See also a review of the equally revolutionary—albeit far less publicly controversial—science practiced by physicist Lisa Randall (page 19). She speculates that our known universe may be only one among many such creations, where there may even be different fundamental forces and forms of matter.

Welcome to the lively, and challenging, conduct of contemporary science at Harvard. ~The Editors
Combine all ingredients in a shaker, add ice, shake and strain into a cocktail glass.

DEPARTING DIRECTORS

Peter K. Bol, Carswell professor of East Asian languages and civilizations, and Lisa L. Martin, Dillon professor of international affairs, have concluded their terms as Faculty of Arts and Sciences-nominated directors of Harvard Magazine Inc. Both have asked probing questions, and both have provided superb counsel—service we wish to acknowledge with sincerest thanks.

We look forward to their continued involvement as members of the Board of Incorporators, and welcome their successors, who stood for election October 14, shortly after this issue went to press.

~Catherine A. Chute, publisher, and John S. Rosenberg, editor

How long will it take for Harvard to really embrace the full intelligence and longer support the president,” September-October, page 56) and the ensuing publicity bring shame on him. The continued inability of Harper and others to move on and let some questionable events go is appalling. In my view, former University Professor Cornel West’s behavior is more of an issue than that of President Lawrence H. Summers, in an example Harper cited.

In my view, Harvard needed some fixing. Grade inflation was just one example of a number of issues that needed to be addressed. The Overseers and the Corporation elected an individual capable of making changes. I cannot find any way that Harvard has been unfair to any minority. Claims by Harper and others of unfair treatment in the examples he listed are ridiculous. With or without the appropriate style, Harvard and Summers will do the right thing about the lack of women in tenured faculty positions and other issues before the University.

Enough is enough of this silliness. Life simply is not a journey where you get what you want when you want it. We all learn that people will not always see things our way. Harper’s behavior in my opinion is comparable to that of an immature crybaby. I believe this attitude is unbecoming to a man of his stature and accomplishments.

Richard A. Jones ‘55
Beachwood, Ohio

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Combine in a shaker, add ice, shake and strain into a cocktail glass.

Combine in a shaker, add ice, shake and strain into a cocktail glass.
wisdom of people of all genders, races, and social class?

I grew up in the South, went to Syracuse University, and then came to Harvard for my M.A., went on to MIT for a Ph.D., and returned to the Harvard environment as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for two years. I coach CEOs globally and am a lifelong scholar of leadership and an educator of business and government leaders. A president shouldn’t have to be dragged and shocked into appreciating diversity: she or he should be a role model for embracing humanity with grace and enthusiasm. One who doesn’t should not be president and definitely doesn’t deserve a raise. Harvard needs to wake up.

Hannah S. Wilder, A.M. ’64, RI ’76
Faber, Va.

The resignation was a demonstration of courage and determination. The comments reportedly made by Harper speak to the issue not only of the temperament and judgment of the president of Harvard, but also of his “intrinsic aptitude” for understanding history.

I find that my students, both male and female, do not know the history of the collapse of barriers to women entering the professions, and, especially, that of academe. They do not know the experience of a few decades ago. They cannot imagine a world in which virtually all professors were male and women could not even hope to receive prestigious grants, a world in which working conditions for males and females were completely different. If the new generation, which has become accustomed to taking certain things for granted, does not understand what happened in the last 50 years, there is a great danger that we will lose the rights we so painfully acquired.

Kudos to Conrad Harper.

Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier ’55, Ph.D. ’73
Professor emerita, art and art history, University of New Mexico
Washington, D.C.

JOB ADVICE
Evelynn Hammonds’s appointment as senior vice provost for faculty development and diversity (“Diversity Director,” September-October, page 56) makes it certain that prejudice, bias, and a lack of diversity will be enshrined as policy at Harvard. Affirmative action will run ram-
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The photograph of the new building of the School of Dental Medicine on page 72 of the September-October issue was released by the school without credit information. The photograph is by Anton Grassl, courtesy of Rothman Partners Architects.

Edward H. Parker Jr., ’60, M.D.
Spokane, Wash.

The Darkness of the Forest
“Congo report” (September-October, page 68) adds enormously to the public’s awareness of the late New York artist Anne Eisner, who married Patrick Tracy Lowell Putnam ’25 and lived with him at Camp Putnam in the Congo more than half a century ago. But surely your readers would like to know the rest of the story. Joan Mark sets this all out in her book, The King of the World in the Land of the Pygmies, her 1995 biography of Putnam.

Although Colin Turnbull may not have mentioned Eisner much in his own book The Forest People (1961), Marks states in hers that “On January 26, 1967, when Anne Eis-
SLAVE-TRADE COLLABORATORS

Jonathan Shaw’s “Witness to Violence” (September-October, page 42), discussing Jill Lepore’s new book, New York Burning, about the 1741 slave-conspiracy hysteria in New York, is emotionally and historically riveting. He cites Lepore’s description of the 2003 reburial of the executed victims in a public funeral in New York City—especially her thoughts about a string of beads found around the waist of a woman identified as Burial 340. “Glass beads like these were manufactured,” Lepore reveals, “in Venice and Amsterdam and traded, for slaves, on the African coast.” She also reports the words of a black woman as the coffin was readied for burial: “They will not rest, they will not rest, until we are repaid!” All eyes turned to her. ‘They owe us!’ she called. ‘They owe us! They owe us!’ And the crowd hollered back: ‘Reparations!... Reparations NOW!’

However, Shaw’s article fails to mention who traded slaves for these beads on the African coast. The evidence is incontrovertible: the overwhelming majority of Africans shipped to the Americas were kidnapped by African slave dealers. Historians estimate that as many as 20 million Africans were abducted by African raiders who typically surrounded a village before sunrise, attacked and seized as many prisoners as possible, and burned the village to the ground. Perhaps 10 million of these victims died during horrific forced marches to the coast—still chained, yoked, and shackled by their African captors—and before they ever laid eyes on a white slave trader. The captives were either purchased by white dealers or beheaded by the African traders if they could not be sold. The survivors, of course, faced the even more appalling brutality of the middle passage. The enslavement and sale of millions of Africans in Africa by Africans was therefore decisive in facilitating the Atlantic slave trade and the growth of slavery in the Western Hemisphere.

The only way to put this terrible joint legacy behind us and move forward as one nation is to honestly confront the whole story of the Atlantic slave trade. Young Americans are not well served when, as one historian put it, “old myths of African barbarism” are replaced by “new myths of African innocence.” There are encouraging signs: the textbook for a new course on African-American history in Philadelphia high schools tells the full truth about the Atlantic slave trade. Only the whole truth can free us all from the burden of our shared and shameful past and reinvigorate our commitment to a more democratic future. As Martin Luther King Jr. dared to dream at the 1963 March on Washington, we can then join hands and sing together in the words of the great black spiritual: “Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

Sheeldon M. Stern, Ph.D. ’70
Newton, Mass.

AT WAR WITH AN HISTORIAN
With regard to the piece about Professor Jill Lepore that the editors entitled “Witness to Violence, An [sic] historian interprets...” (September-October, page 42), I write to ask what rule of grammar you were recalling when you used the article “an” before the word “historian.”

(please turn to page 101)
LETTERS (continued from page 10)

The indefinite article, as far as I know, has two forms—“a” and “an.” “A” is used before words that begin with a sounded consonant. “An” is used before words that begin with a sounded vowel. The only time “an” is used before a word beginning with the “h” is when the “h” is silent; and, thus, in pronouncing it, the word begins with a vowel. For example, with the word “herb” (American pronunciation), you would use the article “an,” because the letter “h” is not pronounced. “Hour” and “honest” are two further examples of words beginning with a silent “h.” The word “historian,” however, as with the majority of words that begin with the letter “h,” requires the article “a,” because the “h” is heard.

It seems remarkable to me that no one on the staff of Harvard Magazine knows this rule of grammar. Can you defend your use of “an” in front of a sounded “h,” or was it a mistake? I’m hoping you would never write about “an Harvard graduate.”

BRAKING NEWS

For coverage of breaking news at Harvard, the editors invite you to visit the magazine’s website, www.harvardmagazine.com.

On the website, you may also register for “Editor’s Highlights,” a summary of the contents of each new issue e-mailed just as it is posted on the website. Readers outside the United States, who don’t automatically receive the print edition, may find this an especially helpful way to keep in touch with the University and each other.