A Women’s Weekend

Harvard’s first University-wide Women’s Weekend drew more than 400 alumnae and friends to campus in November to network, get reacquainted with people and places, and educate themselves during often pointed and panel personal discussions and workshops that touched on sexuality, race, work-life balance, public service, and women’s health and rights across the globe.

Addressing attendees at an evening reception in Harvard Business School’s Spangler Center, President Drew Faust celebrated the “once unimaginable” gathering of women at Harvard—or at any number of universities that had barred their entry: “When I was in college I was not allowed to wear pants to class. I would not have been able to apply to Princeton or Yale, or get a credit card without a male co-signer.” (Read more on her remarks and other weekend events at harvardmag.com/womens-weekend-16.)

The three-day program, organized by the Harvard Alumni Association, was developed in partnership with similarly focused Shared Interest Groups. Not on the weekend agenda, but prompted by events, was sharp discussion of sexist behavior by some of Harvard’s men’s sports teams; see page 23.

inadequate immigration controls to terrorism; as the campaign wore on, he giddily predicted historic turnout among Latino voters—but according to limited data based on exit polls conducted soon after election day, that didn’t really happen: about 48 percent of eligible Latino voters (there are an estimated 27.3 million) came out, only slightly more than in 2012, and Trump appears to have done better than expected among them. Varela is not alone in questioning the validity of exit polls, and he plans to evaluate the final voting data—which should reveal a more comprehensive picture of Latinos’ political views—to see why this happened and how we can progress.” Still, the turnout and votes for Trump are “an ‘inconvenient truth.’ It’s sad,” he says. “I think the Republican Party has now learned ‘We don’t need the Latino vote; we just need to get enough white voters and enough Latinos in certain districts.’”

What’s probably more critical for politicians and journalists to take into account moving forward, he explains, is that “Latinos” are not a monolithic demographic, as they are often portrayed—they come from more than 20 countries, have wide-ranging religious and political beliefs, and are assimilated to differing degrees.

He touts the potential power of younger Latinos to spur significant political and cultural changes. About one-third of the Latino population (17.9 million people) is under age 18, and another quarter are millennials—and that group, according to the Pew Research Center, based on 2014 figures, is the largest share of millennials in the American adult population. Many of those younger people, Varela maintains, are disaffected independents—they tend to be left-leaning, but that did not translate into votes for the Democratic party. “This is a defining time for Latinos in U.S. politics, but we don’t know what we want,” he asserts, and “we are still being represented by white males. There has to be a Latino-American agenda about how to achieve political power—now, more than ever…Latinos can’t be satisfied with the current state of political representation. And if my role is to keep saying ‘That’s not good enough,’ and if that’s going to upset people, then I’m good with that.”

Ideally, he favors an “ambi-cultural” society, in which communities of color coalesce, or at least share in a more explicit solidarity. That’s already under way, he says, especially in the country’s urban areas, and was evident even when his own parents met and married. “Will we go through a messy, ugly process to get to this utopian vision? Yes,” he continues. “Do I think it will be violent and tragic? There’s a part of me that thinks that will happen, although I don’t want it to. I try to have faith in people—but it’s a tough call.”

As for representation in the newsroom, Varela acknowledges that whatever strides were made to diversify staff were undermined by the recession and the financial decimation of the industry—largely as a result of the rise of online media. (The same Internet, he admits, also popularized LatinoRebels.com.) During the last three decades, the number of Latino journalists in print media has risen by only 1 percent, and by only 3 percent in broadcast newsrooms, according to “Good News, Bad News: Stormy Seas for Latino Journalists,” in the winter 2016 issue of Latino magazine. More bluntly, the article reports that according to the American Society of News Editors, there has been an overall “net loss of 721 Latino journalists since 2002.” (Print newsrooms have sheds tens of thousands of employees since then.)

Varela readily tangles with questions about the need for specifically “Latino journalists,” and assertions that such ethnic or racial affinities bring inherent biases to news coverage. “There’s no such thing as a journalist who is not biased,” he answers. “If people have a problem with that [statement], they can disagree with me.” Even raising that question “is part of the problem: people don’t hear voices like mine in the mainstream media, so I come across as antagonistic.” White journalists have been covering white politicians and white social issues since America was founded, he points out, and their inherent “bias” is not disputed. In fact, he adds, one of “my biggest problems with political journalism right now is that a Donald Trump is put on the same plane as a Hillary Clinton because you’re supposed to be ‘balanced and unbiased.’”

Journalists of color are often put in difficult binds; they are called to report on topics perceived as relevant to their identified groups—“boxed into” talking about “Latino” issues, Varela says, in order to “get my voice out there”—when, in fact, he’s “sick of talking about immigration and Donald Trump.” Yet as an advocate, he feels compelled to do it, and at the same time cor-