LETTERS

Cambridge 02138

Privacy, gender agendas, the Horsehead Nebula

DEmocrACy deTAILS

Re: Lincoln Caplan’s article “A Conservative Counter-revolution” (January-February, page 69), reviewing Michael J. Klarman’s The Framers’ Coup.

The limits of the available evidence—about 90 percent of the actual words of the debates at the Convention are probably lost, as Caplan paraphrases Klarman saying—complicate the task of divining the Founders’ intent. The difficulties the readers of such a dense scholarly book will have, when even a reviewer like Caplan has trouble distilling that point, are evident. Without knocking the challenge he faces, I do have to call out a confusing line about the Founders’ collective undemocratic agenda: “They did not intend that...” Perhaps Caplan intends this as a paradox; or it may just be ill-phrased. The inadvertent effect, though, it reinforces the need to reinterpret the Constitution for each generation’s needs free of the “dead hand” of the drafters, instead of focusing, as originalism does, on intent devoid of contemporary context, based on sometimes scant or contentious evidence.

Jeffrey Schultz, M.P.A. ’04
New York City

The article rightly stresses the importance of Klarman’s book about the making of the U.S. Constitution. It fills a gap in our understanding of how it came about. Of particular interest is the fact that the Convention participants were the elites of their day (e.g., Madison et al.) working in secrecy to produce a charter which is revered today by almost everybody. It is quite popular for some to castigate today’s elites (e.g., as responsible for some of our current troubles), probably while unaware of the huge debt we owe the elites who were the Founders.

Henry H. Moulton ’46
Cambridge

Lincoln Caplan’s review notes that Donald J. Trump was the fourth candidate in American history “to win the Electoral College despite losing the popular vote.” Strictly
Speaking Strategically

Among the most important gains intended from the governance reforms unveiled in late 2010 is enhanced capacity for the Harvard Corporation to think strategically: to envision the institution’s chief challenges and opportunities, and to help its leaders navigate toward future strengths. In the years since, the imperative of mounting the Harvard Campaign successfully has been, de facto, a proxy for strategy—at least in the near term: shore up financial aid, pursue deferred building projects at several schools, invest in engineering and applied sciences particularly.

But occasional briefings by the Corporation’s senior fellow have provided encouraging hints that the hard work of peering beyond the immediate fundraising horizon is under way, too. During the most recent such conversation (see harvardmag.com/lee-16), William F. Lee identified six strategic priorities, ranging from the financial and practical (Harvard Management Company and the endowment; Allston development) to the programmatic (life sciences; “One Harvard” initiatives) to the broadly intellectual and cultural (campus life, diversity, and inclusion; the place of humanities and social sciences in the liberal arts). All to the good—and alumni, faculty and staff members, and students look forward to their evolution and expression.

To that end, it may be helpful to point to similar efforts and differing practices at some peer institutions. As reported, Princeton University’s “strategic framework,” published in January 2016 following an extensive, broad planning process, draws on its unique circumstances to detail specific investments: enlarge the student body and residences, and thereby attract more dollars; support new practices and include new members, the reformed Corporation is proceeding that way. During its near half-dozen years—approaching the end of the capital campaign, the latter, he pointed directly to the need “to invest further in Yale science,” to augment its research prowess. Specific measures stem from these overarching goals: overhauling science laboratories and teaching facilities, and building new ones; bringing scattered humanities departments together in a common home; building a new theater complex for the drama school; and emphasizing “the application of empirical social science to public-policy problems and questions”—a proxy for “big-data” ambitions. (The Elsie also have a practice of presidential briefings for the community following trustees’ meetings—and the Yale Daily News reports that internal discussions about how to increase transparency are under way.)

Thinking strategically, and speaking that way with the community as a whole, can only be good for Harvard. As it adjusts to new practices and includes new members, the reformed Corporation is proceeding that way. During its near half-dozen years—approaching the end of the capital campaign and a likely University leadership transition—it can build on those gains, preparing itself, campus constituencies, and candidates to become the next president for the most productive conversations about what Harvard wants to become, and the strongest commitment to ensuring that it succeeds.

—John S. Rosenberg, Editor
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Lincoln Caplan replies: The writer is of course correct about Adams’s victory over Jackson—and over William H. Crawford and Henry Clay, as well. (Their respective electoral and popular vote totals were: 84 and 108,740 for Adams; 99 and 153,544 for Jackson; 41 and 40,856 for Crawford; and 37 and 47,531 for Clay.) Journalism often requires selection. While the writer is also correct that it’s important to remember this first example, it’s not essential to mention it in every consideration of the Electoral College. After consulting with the editors of the magazine, I didn’t mention the Adams example in the review because the larger point Klarman was making about the not-fully-democratic character of the Electoral College was amply supported by the four other examples, which I could refer to succinctly in a parenthesis.

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LETTERS

state is becoming subordinate to large corporations. As the last section of the article makes clear, we are up against a powerful economic feedback loop. Our only hope of protection comes through non-market interventions (legislative, legal, etc.). When our public institutions themselves become departments of corporations, what hope have we of protecting ourselves?

Charles Hsu '79
San Francisco

GENDER AGENDAS

What can they be thinking, these agenda-driven Harvard administrators and their student adherents (“Gender Agenda,” January-February, page 23)? All their specious cant about demographics and their nonsensical notions about certain independent associations being antiquated cannot justify the radical violation of rights these folks are proposing. Their impulse to overthrow civil liberties, including the freedom of association, seems so ill-suited to the fair Harvard, the tolerant, liberal, live-and-let-live Harvard, the Harvard that has always shone forth as a powerful beacon for human rights. That Harvard is the true Harvard. Oy vey! Johnny, we hardly know ye.

John J. Adams '62
New York City

I noticed the brief review of the University-wide Women’s Weekend in November (“A Women’s Weekend,” January-February, page 74). It sounds like it was a success.

Would it not make sense to organize a Men’s Weekend once a year as well? The world is changing for everyone. There are many issues that would be uniquely important, such as men’s health, family, being fathers, careers, sports, even feminism.

In the drive for women’s rights, one doesn’t want to marginalize men or be insensitive about their particular challenges and problems. Sexism can have two faces.

Peggy Troupin, Ph.D. ’74
New York City

M.B.A. ANXIETIES

I enjoyed your reference to the dread Harvard Business School WACs in “Signs of the Times” (The College Pump, January-February, page 76). As an HBS student in the heyday of this time-honored practice, I
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Robert Ruggeri-Koret, Ed.M. ’90  
Melrose, Mass.

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