LETTERS

Cambridge 02138

Vietnam, final clubs, Puritans

ELSA DORFMAN

With great joy I read “The Portraitist” (by Sophia Nguyen, September-October, page 30), on Elsa Dorfman. I clearly remember her coming to Mather House to be a tutor, her smile and her expertise. With amusement I remember her posting a notice regarding the newly established darkroom in the Mather House basement. What caught my eye under her elaborate stationery letterhead was an undulating sentence that stated simply: “Some day your prints will come.” I laughed then, and I laughed again when I recognized her on the cover and remembered that witticism. Glad to read she is going strong. Thank you for your article.

TOR SHWAYDER ’75, M.D.
Detroit

CRIMINAL INJUSTICES

I want to thank you for “Criminal Injustices” (by Michael Zuckerman, September-October, page 44). I’m an attorney who occasionally handles criminal matters, usually for people I’m handling other things for, or those near and dear to them. Last year, I had a client who was unemployed himself, and whose parents were employed respectively as a home health aide and an auto mechanic. The judge set his bail at $3 million. (One of the bailiffs asked me, “What president did the assassinate?”) Eventually, we got it reduced—to $300,000.

Constitutionally, the only matter at issue for a defendant locked up in Cook County jail is “deprivation of liberty.” It is precisely the same constitutional issue that could legitimately be raised by somebody locked up in the VIP Suite of the Ritz Carlton with unlimited room service and no doorknobs on the inside. The conditions of the place where one is deprived of liberty are constitutionally irrelevant. But to the defendant, the conditions are the real issue. Had our client been offered confinement in the Ritz Carlton for however long it would take his case to get to trial, he would probably have accepted it. (I certainly would have advised him to.)

If the court had ordered an amount of bail he could actually afford (somewhere around $1,500, I’m guessing), this would not only have enabled him to stay home and work while awaiting trial, it would also have enabled him to pay his own lawyers, and pay them in full, rather than relying on his parents, who could afford only partial payment at best.

More important, it would have enabled our client to insist on a trial. (More than 97 percent of U.S. criminal cases never go to trial, but are “plea-bargained out.” The issue of pretrial incarceration has a lot to do with that. The constitutional guarantee of “due process” is meaningless unless the defendant has a choice.)

OBIV, the other issue, is whether our client could afford the “lower” bail either, so he spent nearly a year in jail awaiting trial before accepting a relatively good plea bargain rather than spend any more time in jail to take his chances at trial before a judge who obviously thought he was a dangerous person to begin with. And, given the rather well-known conditions in Cook County jail, it should be reasonable to expect the judge to take judicial notice that nobody stays there voluntarily, and that any amount of bail that keeps a defendant locked up there is by definition “excessive.”

More important, it would have enabled our client to insist on a trial. (More than 97 percent of U.S. criminal cases never go to trial, but are “plea-bargained out.” The issue of pretrial incarceration has a lot to do with that. The constitutional guarantee of “due process” is meaningless unless the defendant has a choice.)

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process” doesn’t mean much if you have to spend several months in Cook County jail to get it.) In this particular case, my colleague and I were quite sure we could have won an acquittal, or at least gotten the charge reduced to something not involving physical violence or use of a weapon. The prosecution could not have proved either of those elements. Our client had never touched a gun. There was absolutely no physical evidence that he had.

And that in turn would have meant that, after the criminal proceedings were over, we could have sued the police department civilly for shooting our client five times, causing him considerable pain and suffering and leaving him with a permanent limp. (The reason the police and prosecutors in the case brought charges that could even remotely be considered to justify a seven-figure bail was that they needed to justify shooting the defendant five times in a case in which nobody else was killed or even injured.) In all likelihood, the city would have settled for a reasonable sum.

The decision to set bail in an amount that neither the defendant nor his family could have raised saved the city a whole lot of money and got them off the hook for shooting the defendant for no particular reason.

The decision to set bail on my client at $3 million, or even $300,000, was obviously a strategic one. It was meant to subject the defendant to unpleasant and dangerous conditions to pressure him into a plea bargain. Thus the state could avoid having to try a questionable criminal case and then settle a civil case to compensate the defendant for the injuries inflicted by police overzealousness. It worked. I cannot possibly believe, nor expect my fellow alumni to believe, that this case was unique. It is part of a pattern that enables the state to run its criminal-justice system at what it considers a reasonable cost. It is a system based on ransom and extortion. America deserves better. Human beings, made in the divine image, deserve better.

Marian Henriquez Neudel ‘63 Chicago

I am inspired and excited by the work of Alec Karakatsanis to end human caging and wealth-based detention. A few statements in the article especially caught my attention, as they point to a related issue. The author points to “a danger, in focusing on the work of a privileged white man” and of “falling into… the white savior trap.” He later mentions that “all of us are complicit in the social injustices that we’ve allowed to fester.”

Much of the social progress that we Americans have made in the last few decades can be tied directly to mass movements for civil rights, women’s rights, and gay rights, among others. However, as we look at the current political landscape, typified by President Trump, we realize that we have never experienced a badly needed movement to modernize white men. Instead, we see white supremacists, white male legislators who interfere with women’s reproductive rights, white male fear of immigrants (who built and continue to build this country), and too many other injustices to mention. We badly need to have men like Karakatsanis to model a more enlightened way for us white (Caucasian) men to behave.

Frederick (Fritz) Engstrom ’70, M.D. Brattleboro, Vt.

The articles on Alec Karakatsanis and Carl Thorne-Thomsen [see below] made me especially proud to be a Harvard graduate. With all the criticism of higher education these days, we need more stories like these.

Mike Clement, M.B.A. ’71 Birmingham, Mich.

CARL THORNE-THOMSEN

Thank you and Bonnie Docherty for the article on Carl Thorne-Thomsen (Vita, by Bonnie Docherty, September–October, page 38). I was two years behind Carl at Lake Forest High School and Harvard College. His leadership and bravery were long-standing. Starting with my freshman year in high school, Carl was one of my heroes. He would speak out in support of racial minorities and LGBTQ students as a high-school leader. His calm and articulate bearing was a beacon for all who knew him. He is deeply missed.

Mark C. Shields ’70, M.D. ’75 Chicago

There is certainly a quality to be admired in the character of Carl Thorne-Thomsen, who died in the Vietnam war after rejecting the safety of a student deferment. However, I have something of a problem with the stance the piece appears to take. Refusing to accept the privilege inherent in a student deferment does, perhaps, represent a kind of moral courage. However the role that Carl
in so doing accepted is unfortunately one that involved the killing of large numbers of Vietnamese, not to mention ravaging their culture and their countryside. That is a role that a number of Vietnam-era Harvard students rejected, on what could arguably be that a number of Vietnam-era Harvard students rejected, on what could arguably be more compelling moral grounds. No doubt a wish to personally escape the risks and unpleasantness of military service entered into many students’ calculations; human motives tend to be mixed, especially when moral issues are involved. But the implied comparison between Carl and his somehow less upstanding, more craven fellow students does not sit well with me. At the very least it is unfair to the many who sincerely—in many cases passionately—believed that fighting in this war was more ethically repugnant than sitting comfortably on the sidelines.

Dan Breslaw ’59
West Corinth, Vt.

I was profoundly affected by the life story of Carl Thorne-Thomsen and found great resonance in the history of my classmate, Commander Melvin Lederman, who grad-

Strategically Speaking

ON JULY 11, Corporation senior fellow William F. Lee wrote to the Harvard community, soliciting advice about the qualities the University’s new president should have. The same day, the Pew Research Center reported unsurprising, but dismaying news: reversing earlier polls, a majority of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents now think colleges and universities damage the country. Weeks later, a Democratic political-action committee released polling research that found that a majority of white working-class voters believed a college degree ensured a better future. However, 83 percent concluded that a college degree no longer guaranteed success. Such findings seem to spell disaster for the prospect of Americans agreeing on an agenda to advance knowledge and equip citizens with what they need to succeed.

What does this have to do with the search for Harvard’s twenty-ninth president? At a minimum, it suggests that she or he should be talented at communicating the institution’s role in society—and eager to do so beyond the Crimson community. It also raises questions about who gains admission in a hyper-competitive era, and points to the need to air that out more fully (see the articles on pages 18 and 50).

Those demands—and the many others any president will face—underscore the urgency of articulating a more sharply defined, credible narrative about the institution that reflects a rigorous strategy. Charles William Eliot declared in his inaugural address, in 1869: “This university recognizes no real antagonism between literature and science, and consents to no such narrow alternatives as mathematics or classics, science or metaphysics. We would have them all, and at their best.” Harvard leaders have understandably embraced his robust formulation. It is comforting to associate with greatness, and “best” has a nice ring to it: aspirational, good for fundraising. And that limitless “all” eliminates the burden of choosing.

But perhaps Harvard has lingered in the shadow of having it all and at its best too long. In the past decade, as an implicit strategy, the University has invested heavily in engineering and applied sciences. But even as those fields draw more students, the faculty remains far smaller than Princeton’s (not to mention MIT’s) — and scaling up further will take additional billions, amid the competing needs of other pricey priorities like life sciences. Should Harvard partner with MIT in a regional engineering and applied-sciences cluster? As the neurobiologist now at Stanford’s helm aims at a Bay Area life-sciences cluster (perhaps embracing UCSF, Berkeley, large local biotechnology enterprises, and the many area data scientists), can Harvard, with Boston’s natural advantages, build unquestioned leadership in that field — and again, at what cost? Meanwhile, the University is tiptoeing into more curricular art-making — but trails Yale, while Princeton and Stanford have recently created campus arts precincts.

Suggesting that Harvard or any institution has it “all” today, and “at their best,” is an invitation to complacency or self-delusion. No one has enough money to fulfill that aspiration, or the facilities to accommodate everyone who would have to be involved. Insisting on it will only confuse constituents at hand (faculty members, students, administrators); those emotionally nearby (alumni, philanthropists); and those farther afield (the rest of the country and world, including political leaders).

In his useful and accessible recent book, Realizing the Distinctive University: Vision and Values, Strategy and Culture (Notre Dame Press), Mark William Roche, a scholar of German and of philosophy, and former dean of Notre Dame’s College of Arts and Letters, writes, “One of the great dimensions of the American university landscape is its diversity. Ohio State has a different vision of itself than does Williams College. Notre Dame is different yet again. Each university benefits from being able to articulate in meaningful and not simply incidental ways why a particular student or faculty member should be drawn to that institution. Roche adds that such a vision is also “the best brake on the homogenizing tendencies of rankings. It offers students, faculty, and others additional opportunities for intrinsic motivation and emotional identification”— invaluable, even if not tooted up on a balance sheet. Conceiving and animating a vision does “require tremendous effort in terms of faculty socialization, support structures, communication, incentives, and leadership,” he notes. But given the complexities of running universities in an era of rising costs and doubts about their societal value, any institution and its leader are clearly better off defining such a vision than simply winging it.

Eliot would be proud that his ambitions still resonate as the University he transformed nears its four-hundredth anniversary. To do him credit, and make that celebration a great one, bringing the community together to articulate a vision and refine a strategy tops any Harvard leader’s agenda.

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor
VIOLATIONS of human rights will destroy the fabric of a community, shattering its ideals like glass (“Social Club Ban?” September-October, page 20). And this occurs most readily in times of deep anxiety and frustration. Seized by the crude formula “Us. vs. Them,” people cluster in mobs and committees and seek to ease their distress by tormenting a scapegoat, almost always some minority perceived as a threat.

So, now, a committee at Harvard, along with some administrators, have attempted to scapegoat a small group of students, aiming to stigmatize them and strip away their right to freedom of association. These students’ rights have been trampled upon, and the values that should bind and inspire the University have been defiled. This shameful episode must end, the appalling abuse of power must be denounced, and Harvard’s better angels must throw a clear light on the psychology of the mob and its destructive consequences.

John J. Adams ’62
New York City

In gratitude for what Harvard has done for my daughter, I had planned to continue my donations toward financial aid, but I can’t. Harvard’s stance against single-gender groups is too troubling.

In the Harvard Gazette, President Drew was, from elsewhere in the US and abroad, as well as the faculty, should be free to associate with whomever they please without fear of punishment by Harvard College or the government. Some of us remember President Pusey protecting the Harvard faculty by standing up for that principle during the McCarthy era. It is time for the faculty to do likewise and stand up for its students.

Joan Morthland Hutchins ’61
President, Board of Overseers (1999-2000)
Elizaville, N. Y.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS, FINAL CLUBS, THE “PURITANS”
As a loyal Harvard alumna and parent, and past president of one of the governing boards, I find it appalling that Harvard would ban students from joining clubs because it thought doing so would improve social life. I hope the faculty votes down the social clubs mandate and figures out some better way to make undergraduate life more appealing to all.

Undergraduates from California, as I was, from elsewhere in the US and abroad, as well as the faculty, should be free to associate with whomever they please without fear of punishment by Harvard College or the government. Some of us remember President Pusey protecting the Harvard faculty by standing up for that principle during the McCarthy era. It is time for the faculty to do likewise and stand up for its students.

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In the Harvard Gazette, President Drew
Faust stated, “We want to make sure that everybody feels fully welcome and can participate fully in campus life. The single-gender social organizations are antithetical to much of that....”

My daughter competed to join the Crimson Key and the Advocate. After both refused her, she found a home at the Bee. Some of her most positive experiences and leadership opportunities happened through the Bee, where she enjoyed the camaraderie of its diverse members of all colors, nationalities, and backgrounds.

As one of the 16 percent of plastic surgeons who are women, I published an article about gender bias in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in which I applauded the Business School’s project covered in 2013 by The New York Times (“Harvard Business School Case Study: Gender Equity”—described as Dean Nitin Nohria’s attempt “to remake gender relations at the business school...to change how students spoke, studied and socialized.” That project, which President Faust supported, was brilliant because it was both objective and constructive.

At a time when male-dominated STEM industries struggle to increase their number of women employees, Harvard’s attack on all-female clubs in the name of combating sexual assault, the bar’s original intent, defies logic. An all-female club can be a respite for young women, particularly for those who might have experienced sexual assault.

Forcing members of all-female clubs to confess membership and be punished has a chilling resemblance to McCarthyism and is anathema to the explicit right of people to peaceably assemble under the First Amendment. Stanford, my alma mater, like most major residential universities, struggles with sexual assault, yet they just added their eighth sorority to meet demand.

I was deeply disappointed to hear that the Kennedy School withdrew its invitation to Chelsea Manning following pressure from past government officials. [See page 31.] It would be bad enough if fear of displeasing the intelligence community inhibited Harvard from extending invitations to controversial persons. To rescind an invitation already extended is worse. Harvard has sent a clear message to the public and the government that those who offend the intelligence community will not be tolerated.

The Kennedy School has hosted foreign despots and U.S. officials whose actions have caused misery and death for millions around the world. Some have done things so widely condemned that they dare not travel to countries where they might come under the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, yet they find safe harbor in Cambridge. Is it the considered scholarly opinion of our premier school of government that Chelsea Manning’s actions are plainly more criminal or more damnable than those of Henry Kissinger [’50, Ph.D. ’54] or Hector Gramajo [M.P.A. ’91]?

I understand that the experiences and perspective of such VIPs provide important additions to the campus discourse; while their presence at Harvard may offend me, I do not assume it means the Kennedy School approves their actions. Other readers may celebrate these men and have different villains, but can doubtless find members of their own rogues’ gallery who have been invited to the Kennedy School.

U.S. universities and the federal government have a complex, interdependent relationship. Yet Harvard is among a handful of universities whose resources and reputation allow it to risk standing up to the government, costly as that could be. With this privilege comes responsibility to exercise it appropriately. It is a sad day when Harvard instead chooses to bow down.

David Feurzeig ’87
Huntington, Vt.

DEPARTMENT OF AMPLIFICATIONS

I was disappointed to read “Anti-Aging Approaches” (Right Now, September-October, page 8), as it was one-sided and misleading.

Despite referencing (and misrepresenting) our company multiple times in the article, you did not reach out to us for comment. If you had talked to us, we would have shared the extensive scientific research supporting the potential benefits of nicotinamide riboside and pterostilbene. Furthermore, we conducted a double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical study of our product BASIS demonstrating that it increases and sustains nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD+) levels. The study is registered on clinicaltrials.gov for anyone to view.

Elysium Health is dedicated to improving lives by translating advances in science and technology into effective, scientifically sound products that help people manage their health. We are working directly with the world’s leading scientists, clinicians, and academic institutions to progress our understanding of science. In fact, we entered a multi-year research agreement with Harvard to fund research projects focused on cellular function and other key modulators in the aging process—a fact you left out of your story.

As a Harvard graduate, I expected better from you. At the very least, we deserved the courtesy of being called for comment.

Eric Marcatulli, M.B.A. ’12
Chief executive officer,
Elysium Health
New York City

Marina Bolotnikova responds: Elysium cites evidence that its product increases levels of NAD+ in the human body. But there is no
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* ANNUITY RATES CURRENT AS OF SEPTEMBER 2017

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scientific evidence to date linking NAD+ to any health or anti-aging benefits in humans. The article (which was about anti-aging research at Harvard, not about Elysium specifically) pointed out that Elysium markets its product for its health benefits, despite the lack of evidence supporting this claim.


The sidebar, “Records, Rescued,” stated, “In 2014, Woodberry Poetry Room successfully resurrected Ezra Pound’s 1939 recording of The Cantos.” More precisely, the project retrieved and digitized data from a disc containing Canto 56. For more about Pound’s Harvard recordings, see the Woodberry Poetry Room’s notes for its 2015 exhibition, “Not to be Played” (http://woodberrypoetryroom.com/?p=1938), or this magazine’s coverage, “Pound, on the Record” (http://harvardmagazine.com/2015/10/pound-on-the-record).

And in other articles... “Practicing My Purpose” (by Max Suechting, Montage, September-October, page 53) refers to songwriter Dan Wilson as having “written for or with many of the biggest names in pop,” among them Joni Mitchell. Wrong pop star: the author meant to list Carole King.

The Harvard Portrait featuring Sunil Amrith (September-October, page 19) rendered the title of his professorship incorrectly. He is the Mehra Family professor of South Asian studies. Our apologies.

A photo credit accompanying the Vita profile of Carl Thorne-Thomsen misidentified the date for the image from the Lake Forest High School yearbook; the correct date is 1964.