INFLAMMATION
I read “Raw and Red Hot” (May-June, page 46) with great interest. I have equally great admiration for the clear writing. The multifaceted faculty approaches to the many well-known, as well as to the recent, involvements of inflammation in humanity’s defenses and illnesses were beautifully presented. We have come a long way from the rubor, calor, and dolor (redness, heat, and pain) reactions to a foreign body, usually of infectious nature.

The compilation of interests and questions whose answers are being sought reminded me of my 1953 freshman chemistry class, Chem 1, with Professor Eugene Rochow. Among the many witticisms that Rochow inserted into his lectures was a couplet that I hope I am quoting accurately:

Little bugs have littler bugs upon their backs to bite ‘em.

Littler bugs have littler bugs, ad infinitum.

I now interpret that to mean that, no matter how many answers scientific research determines, it unearthes even more questions. That’s why we need research—to answer questions; and why we need to support it—to ask deeper ones.

Murray L. Levin ’57, M.D.
Chicago

The article did a great job of presenting the groundbreaking research behind the negative role of inflammation in the body. While there are likely benefits of finding medications that can address these issues, we must also believe in the willingness and ability of individuals to tackle the inflammation problem through diet and exercise. The author, Jonathan Shaw, states, “The great difficulty with interventions involving altered diet and increased exercise is that...people already know what they should be doing—but for most, that knowledge doesn’t change behavior.... This suggests that pharmaceutical interventions that block inflammation may be necessary to check the global epidemic of non-communicable disease.”

I run Wellness Foundation, a grass-roots nonprofit on Long Island that has been teaching people how to adopt a whole-food, plant-based diet for 14 years. We were created largely to address heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Our six-week kick-start program is successful at reducing cholesterol, weight, and prescribed medications. But what we didn’t initially expect was how much it could help people with other inflammation-related problems such as arthritis, headaches, acid reflux, back pain, and eczema. Even people with depression report significant improvements.

Many of our clients have been told by their doctors to take medications, but rarely do their physicians recommend a diet and exercise program. In talking to skeptical doctors early on, many didn’t believe that their patients could change their habits. But after seeing dramatic results in their own patients, doctors now regularly refer patients to our program and several have even taken the program themselves.

I am encouraged to see Harvard scientists strengthening research on inflammation, but we must also encourage patients to make changes to their diets, and—even
more importantly—create environments in our communities where healthy lifestyles are the norm. For while we may be pushing against evolutionary habits to consume sugar and fat, change is possible, and those people who make changes are more likely to live long, healthy lives.

Michele Sacconaghi, M.P.P. ’92
Sag Harbor, NY.

Jonathan Shaw’s article on inflammation is well researched and well written. Inflammation, however, may originate from divergent sources via several different pathways. Thus, categorizing them as “inflammation” in one fell swoop may be too naive. One group of inflammation comes from infections or other noxious stimuli which our immune system tries to fight by generating the cardinal signs explained by Celsus. The other inflammatory groups include endogenous metabolic inflammation, which comprises the main gestalt of Shaw’s article, and the last group is autoimmune inflammation stemming from aberrant immune reactions.

Metabolic inflammation is the result of several obesity-related illnesses such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and diabetes. These non-infectious inflammations are called sterile inflammation, denoting non-involvement of infection, and usually do not exhibit the cardinal signs. However, blood viscosity upsurges in metabolic inflammation. Thus, fish oil with mild anti-coagulator function may alleviate increased blood viscosity in metabolic inflammation.

The largest source of chronic inflammation is obesity. IL-1beta, as stated in this article, is in the center of this pathway. Therefore, reducing obesity will decrease inflammation, IL-1beta, and abate many chronic diseases. Indeed weight loss decreased CRP, the marker of inflammation referred to in the article.

Although these non-infectious and infectious inflammations produce similar cytokines, they have vastly distinct origins of pathogenesis. Clearly distinguishing these pathways will help the public’s understanding of inflammation and treatment options. One would not treat chronically abscessed teeth with fish oil, nor fatty liver disease with anti-infective drugs. Some pathology, such as periodontitis, does involve metabolic inflammation superimposed with local infection. Thus, it requires a two-pronged approach utilizing both anti-metabolic and anti-infective treatments.

Although “knowing” the disease process may not directly translate into behavioral changes, don’t we have the obligation to educate the patients as to what causes their illness? In my surmise, Hippocrates is still correct as he said, “Before you heal someone, ask him if he’s willing to give up the things that make him sick.”

Sok-Ja Janket, M.P.H. ’02
Cambridge

JUSTICE HOLMES

I am neither a lawyer nor a historian of law, but I was aware more than colloquially of Holmes’s Buck v. Bell decision, and though Lincoln Caplan (“America’s Great Modern Justice,” May–June, page 54) mentions the shadow it cast on Holmes’s career via reference to Adam Cohen’s book (which I have not read), he seems to whitewash Holmes’s explicit eugenic agenda by framing it in cosmopolitan terms, and rather than condemn this vile-mindedness, chooses rather to celebrate this jurist, ignoring instead the ethical and legal groundwork it paved for Hitler’s Final Solution and, later in our own country, for continued cruel and abusive treatment of the mentally ill and suffering. I find this reprehensible and though Holmes may yet be a favorite son of Harvard, I do not consider him a civilized man.

Philippe P. Bloch, A.L.B. ’95, M.Ed.
Brookline, Mass.

Lincoln Caplan defames the English and American judges who preceded Oliver Wendell Holmes when he says that they pretended to deduce the law from a brooding omnipresence and were unaware that law evolves to meet human needs. He is far from the first to tell how the great justice slew the deductive formalist bogeyman, but the tale is a myth.

Two centuries before Holmes declared that the life of the law has not been logic but experience, Matthew Hale wrote that laws are “accommodated to the Conditions, Exigencies and Conveniences of the People”
as those “Exigencies and Conveniences do insensibly grow upon the people.” One century before Holmes, John Dickinson told delegates to the Constitutional Convention, “Experience must be our only guide. Reason may mislead us.”

Perhaps Caplan obtained his law degree without encountering any opinion by Lord Mansfield or Chief Justice Marshall, both of whom obviously made law with joyous abandon.

Albert W. Alschuler ’62, LL.B. ’65
Kreger professor emeritus, University of Chicago Law School; author of Law without Values: The Life, Work, and Legacy of Justice Holmes

Cumberland Center, Me.

Lincoln Caplan responds: In his Holmes biography, Stephen Budiansky acknowledges “a stream of anti-Holmes vituperation that at time has bordered on the hysterical.” Professor Alschuler’s scathing critique of Holmes in Law without Values, which I took account of in my research, has earned him a reputation as one of the most vituperative. In The Common Law, Holmes quotes Hale, Mansfield, and Marshall. My article didn’t claim Holmes had a thought that no one had ever had before. It reported that, in this iconic work of legal history, Holmes gathered evidence countering the “prevailing view about this form of law in the late nineteenth century.”

Justice Holmes’s dissent in Abrams v. United States is justly celebrated. But Holmes’s rhetorical skill in that case should also be noted. Praising “free trade in ideas” and “the competition of the market,” the justice appropriated the language of the conservative defenders of laissez-faire economics and turned it against them in defense of freedom of speech. I imagine him casting a sly glance at his colleagues as he delivered his opinion.

John V. Orth, J.D. ’74, Ph.D. ’77
Chapel Hill, N.C.

A HOLMES-INFLAMMATION NEXUS

Both of the articles were excellent. At first reading, the topics discussed may seem disparate. The article about Justice Holmes stimulates interest in reading Stephen Budiansky’s new biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. in its entirety. The article about inflammation outlines how chronic unregulated inflammation, which does not restore homeostasis, may be the common pathogenetic mechanism in many different diseases. Perhaps a link between the two articles may be made through Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. [A.B. 1829, M.D. ’36, LL.D. ’80]. Justice Holmes’s father made important contributions to literature and medicine. A common message from both articles may be that chronic inflammation is deleterious to the body and the body politic. Modulation of inflammation should restore health.

David J. Zaleske, M.D. ’75
Naples, Fla.

I WAS INTRIGUED by the article about Kieran Tuntivate’s one-shoe victory in the 3,000-meter run (“One Shoe, No Problems,” May-June, page 34).

My grandfather, David Connolly Hall (Brown, 1901), also had a one-shoe track run in the 1900 Paris Olympics, good for a bronze medal in the 800 meters—making him the first Rhode Island Olympian medalist. According to the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame write-up, “In a trial heat at Paris, he established the long-time Olympic record in the 800 meters of 1:56.2 on a grass track, but in the finals a competitor stepped on his heel, causing Hall to lose a shoe. Hall finished the race in third place, but the gold medal time of 2:01.2 was far slower than Hall’s earlier pace. During his Brown career Hall was a two-time New England champion and set a national record in the half-mile run.”

He went on to become a physician, but interrupted his career to serve in World War I, where he directed 33 ambulance companies in Italy. He lived in our guest cottage while I was in high school and at Harvard.

I told him about running a 2:08 half-mile in the freshman open meet in 1965. He was not impressed. It was my only timed half-mile. I was a football and tennis player.

David C. Hall III ’68
Lopez Island, Wash.

1969
I ALWAYS appreciate the letters section of Harvard Magazine, and the May-June issue (particularly regarding the 1969 student strike) was especially lively.

Michael Widmer comments in his letter that “Many of the police took full advantage of the long awaited ‘opportunity’ to pummel the privileged students whom they had always resented.” I was astounded by the anti-police bias in that comment. I wonder how many of those police he surveyed to come to the determination that they resented students and that they had long waited for the chance to “pummel” them. I wonder if Widmer is even aware of the bias implicit in his comment.

Peter Keese ’58
Knoxville, Tenn.

Michael Widmer responds: Anyone who lived in Cambridge during the 1960s, as I did, knows full well through word and deed that large numbers of Cambridge police resented what they saw as privileged and snobby Harvard students—a feeling, by the way, with which I had considerable sympathy. And anyone who watched the invasion of Harvard Yard, as I did, knows full well that many of the police resorted to gratuitous violence that went way beyond what was required to disperse the students. One doesn’t need to do a survey to make an obvious connection between the police sentiment and the excessive violence. The facts speak for themselves.

ATHLETIC ADMISSIONS

Many thoughtful people understandably are in a fury over the college admissions scandal [see 7 Ware Street, page 3]. The basis of the outrage is that elite universities are supposed to be institutions that educate the most outstanding students, but, due to corrupt behavior, less accomplished scholars displace individuals who are likely to be better students. At Yale a coach receiving bribes gave to the admissions office, on his list of recruited athletes, the names of two nonathletic applicants who were, by Yale’s metrics, sub-standard students. But wait!
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LETTERS
No deserving scholars were displaced, but only two potential athletes.
This points to the greater area of concern. I have no complaints about Harvard's recruited athletes. They got in according to the rules, and the large majority of them made fine use of their time at Harvard. But now is the time to reassess the policy on recruited athletes. About 15 percent of the class are these athletes. In the scandal currently roiling the nation, a handful of better students was displaced by the corrupt actions of the conspirators. If 80 percent of Harvard's athletes would not have gotten in without their athletic credentials, that means they displaced 200 applicants who, according to Harvard's standards, are better students and more deserving of being at a great educational institution.

The irony is that the policy doesn't even give Harvard a competitive advantage: our Ivy League peers have the same policy. It's time for the entire league to reconsider the policy of providing an admissions advantage to recruited athletes; a change would raise the student body's academic abilities dramatically.

JAMES W. ANDERSON, M.Div. '73, Ph.D.
Chicago

WHEN HOUGHTON WASN'T OPEN
I was amused by the article about Houghton Library (“A Sense of Belonging,” May-June, page 18), subtitled “open to all.” As a student at the School of Education in 1964, I wasn't allowed in because I was female. This was years before the “women's movement” so I hadn't yet learned to be hurt or outraged: that was just the way it was, something else we women had to work around or not give a hoot about. I assumed there was something so precious inside that building that it had to be reserved for the very greatest among us. Also, Harvard was a boys' school, really, so let it be a boys' school. I didn't care; the books I needed were at Widener.

One day, the poet William Meredith arrived in Cambridge to read at Houghton. He was my teacher in undergraduate days and I was, if I may say so, his pet. So of course, I went to his reading. I entered Houghton and looked around. What's so great about this place? I asked myself. It was just some dumpy library. It was the Wizard of Oz! I remember feeling confused and sort of sorry for men that they had to make exclusive something so mundane. But I never forgot.

DIANA ALTMAN, M.A.T. '64
New York City
DIVESTMENT

I was dismayed when a spokesperson for Harvard Management Company (HMC) described the movement by faculty and students to divest from fossil fuels as a political issue. The December 11, 2018, letter to President Bacow and the Fellows of Harvard College signed by 250 faculty members makes clear that HMC’s “continued investment in the fossil fuel industry is discordant with our mission and with the purposes of the endowment.”

The 2018 report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a clarion call for bold action on an unprecedented institutional, local, and international scale. There is little doubt that climate change is occurring rapidly and with ever greater societal costs and damage to the natural world. Old metrics for decisionmaking no longer apply. Free-market economies influenced by vested interests will fail to respond quickly and rigorously enough to avoid devastating environmental destruction. Market mechanisms alone are insufficient to address climate change and do not adequately value the complex ecosystems that support all life on earth.

Transitioning to a carbon-free economy is an unprecedented global challenge that requires bold and decisive action. The arguments that it will cost too much or that technology will find a silver bullet are incorrect. Real leadership is needed to avoid leaving a much-diminished world to our children and grandchildren.

This open letter is an urgent call to Harvard to employ its considerable influence to bring about meaningful change, to lead with vision and moral authority, and to commit to a sustainable future. HMC’s financial support for an industry that is drilling humanity and the natural world toward disaster is incompatible with the values and principles of a great university.

J. Hale Smith, M.B.A. ’77
Milton, Mass.

THE FACULTY DEAN’S DUTIES

My first reaction to the press reports of the controversy over Professor Ronald Sullivan’s dual role as counsel for Harvey Weinstein and faculty dean of Winthrop House was to cite it as an example of the inadequate current teaching of American history in the high schools. Certainly by the time I had graduated from high school in 1954, I knew that John Adams had been counsel for the six British soldiers indicted for the murder of Crispus Attucks and five other colonists in the so-called Boston Massacre of 1770, which underlay the American Revolution. Subsequently I learned that one of his co-counsel was Josiah Quincy II, son of President Quincy and a member of the College class of 1763.

At that point I was prepared to dismiss the student objections to Sullivan’s dual role as based on ignorance of the high ethical calling of members of the Bar to defend the accused, guilty or not. Certainly, even as a lawyer early in my practice of administrative law, I was appointed by the courts to defend indigent defendants who were likely guilty as charged.

But “Coming to Terms with Sexual Harassment” (May-June, page 22) has raised a question as to whether Sullivan’s role as counsel for Weinstein is a conflict of interest with his role as faculty dean with respect to his students’ sexual issues. Your reporting will be incomplete without addressing that question, which I consider the only basis on which the decision to remove Sullivan as faculty dean could be justified.

William Malone ’58, J.D. ’62
New Canaan, Conn.

Your article should have been titled “Coming to Terms with Harvard’s Failure to Educate Its Students.” In what has become the Sullivan case, Harvard missed its chance to help its students understand the quest for truth in legal proceedings.

Any student is entitled to have an opinion about the guilt or innocence of a criminal defendant. But every defendant is entitled to an effective legal defense. The students who protested Sullivan’s decision to defend Weinstein understood neither point. They did not understand that their opinion about Weinstein is just that: an opinion that does not vitiate the presumption of innocence. And they did not understand that even the most unpopular defendants—indeed, even guilty defendants—are entitled to a fair trial with a lawyer of their choosing. They also did not understand that a lawyer who serves a client of their choosing. They also did not understand that even the most unpopular defendants—indeed, even guilty defendants—are entitled to a fair trial with a lawyer of their choosing. They also did not understand that a lawyer who serves a client does not, by that service, endorse anything about the client may have done.

Or perhaps the students acted as they did simply because they could. After they acted up and acted out, the dean of Harvard College, unable to dismiss Sullivan for the reasons given by the students, initiated a “climate” investigation at Winthrop House.

The findings were predictable. Students, presumably including many whose actions instigated the investigation, reported that the “climate” was unsatisfactory, and so Dean Khurana terminated the leadership of the faculty deans.

So the sequence is that students initiate an ignorant and unwarranted protest. The dean fails to help them understand anything about the legal process and the right to counsel, but instead orders an investigation of a “climate” that inevitably deteriorates as a result of the students’ actions. He then dismisses the target of those actions.

The failings here are multiple: the educational failing, the survey of opinion in an inflamed and biased environment, and the manipulativeness of the decisionmaker. The contrast with the fair criminal trial to which any defendant is entitled could not be sharper. Harvard has failed miserably in its educational mission.

Donald L. Horowitz, LL.M. ’62, Ph.D. ’68
Duke professor of law and political science emeritus
Duke University
Chevy Chase, Md.

Editor’s note: For an update on the controversy over the Winthrop House faculty dean, please see page 27.

ERRATA AND AMPLIFICATIONS

The last two words of the May-June book review (“A New Story of Suffrage,” pages 72–73) were deleted in some magazines. The sentence should read: “Her effort to dust off these stories provides a messier, sometimes troubling, and more convincing picture of some of the women who changed the world.”

The contact information at the end of “Reading the Market” (page 13) rendered Professor Lauren Cohen’s first name as “Laura.”

In the feature on inflammation (page 46), Professor Gökhan S. Hotamisligil’s first name was misspelled.

New University librarian Martha Whitehead’s first name was shorn of its “r” in the accompanying photo caption (page 26).

And in Off the Shelf (page 71), both author, Adam Ehrlich Sachs, and title, The Organs of Sense, of one item were victimized.

We apologize for our errors. ~The Editors