daughter of Chinese immigrants. At Harvard, she quickly became a campus celebrity as her blog, Sex and the Ivy, chronicled her sexual forays into the sometimes-dysfunctional world of Harvard undergraduate social life. Some readers were shocked. “I don’t think the actual content was controversial,” Chen recalls, “so much as the fact that I was writing so publicly as a woman of color—and that this was in 2008, when the types of writing that we’re used to, very confessional essays from women, wasn’t as common.”

Concentrating in sociology, with a secondary in women, gender, and sexuality studies, Chen thrived at the newly founded Women’s Center, particularly in a seminar led by its then-director, Susan Marine. She says Marine taught her to understand that feminism “is not just about what you discuss in the classroom; it’s about how you incorporate this in your real life.” For Chen, it has become a guiding artistic principle. In 2018, she and a group of other artist-activists launched Heal Her, a traveling workshop that seeks to help survivors of sexual violence—so far, in six different countries—through “transformative storytelling”: communal, therapeutic, spiritual, and artistic techniques for helping women process sexual trauma through art. Facilitators lead the women in meditation, psychodrama, breathing exercises, and even neopagan rituals all focused on “opening up the body, psychologically, physically, [and] getting people into a safe state where they can start sharing their stories.” The resulting art

**Off the Shelf**

Recent books with Harvard connections

**City on a Hill: Urban Idealism in America from the Puritans to the Present**, by Alex Krieger, professor in practice of urban design (Harvard, $35). Americans romanticize the pastoral countryside and clustering in suburbs, but cities—and visions of better urban places—are threaded through their imaginations and experiences. Krieger, a distinguished practitioner-scholar (and member of the steering committee for Harvard’s urban development for its vast Allston holdings), surveys the history and expression of this vision, comprehensively and vividly.

**The Puritans: A Transatlantic History**, by David D. Hall, Bartlett professor of New England church history emeritus (Princeton, $35). Turning to that other "city on a hill," Hall anchors Puritanism in its roots in Elizabethan England and Scotland, follows its migration to the more hospitable New England, and traces its religious and political decline. A sweeping, vigorous narrative, drawing on a lifetime of scholarship, it begins, briskly, “When Christendom in the West was swept by currents of renewal and reform in the sixteenth century, the outcome was schism.” Who would not read on?

**Kinds Come First**, by Jerome Kagan, Starch professor of psychology emeritus (MIT, $30). A seemingly technical book about the validity of experiments and their results, this volume makes a most humanistic point: Kagan argues that “a particular value on a reliable measure” probably does not possess “the same theoretical meaning for human participants who vary in developmental stage, gender, social class, or ethnic group.” That is to say, per the subtitle, the categories of “age, gender, class, and ethnicity give meaning to measures”—especially important to remember in a data-driven age.


**Why Trust Science?** by Naomi Oreskes, professor of the history of science (Princeton, $24.95). A scholar who has probed attempts to sow skepticism about science (by, among others, the tobacco industry and fossil-fuel producers), makes a strong case that science is credible precisely because it is a social, human process. (See Harvard Portrait, July-August 2014, page 23.)


**Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy**, by James Hankins, professor of history (Harvard, $45). The founding editor of the I Tatti Renaissance Library (see “Rereading the Renaissance,” March-April 2006, page 34) undertakes a magisterial reassessment of the humanist political thought of that momentous upwelling. He finds that the focus on Machiavelli and the machinations of statecraft underlay the focus on character,
objects, recordings, and writings will eventually become a collaborative show. Chen says her sociological training was central to creating workshops informed by the needs of those in attendance: “In every single community, they have their cultural methods, their localized approach toward: ‘How do you talk about and deal with sexual violence?’

That is a question Chen herself has wrestled with ever since a 2007 event altered the course of her life. An ex-boyfriend posted nude photos of her on the Internet in an early instance of revenge porn, and years of harassment followed, especially by one anonymous cyber-stalker who also targeted undergraduate sex writers at other schools, predominantly those who were Asian women. The stalker was never caught.

After graduating, Chen began working full-time as an activist, organizing feminist conferences and events, and started writing a book—first memoir, then novel, but never published—about her experiences. But the strain of public exposure and the trauma and paranoia from her ordeal weighed on her. She was still being stalked online.

In 2012, she moved to Berlin in search of a new start. She assumed an alter ego, Elle Peril, and made her living modeling, often nude, for photographers and artists. At first, the new name was merely an escape from the reaches of Google. But as Chen began reading about feminist performance artists from the 1970s—particularly Sophie Calle, Lynn Sherman Leeson, and Carolee Schneemann—who had made their bodies into sites for con-

viro, and the shaping of the citizenry (through education in the humanities). Hankins’s project began before its relevance to contemporary politics could have been dimly perceived, and, one may hope, will long outlive the dilemmas of the moment.

The Great Democracy: How to Fix Our Politics, Unrig the Economy, and Unite America, by Ganesh Sitaraman ’04, J.D. ’08 (Basic Books, $28). The professor of law at Vanderbilt, operating on a less philosophical level than Hankins, takes stock of the neoliberal era that began in the 1980s and that he now perceives as “collapsing.” The contending visions for “what comes next” are “reformed neoliberalism” (more of the same, tweaked), “nationalist populism,” or authoritarianism: “nationalist oligarchy.” Finding those options grim, he advocates “a new era of democracy,” with vastly more civic engagement and institutions responsive to public, not private, interests.

The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India, by Supriya Gandhi, Ph.D. ’10 (Harvard, $29.95). Why a history of the eldest son of Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor, who commissioned the Taj Mahal? If only to recall India’s full peopling and cultures, at this moment of intense, and increasingly exclusionary, Hindu nationalism. The author is now senior lecturer in religious studies at Yale. Her graceful account does not shy from the tensions that have inhered in the subcontinent for a millennium.

Three Poems, by Hannah Sullivan, Ph.D. ’08 (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $23). The author, associate professor at New College, Oxford, where she is a scholar of English modernism (Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, et al.), now crafts her own poems. The plain title hints at what is within: long poetic meditations prompted by the ordinary objects and scenes that launch memories and scaffold lives.

A New World Begins: The History of the French Revolution, by Jeremy D. Popkin, A.M. ’71 (Basic Books, $35). The Bryan Chair professor of history at the University of Kentucky, who grew up during the convulsions of the 1960s, crafts a narrative history of the revolution, two centuries and three decades after its convulsive beginning raised, indelibly, the persisting issues of liberty and democracy.

Moving Up without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility, by Jennifer M. Morton (Princeton, $26.95). The author, an associate professor of philosophy at CCNY and now UNC-Chapel Hill, reflects on what it takes, and costs, to move from one stratum of society to another as a first-generation student at elite colleges: in her case, from birth in Lima, Peru, through a Princeton undergraduate education and a Stanford doctorate. At a time of increased focus on such students’ needs (see Anthony Abraham Jack’s research, “Adjacent but Unequal,” March-April 2019, page 26, and the College’s First-Year Retreat and Experience, harvardmagazine.com/ffyre-18), this welcome exploration deepens understanding of the real challenges.

The Affirmative Action Puzzle: A Living History from Reconstruction to Today, by Melvin I. Urofsky (Pantheon, $35). The professor of law and public policy and of history emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University, a leading Brandeis scholar, has performed the useful service of delivering an even-handed, comprehensive survey of the subject—about which he was and is “conflicted.” The chapter on higher education necessarily deals extensively with Harvard, from the Bakke case to the recent, if preliminary, victory in the Students for Fair Admissions lawsuit (“Harvard’s Admissions Process Upheld,” November-December 2019, page 21). But it is worthwhile thinking about the whole field for a more than parochial perspective on what remains fiercely contested terrain.

A consequential Mughal victory: a gemlike depiction of the submission of Rana Amar Singh of Mewar to Prince Khurram, the future Shah Jahan, on February 5, 1615.