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On the cover: Illustration by Pete Ryan

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Cambridge 02138

Beautiful math, guns, sexual harassment

THE TARDOGRADE MOMENT
Regarding the cover of the January-February issue, that's exactly how I felt on New Year's Day.
William D. Gould Jr., M.B.A. ’65
Baltimore

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION
A valuable article, as higher ed continues to understand opportunities in online programs (“Preparing for a Profession,” January-February, page 25). As a 50-year veteran pioneering e-learning initiatives, I have watched higher ed struggle with the realities of the disruption of digital transformation. While the article highlights the benefits of pre-residency prep, it avoids the key challenge of the opportunity to reduce residency itself.

Charles A. Morrissey, M.B.A. ’62
Irvine, Calif.

ELDERCARE
Facing the staggering prospect worldwide of so many elders (“The Coming Eldercare Tsunami,” January-February, page 12) suggests to me that there should be greater focus here in the United States, and the addition of political members to the [research] team. Implementation of any new program will be easier in China, with a President for Life, than here, with 50 autonomous states and governors plus thousands of mayors—i.e., Medicare. After creating techniques to keep elders ambulatory, fed, and housed, it will be necessary to raise the money and get the plans through Congress and the president. Perhaps politicians like the Obamas, Romney, or others on either side of the aisle can put together a team to guide implementation.

Separately, I think the stereotypical illustration in the article should be discarded as it speaks to me, as an elder, of the typical nursing home setting. Experience tells me that one-on-one aides assisting elders to exercise will not happen, nor is it likely that elders will be fed at a table with others. There is no indication that, in addition to assisting mobility and offsetting loneliness, there is an attempt to help the elders keep their brains out of neutral with stimulating programs for those who have all their mental faculties working.

Harris Cohen ’47
Montclair, N.J.

CLIMATE CHANGE
Once again Harvard students, faculty, and alumni are debating whether the University endowment should or should not divert investments in fossil fuels (“Divestment debate, Overseer Slate,” January-February, page 19). I submit that this is the wrong question, as it would make no difference either way. Such an approach to the existential global threat of climate change is too little too late. The endowment and the Harvard-Yale football game are high visibility targets, but singularly unproductive ones.

Upwards of 90 percent of the world’s energy is derived from burning carbon. It is so ubiquitous that it is taken for granted, including, ironically, by the divestment debaters themselves. It is carbon itself that makes the debates possible, since the participants traveled to Cambridge by boat, plane, train, car, or public transit and occupy University buildings all run on carbon.

The challenge is very serious and get...
Democracy

Every day, my presidency is infused with Harvard history. I work in Massachusetts Hall, a sturdy brick building where John Adams rested his head and George Washington quartered his troops. I live in Elmwood, a stately home built by a loyalist to King George III that later became a military hospital during the Revolutionary War and, later still, housed Elbridge Gerry, who served as governor of Massachusetts and vice president of the United States. My comings and goings on most days happen in spaces that remind me of the role the University has played not only in bringing our country into being but also in supporting and sustaining it. Harvard was nearly 140 years old the day the Declaration of Independence was signed—with Adams, Gerry, and six other Harvard alumni among the signatories—and we are nowhere near done helping to perfect the Republic.

As we move deeper into what is likely to be an especially contentious election year, I find myself grateful for the many ways in which Harvard continues to define and defend democracy. The most basic of our efforts is the most fundamental: helping to register voters and encouraging them to vote. TurboVote, an online tool developed by two alumni of the Harvard Kennedy School, makes the process far less onerous than it’s been in the past, and I send students to that resource as often as I can with a reminder that voting is the first responsibility of citizenship. I have yet to meet anyone—liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, or anyone in between—who thinks the world is perfect. All of us who enjoy the franchise have a responsibility to exercise it.

To vote intelligently depends, of course, on the availability of useful information and increasingly on the ability to discern signal from noise in an extraordinarily cacophonous media landscape. The Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy is a leader in exploring the spread of distortions, misrepresentations, and deceptions online. Launched earlier this year, the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review relies on expedited peer review to disseminate research with real-world consequences. At the same time, the Center makes scholarship on complex topics more readily accessible to newsrooms through the Journalist’s Resource. Some 53,000 followers on Twitter and more than 50,000 subscribers to its weekly newsletter demonstrate the wide reach of the effort, which recently covered subjects as varied as carbon pricing, gun buybacks, and paid family leave.

Our teaching and scholarship are complemented by members of our community who have responded to the call to serve the public. Harvard is proud to count among its alumni many men and women who have served this country in uniform, including more recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor than any other school outside of the nation’s service academies. In my travels as president, I have met dedicated alumni spanning the political spectrum who are improving cities and states across the country through their good work, both as elected officials and as staff and volunteers. Fifty-five current members of Congress are alumni, and my advocacy in the Capitol on behalf of higher education has been helped considerably by their experience, insight, and partnership. It is inspiring to learn about their commitment both to their fellow citizens and to their alma mater, and to hear firsthand how they work to ensure that our democracy thrives.

Much is rightly expected of those to whom much has accrued. When I welcomed the Harvard College Class of 2023 to our campus, I told them that Harvard, Massachusetts, and the nation are far from perfect, and I challenged them to stand up and speak out for the causes in which they believe. For every effort I have mentioned in this brief piece, there are at least a dozen more happening across our campus that explore democracy from every angle, revealing to us both its complexity and its consequence. Like our predecessors, we embrace the special responsibility of shaping our nation as it shapes us, eager to preserve a form of government that has enabled the pursuit of happiness for centuries.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

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Letters

According to Su, anyone can become proficient at it. But should we expect all students to experience the quest for real math? For Barandes, “Real math is about making bold conjectures and then figuring out how to turn them into eternal theorems by proving them. Kids can start to do real math as soon as they're able to play around with puzzles, draw pictures, and reason logically....”

In reading this I realized there is a fundamental flaw in this approach, which may be why so many people fear and hate math. None but the most exceptional mathematicians will ever truly make bold conjectures and then figure out how to turn them into eternal theorems by proving them. Furthermore, by pushing this standard we set up students to fail, and then to hate math. This approach sets up a false dichotomy: either you are good at math and appreciate the beauty of mathematics, or you are not good at math, so you can't. It doesn't need to be this way. We can enjoy music even if we can't play an instrument, yet very few people will ever write a hit song, let alone a symphony. You and I can enjoy reading and understand literature, even if neither of us can write a novel. Why do we require people to become mathematicians to learn about math?

Instead of expecting students to become “real” mathematicians, why not show them how to appreciate mathematics? Mathematics appreciation would involve teaching the power of mathematics to solve important problems and then showing how mathematicians achieved mastery of these ideas.

We can still teach students about proofs. We can even show how one proof can cross many branches of mathematics. Math appreciation will arise from people seeing and understanding the achievements of others, not through a requirement that each person experience the “Aha!” moment of deep mathematical discovery for themselves.

With a focus on math appreciation rather than mathematics wizardry, perhaps we can reduce math phobia and achieve greater student achievement in mathematics as well.

Andy Davidson ’81
New York City

Guns

I grew up with rifles in our house; they had locks on the triggers, were stored in the attic, and my father (please turn to page 6).

William H. Nickerson ’61
Greenwich, Conn.

Thank you for “Movement Ecology” (The Undergraduate, page 35) and “Color and Mass Incarceration” (page 40) in the September-October 2019 issue. I am glad there are both students and faculty at Harvard who are working hard to advance justice and I appreciate hearing about their experiences, research, and work. At the same time, I am disappointed that the governing boards do not seem to have same commitment. Student calls for divestment from fossil fuels and into renewable energy, and for divestment from the prison-industrial complex are laudable and should be implemented as soon as possible. It’s a matter of integrity. The wealth of the Harvard endowment is a resource that can and should be mobilized to advance justice. When that happens, we will know that Harvard stands on the right side of history.

Brendan Miller, M.P.A. ’03
Santa Fe

Is Math Beautiful?

“Real math is a quest driven by curiosity and wonder,” Jacob Barandes writes in his review of Mathematics for Human Flourishing, by Frances Su (“The Mystery of Mathematics, January-February, page 60”), adding that, according to Su, anyone can become proficient
Closed Doors

Universities customarily are open places. There is security where required (dorms, labs, libraries and museums), but a visitor can get to most appointments without producing identification or passing through checkpoints. This porosity corresponds to the institutions' openness: to discourse, the exchange of ideas, and the serendipitous meetings that pull back the curtains to discovery. Places like Harvard, in fact, spend a great deal of money arranging themselves to facilitate all that.

So it was jarring, during the already dark, cold examination period last December, to find the door to Massachusetts Hall locked and guarded, without and within. Ditto for the locked doors at University Hall, where the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) is quartered.

The measures were understandable. The Graduate Student Union was loudly on strike. Student divestment protesters had been willing to disrupt routines to underscore their case. And student proponents of an ethnic-studies department, and of an associate professor in the field who was not granted tenure, had sat in at University Hall and infiltrated a faculty meeting—a serious breach of campus norms. Academic leaders are no more eager than other executives to have their offices occupied, as has happened in the past. Hence the precautions: low-key perhaps, but they made the campus chillier.

It would be tragic, even fatal, for Harvard if those doors closed permanently, along with the ears and minds of the community members whose work together is, after all, the institution's reason for being—and the source of its international standing.

It is not news that the national discourse is highly polarized: more ranting than reasoning. Universities' role is the antithesis: taking on the hardest questions, in their full complexity, and finding ways forward. Most of that work is far removed from the cacophony of the political marketplace: sifting new evidence to decipher an ancient text, underwriting how plants transport water or diseases infiltrate humans. Other scholarship can be more fraught: on ways to organize an economy and distribute its fruits, say, or limit the carnage associated with guns (David Hemenway's “Doing Less Harm,” January-February, page 43). But that work, too, can and does progress civilly.

Of immediate concern is the sense that the ratio of noise to signal—position-taking, rather than listening and engaging; persuading, and being persuaded—is on the rise on issues internal to the University. To cite a few:

• The Graduate Student Union's strike was motivated, in part, by some members' strong feeling that the University has failed to deal effectively with intolerable cases of sexual harassment and assault—a particular horror for students who depend on their faculty mentors' support. They sought a separate dispute-resolution process, outside Harvard's Title IX system. The University insisted that it is legally mandated to handle such matters as it does, and that undergraduate and graduate students within the union are, indisputably, covered by that mechanism. During months of negotiation, neither side seemed able to advance more effective ways of preventing harassment and assault—surely the most desirable outcome, compared to varying responses to devastating behavior post facto.

• The protests about ethnic studies resulted in loud student demands for disclosing within 24 to 48 hours the evidence brought to bear on the tenure decision. That won't happen: tenure dossiers and proceedings are confidential. At the beginning of the fall semester, FAS dean Claudine Gay had unveiled a plan for multiple faculty appointments in ethnic studies. But that did not mollify students and professors angry about the denial of tenure—to the extent that, during FAS's December meeting, faculty members abetted the startling violation of longstanding rules concerning attendance and conduct. (Thereafter, Gay reiterated her commitment to the appointments, supporting a concentration if professors develop one, and spending the time and resources necessary to build the field at Harvard.)

• And of course, the longest-running fissure, divestment, which has sparked debate and protests for several years. This administration is meeting more often, with more proponents, than its predecessor, but the terms have not shifted. Student, faculty, and alumni advocates insist the endowment must not contain assets related to further fossil-fuel production, and on February 4 the FAS called on the Corporation to alter its investment policies (read about the debate and vote at harvardmag.com/fas-divestdebate-feb-20). The administration and the Corporation are unlikely to be moved. No one is feeling better about the debate so far—quite the contrary—and no real evidence has yet emerged that the University might make a concerted commitment to research, education, and policy analysis on climate change: the realms in which it can excel.

By training, experience, and temperament, President Lawrence S. Bacow is inclined to find ways for people to work together, in furtherance of Harvard's mission: pursuing scholarship to discover truths, and teaching. The headline controversies on campus during the past semester were structured so rigidly that navigating toward common ground, or even finding instances where people were actually debating points of view, rather than simply position-taking, seemed impossible. Objectively, from a distance perhaps, that is not the case. But the perception that Harvard attends to its own business the way the larger society now conducts its political life is discouraging. And the longer members of the community lock themselves into such fighting stances, the longer this privileged, special place risks focusing its energies inwardly, further alienating—and failing to assist—the impatient society beyond.

In his pre-winter recess letter to students, Harvard College dean Rakesh Khurana saluted them for speaking up “about the causes that you care about.” He also made a plea: “[S]ometimes we talk past each other instead of with each other...I hope we can resolve to listen to each other and seek to understand the experiences that inform other people’s perspectives.”

Doing so undergirds the case for having a Harvard, entrusting it with enormous resources, and expecting the world to value the results. Is anyone listening?

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor
kept the ammunition at the club where he taught us to shoot trap.

In 1992 I took Dr. Hemenway’s class, long before Columbine, Sandy Hook, and a myriad of other locations were nightmares shared by our collective American experience. I am incredulous that nearly 30 years hence, his cogent, sensible public-health policy arguments regarding gun-control (“Doing Less Harm,” January-February, page 43) still fall on bureaucratic deaf ears. Clearly, Hemenway’s research throws a mirror up to what very well may be the single greatest public health/public policy challenge we face as nation moving forward.

Robert G. Denmark, M.P.H., M.P.H. ’92, S.D.M. ’94, D.M.D.
Lafayette Hill, Pa.

ZONING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

I beg to disagree with Robert Liberty (“Zoning and Climate Change,” Letters, January-February, page 2) that judicial administration of local zoning under the Mount Laurel decision has utterly failed to achieve its goal of reducing local zoning barriers to more affordable housing types. Recent experience teaches completely otherwise.

I have practiced land-use law in New Jersey for 35 years and devoted a considerable part of my practice to litigating affordable-housing issues under the Mount Laurel doctrine. The New Jersey Supreme Court’s 2015 decision (“Mount Laurel IV”), in which I participated, removed a dysfunctional state agency from the process of administering affordable-housing laws, and returned jurisdiction to the courts. Consequently, more than 300 municipalities initiated and have settled more than 300 separate lawsuits with plans to provide cumulatively for tens of thousands of affordable-housing units.

I have represented developers in about a dozen of these suits. The municipal plans, designed to create a realistic opportunity to provide each town’s fair share of affordable housing, have included substantial re-zoning by towns for the construction of new affordable-housing units as part of multi-family inclusionary developments at densities far higher than previously permitted and with unit types not previously allowed. Monitoring in the next year or so will provide hard data on how many units have actually been built in the past few years.

Effective advocacy by the nonprofit Fair Share Housing Center, and courts’ extensive use of special masters, have been crucial in a
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**SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

It is appalling that the rate of sexual assaults at Harvard (“Sexual Assault Rates Unchanged,” January-February, page 24) remains unchanged since 2015. Four-fifths of attacks among undergraduates were perpetrated by other students and more than two-thirds occurred in University housing—and the report notes that “the majority of students do not report incidents to the University.”

More worrisome to me is the lack of any information in this brief article about the University’s response and work toward prevention, even as we live in a society that generally makes little effort to protect women and men from sexual assaults. We focus on the end result. We study the woman attacked, bypassing the culture that fails to prevent it. We offer counseling and self-defense courses, but rarely deal with preventing attacks. We rarely talk about sexual assault with incoming students. I wonder what the University can do, using all its resources for the life-

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**LETTERS**

**BDS AND ISRAEL**

David Mendenhall trivializes Angela Davis’s support for BDS by dismissing Jonathan Burack’s charge that BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] “aims to dismantle the Jewish homeland” (Letters, January-February, page 4). BDS founder Omar Barghoudi does not equivocate about the right of Jews to self-determination: “Definitely, most definitely, we oppose a Jewish State in any part of Palestine.”

The pro-BDS organizations Mendenhall cites have long spread the myth that Israel is the cause of all ills in the region, and applied standards of morality to which no other country—dozens involved in much more violent and enduring conflicts—is subjected.

Demonization of Israel is pursued even when it clearly harms Palestinian Arabs, the very people BDS claims to champion. For example, last year, almost 600 Palestinians lost their jobs at an Israeli-run Soda Stream factory on the West Bank as a result of BDS advocacy. The organization publicly rejoiced at this “win” for the movement.

Alex Bruner, M.B.A. ’76
Boca Raton

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**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

State where home rule still dominates decision-making on zoning and affordable-housing issues and statewide legislative consensus on affordable housing has proven elusive.

Jeffrey Kantowitz, J.D. ’82
Teaneck, N.J.
changing scholarship lauded by President Bacow, to change the algorithm. I wonder if the magazine can publish that information along with just the raw data.

HARRIS C. FAIGEL ’56, M.D.
Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Editor’s note: All peer schools in recent surveys report similar rates of harassment and assault, regrettably, and almost all show rates of such incidents increasing, due perhaps to increased willingness by those affected to notify authorities. The magazine has reported on Harvard’s prevention programs, and will continue to do so. The full annual University data, including deterrence and prevention measures, appear at https://titleix.harvard.edu/files/titleix/files/harvard_title_ix_odr_2019_annual_report.pdf.

ATHLETICS AND ADMISSIONS
Re: Thomas Ehrlich’s letter (January-February, page 74), why should corpore sano be ignored for admission? Is the College’s focus on “teaching and scholarship” or on preparing students for proactive, productive lives? Harvard commendably seeks excellence in many forms, and athletic excellence deserves “a heavy thumb on the admissions scale.”

CARLO ZEZZA ’57
Chicago

ERRATA AND AMPLIFICATIONS
“The Coming Eldercare Tsunami” (January-February, page 12) misidentified Ph.D. student Daria Savchenko as a postdoctoral fellow.

We inadvertently omitted Wendi C. Thomas’s middle initial and truncated the name of her organization, MLK50: Justice Through Journalism, in “Renewing the News” (January-February, page 48).

“Sports Medicine Man” (January-February, page 35), misstated Brant Berkstresser’s title; he is associate director of athletics for student-athlete health and performance. Berkstresser notes also that the athletic training staff, not the Micheli Center, carries out Harvard’s baseline concussion testing, and that the Crimson Mind and Body Program, which offers mental-health programming, is part of the athletic department’s overall health and performance model, which coordinates medical services, nutrition, mental health, and strength and conditioning for athletes.

Lena Chen (“Creative Exposure,” January-February, page 57) is enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Carnegie Mellon, not the University of Pittsburgh.

We regret these errors.

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Breathing fine particles suspended in the air is harmful for everyone—and can kill those with cardiovascular or respiratory vulnerabilities, a fact known since the 1990s. Now a study of 95 million Medicare hospitalization claims from 2000 to 2012 links as many as 12 additional diseases, including kidney failure, urinary tract and blood infections, and fluid and electrolyte disorders, to such fine-particle air pollution for the first time. The research demonstrates that even small, short-term increases in exposure can be harmful to health, and quantifies the economic impact of the resulting hospitalizations and lives lost.

Fine particles (known as PM2.5 because they are smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter) can slip past the human respiratory system’s copious mucosal defenses in the nose and upper airways. These tiny byproducts of combustion, principally of fossil fuels such as coal and oil, land in the thin-membraned alveolar sacs deep in the lungs where oxygen exchange occurs. From there, they can pass into the blood. But the full extent of the systemic harm they cause is not well understood, explains principal investigator Francesca Dominici, Gamble professor of biostatistics, population, and data science and co-director of Harvard’s Data Science Initiative. Joel Schwartz, professor of environmental epidemiology and senior author of the BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal) paper elaborates: “We wanted to shed further light on the risks of exposure to short-term air pollution by searching for links between such pollution and all diseases that are plausible causes of hospitalizations.”

To do so, the researchers used a “big-data” approach, aligning Medicare-patient hospital admissions by time and geography with known levels of PM2.5 pollution on the previous day. That information was modeled using satellite and temperature data, and verified with actual measurements from thousands of ground-based monitoring stations. The approach sounds simple, but Dominici explains otherwise: she built the data platform on which the study relies “one year at a time” during the past 20 years of
her career. The construction of such a research tool, which harmonizes the data using standard values and definitions across multiple sources and data attributes, requires “enormous intellectual input” and many financial resources that are “hard to find,” she says, because most grant-making organizations, including the federal government, “don’t put their money” into data platforms. “They are not considered sexy or intellectually important.”

In fact, this foundational work is critical for gathering, linking, curating, and harmonizing the data (which come from more than two dozen different government databases). In this study, for example, satellite data for air pollution is provided in one-square-kilometer grids, whereas temperature and weather data cover areas of 32 square kilometers. And patient zip code records must be aligned with both these measures. Overcoming such hurdles so that the data sources can all talk to each other is challenging, but worthwhile, says Dominici; big-data approaches are “changing the paradigm for scientific investigation. Without the data platform, we would not have had the statistical power to run an analysis on all possible diseases” or “test many hypotheses at the same time.”

To the known effects on the cardiovascular, respiratory, and nervous systems, the team’s work has added pathologies of the blood, gut, skin, and kidney. “Identifying all of the diseases that fine-particle pollution is affecting,” Dominici continues, “will shed light on what additional experiments need to be done” to better understand the mechanisms of disease and methods for prevention.

The research demonstrates that every microgram-per-cubic-meter increase in PM2.5 within a 24-hour period has an incremental effect on human health. Even when starting from zero (perfectly clean air), each such increase of one microgram in concentration was associated with an annual increase of 614 deaths and 5,692 hospitalizations, as well as 32,314 patient-days in hospital. In the United States, such increases in pollution occur on more than 122 days a year in every geographic region. In lay terms, says Dominici, this represents “one additional hospitalization per day for every zip code for half of the year.” These data correspond to $100 million in annual inpatient and post-acute care costs, and an estimated $6.5 billion in lost value of human life. In the United States, where fine particle pollution began rising again in 2016 after a long-term decline, Environmental Protection Agency regulations specify that exposures greater than 35 micrograms of PM2.5 or less in a 24-hour period are unhealthy. (The target for annual, or long-term, limit of exposure, averaged over three years, is 12 micrograms per cubic meter.)

Dominici notes that these findings understate the economic impact of fine-particle pollution in several ways. The study captured only effects that led to hospitalization, and not prior visits to a doctor or the costs of previously prescribed medication, or costs after discharge (including readmission, outpatient, and drug costs). And it captured only fee-for-service patients, not those covered in HMOs. It didn’t capture effects on mental health, or in fact “any encounter with the healthcare system that did not lead to a billing record in the hospital.” And it did not capture data for anyone under the age of 65 (Medicare covers patients 65 and older). As a result, she says, “It is probably a very big underestimate.”

Older people may be more vulnerable to air pollution than young people with healthy immune systems, she says, but everyone is affected: “The entire body of epidemiological evidence for cardiovascular and pulmonary disease shows that these effects are present at all ages. Whether this will also be true for these new diseases, we don’t know yet.” Dominici and colleagues plan a similar study using Medicaid data (which covers patients of all ages).

Despite the study’s likely underestimate of economic impacts, the authors write that it “could provide information for assessing the cost effectiveness of air pollution interventions in other high income countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany,” among others, “where the burdens of disease, population demographics, and healthcare use are similar to those of the U.S.” Dominici adds that there is another common benefit to controlling PM2.5 that is often overlooked in discussions of air pollution: “There is a direct linkage between the sources of fine particulate matter and the sources of greenhouse gases. Most are the same.” ~Jonathan Shaw

THE SILENT SHAREHOLDERS

Passive Corporate Governance

INDEX FUNDS—the low-cost mainstay of retirement accounts and college funds—are so popular that they now hold a surprisingly large share of U.S. corporations. These passive investment vehicles purchase shares of companies so that their holdings mirror common measures of market performance, such as the S&P 500, which is weighted by market capitalization. Now, a series of papers from the Law School’s Program on Corporate Governance sounds the alarm about the ways index-fund managers are using their expanding influence—or not. Ames professor of law, economics, and finance Lucian Bebchuk, director of the program, shows through empirical analysis that index funds often vote against the financial interests of investors. And Leo Strine, Scott lecturer on law and former chief justice of the Delaware Supreme Court, says index-fund managers are not doing enough to halt corporate political spending.

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dex-fund investors, collectively cast about 25 percent of proxy votes in all S&P 500 companies (a common benchmark for large, publicly held corporations), Bebchuk says, a percentage that he and his coauthor, legal scholar Scott Hirst of Boston University, expect to increase. “If trends of the past two decades continue for another two decades, the ‘Big Three’ will grow into what we term the ‘Giant Three,’” he says, projecting that they would cast up to 40 percent of such votes by 2040.

Bebchuk notes that the late Jack Bogle, the iconic founder of The Vanguard Group, once called index funds “the best hope for corporate governance,” suggesting that their vast holdings and the generally long-term investment horizons of the people who buy them to fund goals such as retirement enable these owners of shares in index funds to play a key role in company oversight. Yet the reality, Bebchuk says, is that index funds are “excessively deferential” to corporate management, even when this conflicts with investors’ needs or harms corporate performance. For example, he and Hirst found, by analyzing data from research firm Morningstar, that index-fund managers spend relatively little time or money on stewardship activities, whether evaluating company performance or submitting shareholder proposals. By their estimates, BlackRock spends fewer than four days of employee time and less than $5,000 in stewardship costs per year for each billion-dollar investment the company holds, while State Street and Vanguard each devote fewer than two days, and less than $2,500 in stewardship costs, annually per billion-dollar holding.

Among his proposals to remedy the lack of oversight, Bebchuk suggests that index-fund companies not only pass the costs of research and other stewardship duties on to their investors, but also work together to create a shared research service to monitor companies in major indexes, with the aim of spotting those that underperform. “Index funds are under a lot of public scrutiny and they care about being viewed as good stewards,” Bebchuk notes. “We think that recognition of these problems would by itself contribute somewhat to improving matters.”

Strine, for his part, takes a broader view of the responsibilities index funds have toward their investors. He faults the Big Four investment companies (the Big Three, plus Fidelity) for operating without enough concern for the “worker investors” who rely on index funds and other mutual funds to finance college tuition and retirements. He applauds their efforts to begin paying attention to ESG issues (environmental, social, and governance concerns), but wants them to add another “E,” for “employees.”

Strine believes worker-investors are particularly affected by the Big Four’s lack of intervention focused on unchecked corporate spending for political purposes, another area of “total deference to management,” as he put it in a recent paper. He calls for all political spending by companies to be made public, and recommends a proposal first championed by Vanguard’s Bogle: that any political spending by public companies should require obtaining yes votes from 75 percent of the stockholders. Index-fund companies, he says, have the clout necessary to make such changes: “If Vanguard, BlackRock, State Street, and Fidelity voted to restrict political spending by public companies, it would happen.”

Program on Corporate Governance website: pcg.law.harvard.edu

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An Interstellar Ribbon of Clouds in the Sun’s Backyard An unprecedented new finding retraces the map of our galaxy.

New England’s Forest Primeval Before Europeans arrived in New England, local ecology was driven by climate shifts, not by human interventions.
"WANTONISM" AND THE RULE OF LAW

Legitimate Leadership?

What makes a government legitimate? Adams professor of political leadership and democratic values Arthur I. Applbaum believes that legitimacy entails “genuinely having the moral right to rule.” By this right, he explains, governments impose laws and their consequences on citizens and derive immunity from foreign intervention.

The key question is how this right comes about. Americans, Applbaum explains in his recently published book, Legitimacy: The Right to Rule in a Wanton World, tend to discuss legitimacy in procedural terms: if a government comes to power through certain correct steps, such as free elections, it must be legitimate. He ties this notion to what he calls Americans’ “folk theory” of government by consent, whereby legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed.

Applbaum identifies myriad problems with this idea. Most obviously, most people never explicitly consent to be governed. Theories that place initial consent in some earlier moment of societal founding neglect the reality that, in his words, “all foundings are forced,” often enacted against a backdrop of lawlessness. Even if this issue were resolved, the folk theory would run into a different kind of problem: it fails to consider governments that act illegitimately after coming to power through proper means.

By Applbaum’s account, legitimacy depends not only on how power is gained, but also on how it is used. A government, he offers, rules legitimately only if it counts each governed individual as part of itself, and only if its rule furthers each individual’s freedom in the long run. Citizens thus govern themselves by choosing their leaders, who are trusted to determine “the substance of policy and law” to advance their citizens’ freedom, though not necessarily according to those citizens’ wishes.

This conception of legitimacy leads him to several revisionist views. Applbaum believes, for example, that U.S. elections are insufficiently egalitarian, with too many obstacles to voting. He condemns campaign promises, which commit the winning candidates to neglect responsible governance (taking new circumstances into account, for example) in favor of fealty to previous pledges. He rejects limitations on individuals’ spending to promote their own political views, but supports limits on direct, monetary contributions to candidates as likely sources of corruption. He fully embraces civil disobedience, arguing that his view allows—even encourages—citizens to employ this form of protest to move their society closer to the ideal of legitimacy.

He also offers several examples of how governments can fall short of legitimacy. In one scenario, a monarch rules in absolute wisdom, preserving freedom for her subjects in all domains but the political; still, she is illegitimate because her subjects have no say in...
who rules them. Another government lacks legitimacy because it disregards individual freedom: majority vote alone determines its laws, including one declaring that any person may be sacrificed for organs to save 15 others. In a third society, where laws are chosen by random selection from citizen proposals, tyranny reigns because its citizens are governed not by themselves, but by chance.

Applbaum calls this third failure wantonism. Borrowing an image from Porter professor of philosophy Christine M. Korsgaard, he likens wantons, whether individuals or governments, to bags full of cats: they may appear to move as single entities, but have neither reason nor discernible mechanisms of cause and effect. Elected leaders who govern by impulse fall in this category, leaving no room for “practices of reason-giving that are public, transparent, and subject to criticism.” As he writes, “Rulers that cannot govern themselves cannot legitimately govern others.”

Applbaum views this wantonism as “the greatest threat to the legitimacy of contemporary democracies,” as evidenced by the Trump administration’s fumblings and the British Parliament’s failure to strike a clear course through Brexit. Still, he emphasized in an interview that “the book is not about Trump,” but grew from his early writing on structures of authority within professions such as law and business, taking shape after Bush v. Gore launched discussions of “legitimacy” in 2000.

Applbaum, who is based in the Harvard Kennedy School, acknowledges nevertheless that the book feels apropos to the present moment. “One of the heartbreaking things about our current politics,” he said, “is that the president thinks he can demand whatever he wants because he was elected, notwithstanding existing laws and regulations. What the White House calls the ‘deep state,’ I call ‘rule of law.’” He did not classify President Trump as a wanton explicitly, but did note that even governments led by wantons can maintain legitimacy through checks and balances that limit the wanton individual’s damage. “In a constitutional order,” Applbaum insisted, “there are brakes that are put on wantonism.”

Those stopgaps, he suggested, could be improved by a better understanding of legitimacy. Institutions such as judicial review, counter-majoritarian protections, and even a culture of reason and collegiality bolster legitimate governance. If some of these practices appear weakened in the current moment, Applbaum insisted, “We’ve done better in the past.” Avoiding the dangers of wantonism—and tyranny in general—requires doing better again. Leaders, in this view, should aspire not only to advance liberty, but also to provide transparency and accountable reason-giving for their actions. The public should demand no less. “You become self-governing,” he argued, “by acting as if you already are.”

ARTHUR APPLBAUM WEBSITE: www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty/arthur-applbaum

FRONTIERS...

A Disruptor, Decoded

A chemical plasticizer, produced by the millions of tons annually for use in clothing, shampoo, carpets, adhesives, printing inks, and even makeup, has long been linked to birth defects and male infertility. Now a team of researchers led by Harvard Medical School professor of genetics Monica Colaiácovo has shown why. Diethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP)—which softens plastics—disrupts the production of eggs and sperm, causes changes in chromosome structure, and alters early embryogenesis in C. elegans. (The team used female roundworms to study these effects because their molecular processes of reproduction are largely conserved in mammals.) DEHP, they found, causes breaks in DNA, and then impairs natural processes of repair. Federal and state regulations already limit the amount of DEHP and other phthalates in drinking water, food packaging, and children’s toys, but even small amounts, including levels recently measured in U.S. and Dutch women, can harm DNA involved in reproduction—and exposure can occur through inhalation, ingestion, or absorption through the skin.

The Two Faces of Sugar

All sugars are not alike. High levels of fructose, consumed in conjunction with a high-fat diet (HFD), inhibit the liver’s ability to burn fat, researchers at the Joslin Diabetes Center write in Cell Metabolism. Professor of medicine C. Ronald Kahn, chief academic officer at Joslin and senior author, found that in rats on an HFD, those fed water sweetened with fructose developed smaller liver mitochondria (the cells’ energy-producing organelles), and were less able to eliminate small and damaged mitochondria. Their livers therefore had a diminished ability to oxidize fat, and increasingly synthesized and stored it instead. Glucose had the opposite effect, improving overall metabolism. Said Kahn, consuming fructose “is almost like adding more fat to the diet.”
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www.choate.edu/summer
16B Extracurriculars
Events on and off campus in March and April

16F “Under the Skin”
Exploring art, science, and nature at the Bruce Museum

16H Emily Dickinson
Tours of her Amherst home shed light on the elusive poet

16J Atwood’s Tavern
A friendly bar plus restaurant spotlights bluegrass music

16N The 76th Annual New England Folk Festival
More than 200 dance and music sessions enliven traditions from around the world

16S Authentic Eats
Gustazo Cuban Kitchen & Bar, in Cambridge
Extracurriculars
Events on and off campus during March and April

SEASONAL
John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum
jfklibrary.org
The Boston institution celebrates Saint Patrick’s Day with stories of Irish immigrants told through music, poems, and humor. Featuring the sounds of mother-and-son traditional-music duo the Celtic Bells. (March 14)

The 11th Annual Ciclismo Classico Bike Travel Film Festival in Comedy
ciclismoclassico.com
A wide range of filmmakers and bike enthusiasts highlight the art and joy of pedaling adventures—along with the cause of cycling. Regent Theatre, Arlington, Massachusetts. (March 19)

Igloos at the Winter Pop-up Bar
outlookkitchenandbar.com
The rooftop lounge at the Seaport’s Envoy Hotel offers drinks, snacks, and panoramic views from the warmth of lit plastic igloo structures. (Through March 28)

Arts First Festival
ofa.fas.harvard.edu
The annual arts celebration in and around Harvard Square features more than a hundred live performances of dance, theater, and music, along with art exhibits and hands-on activities for all ages. (April 30-May 3)

THEATER
American Repertory Theater
americanrepertorytheater.org
In New York Values, performance artist Penny Arcade pays tribute to anyone living on the margins of “an increasingly entrenched, fortified, and well-financed mainstream society.” With musical collaborator Steve Zehentner. Oberon. (March 14)

The live vintage-rock concert and theatrical event Macbeth in Stride traces the treacherous arc of Shakespeare’s leading lady, delving into “the underbelly of female ambition.” Created and performed by Whitney White. Oberon. (April 23-May 10)

Lowell House Opera
boxoffice.harvard.edu
The professionally led company-in-residence stages an adaptation of a Stephen Sondheim classic, the delightfully frightening modern musical Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street. Lowell House Dining Hall. (March 27-April 4)

Lyric Stage Company
lyricstage.com
Fabulation Or, The Re-Education of Undine, by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage, examines the journey toward downfall of a successful African-American publicist and her forced return to the Brooklyn housing projects of her youth. (April 3-May 3)

FILM
Harvard Film Archive
harvardfilmarchive.org
The series A World Viewed: Celebrating Stanley Cavell’s Life in Film begins with screenings—among them Chantal Akerman’s La Captive, Kenji Mizoguchi’s Ugetsu, Jean-Luc Godard’s Two or Three Things I Know About Her, and George Cukor’s Rich

Spotlight

The 2020 Elson Lecture—“A Creative Dialogue about Wadada Leo Smith’s Philosophical and Compositional Practice”—features the musical artist himself in conversation with musicologist Nina Eidsheim, a professor at UCLA’s Herb Alpert School of Music. Smith is an award-winning trumpeter, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and improviser, typically of avant-garde, or “free,” jazz. His Ten Freedom Summers, a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for music, features 19 works composed across decades, starting in the late 1970s, that evoke the civil-rights movement. Smith, born in Mississippi, studied ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University; he has taught, played, recorded, and created music—releasing 55 albums—for nearly his entire life. Eidsheim, with whom Smith has also performed, is the author, most recently, of The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music (Duke University Press, 2019).
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and Famous—and culminates in a two-day conference featuring Harvard and visiting scholars exploring the philosophy and work of Cavell, the influential Cabot professor of aesthetics and the general theory of value, who died in 2018. (March 13-28)

**IFFBoston**
iffboston.org

The Independent Film Festival Boston offers documentaries and narrative features, short films, and animated and experimental works not readily available elsewhere. New and established filmmakers, along with a host of regional practitioners, are featured through screenings at local cinemas. (April 22-29)

**NATURE**
Arnold Arboretum
arboretum.harvard.edu

“Greenovation: Urban Leadership on Climate Change.” Northeastern University professor of urban and public policy Joan Fitzgerald identifies effective strategies, governmental roles—and Boston’s specific challenges. Hunnewell Building. (April 9)

**MUSIC**

**International Bagpipe Conference**
boxoffice.harvard.edu

For this fifth annual gathering (and the first held in North America), the agenda kicks off with a gala concert by devoted piping practitioners from France, Spain, Greece, Austria, Ireland, and Scotland. Paine Hall. (March 13-15)

**Boston Chamber Music Society**
boxoffice.harvard.edu

The program includes works by Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, Zoltán Kodály, and Antonín Dvořák. Sanders Theatre. (March 22)

**Radcliffe Choral Society**
boxoffice.harvard.edu

The evening performance also features the Parker String Quartet. Sanders Theatre. (April 4)

**Fromm Players at Harvard**
music.fas.harvard.edu

Pianist, composer, and Rosenblatt professor of the arts Vijay Iyer curates the “Black Speculative Musicalities” symposium, with concerts featuring two faculty colleagues—bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding and composer Yvette Janine Jackson—and iconic jazz instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell. Check the website for location details. (April 3-4)
Harvard Squared
Friday
12pm – Check In
Roll up to the front drive and hand off your keys to the doorman. Spring break has officially begun!
5pm – Happy Hour
Reunite with old classmates and professors over a cocktail (or two) on the outdoor patio at Noir.
8pm – Room Service
Done socializing for the night? Enjoy Henrietta’s Table cuisine in the comfort of your own bathrobe, TV remote in hand.

Saturday
9am – Work Out
Jog along the thawing Charles River or practice yoga at Wellbridge Athletic Club.
12pm – Brunch Away
Waffles. Mimosas. Red Flannel Hash. Oh my!
6pm – Tickets Please?
Thankfully the concierge has tracked down tickets for you to this evening’s sold out A.R.T. performance.

Sunday
9am – Pamper Yourself
Forgo sleeping in for a pampering massage at Corbu Spa & Salon.
1pm – Pack Up
Step out into the porte-cochère to greet the valet. Take a deep breath of that New England springtime air. You’re rejuvenated and unstoppable.

Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra
boxoffice.harvard.edu
Celebrate the musical season with Igor Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring and Arnold Schoenberg’s Verklärte Nacht. Sanders Theatre. (April 18)

Lectures
Harvard Graduate School of Design
gsd.harvard.edu
Co-hosted by the GSD and the Harvard Paulsen School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the “Thresholds: Design and Science” conference features academics and practitioners presenting interdisciplinary methods, analyses, and techniques. Knafel Center, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. (March 27)

Mahindra Humanities Center
mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu
The Tanner Lectures on Human Values this year feature Thomas Piketty, author of the influential Capital in the Twenty-First Century, and its follow-up volume, Capital and Ideology, due out in early March. Piketty is director of studies at L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and a professor at the Paris School of Economics. Sanders Theater. (April 15 and 16)

Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study
radcliffe.harvard.edu
“Can Originalism Save Bioethics in the Age of CRISPR?” A lecture by constitutional-law and genetic-technologies scholar Osagie K. Obasogie, Haas Distinguished Chair and professor of bioethics in the joint medical program and school of public health at the University of California, Berkeley. Knafel Center. (April 20)

The Celtic Bells, at the JFK Presidential Library and Museum

Exhibitions & Events
Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology
peabody.harvard.edu
Uncovering Pacific Past: Harvard’s Early Endeavors in Oceanic Anthropology offers historical images and objects, such as carved Fijian clubs, models of outrigger canoes, and “a striking example of Samoan bark cloth.” Laureate Fellow and Australian National University archaeology professor Matthew Spriggs gives a related lecture on March 10. Geological Lecture Hall. (Opening March 7)

Resetting the Table: Food and Our Changing Tastes explores the history and science behind American eating habits. Perhaps most illustrative is the exhibit’s careful recreation of a formal dinner served to Harvard freshmen in 1910.
Harvard Squared

CURIOSITIES:

Danish Realism, and the Reality of the Flesh

Two new exhibits at the Bruce Museum, in Greenwich, Connecticut, explore Danish paintings and scientific imaging that help unveil the truth of what we can see.

At the core of “On the Edge of the World: Masterworks by Laurits Andersen Ring from SMK—the National Gallery of Denmark” (through May 24), is a heartfelt grappling with modernity. In Has It Stopped Raining? (1922), at right, an able-bodied but aged man warily surveys the grayness of the scene outside his door. At the French Windows. The Artist’s Wife, painted in 1897, not long after Ring married its subject, Sigrid Kähler, the young woman in white is surrounded by a blissful, verdant scene. And yet, as chief curator and senior researcher Peter Nørgaard Larsen points out on SMK’s website, the central tree is gnarled, out of place: “I think of [Ring’s] art,” he adds, “as liminal images, pictures that are poised on a threshold.” The artist worked at a time of major cultural change, during a transition from rural to industrial life, and his symbolic yet realist paintings also feature Danish landscapes of crisp coastlines and enchanting Nordic light, along with stirring images of men and women at work in fields and villages.

Just as penetrating, although in service to science, is “Under the Skin” (through July 19). The dozen anatomical images, like the thermal imaging of pelicans and their pouches and the cleaned, stained roosterfish specimen, at left, reveal that “nature is full of beauty, at scales great and small,” notes museum curator of science Daniel Ksepka. “While each represents a research breakthrough, these striking, and, in many cases, prize-winning images, can be considered art in their own right.”

Take the patterned microscopic structures of a 10-ton dinosaur’s bones, or the stunningly intricate CT scan of a hog-nosed snake in the midst of digesting its prey. These designs of pure nature—and those of Ring’s sensitive, evocative depictions—reveal the true fragility of universal life forms. ~N.P.B.

Harvard Art Museums
harvardartmuseums.org

“Artist Dorothea Rockburne in Conversation.” The abstract painter and Black Mountain College alumna discusses her abiding fascination with mathematics and astronomy, and its effect on her work, as well as the notion of “drawing as a form of intellectual inquiry.” She is joined by Abrams curator of drawings Joachim Homann and Bowdoin College mathematics professor Jennifer Taback. (March 11)

Johnson-Kulukundis Family Gallery, Byerly Hall
radcliffe.harvard.edu

Brown II offers works by Tomashi Jackson, a 2019 Whitney Biennial participating artist, painter, and printmaker who incorporates “archival research in the histories of law, urbanism, and social justice.” (April 14-June 27)

Harvard Ceramics Program
ofa.fas.harvard.edu/ceramics

What Was I Thinking? New Works by Shawn Panepinto offers expressive watercolors by the artist, a former longtime director of operations at the ceramics program. (April 18-June 5)

MASS MoCA
massmoca.org

The North Adams museum’s contemporary galleries offer a packed spring lineup, including Kissing Through a Curtain, which examines cross-cultural communication through works by Nasser Alzayani, Osman Khan, and Clarissa Tossin, among others. (Opens March 21) Also on tap is the second annual High Mud Comedy Festival. This year expect performances by actor-comedian John Early and other established and emerging talents, along with workshops and ad hoc opportunities for laugh-athons. (April 17-18)

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
thewadsworth.org

Savor: A Revolution in Food Culture looks at radical changes in French and European culinary culture and society between 1650 and 1789 using early cookbooks, gardening techniques, and even tableware. Includes lively programs, like the panel discussion on dining etiquette and cross-cultural customs on March 25. (Through May 25)

Museum of Fine Arts
mfa.org

Curated by teenagers (through a new museum partnership with local organizations), Black Histories, Black Futures explores works by twentieth-century artists of color, including Archibald Motley, James Van Der Zee, and Dawoud Bey. (Through June 20)

Events listings are also found at www.harvardmagazine.com/harvard2-events.
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A Mind of One’s Own

Delving into the world of Emily Dickinson
by NELL PORTER BROWN

In a small New England town, sitting at a plain wooden table, 17 3/8ths inches square, Emily Dickinson created nearly 1,800 poems that continue to entrance and mystify readers across the globe.

That table will again be on display at Harvard's Houghton Library, known for its Dickinson collection, when building renovations are completed this fall. But far more riveting is seeing its replica within the context of her intensely private domain: her bedroom at The Emily Dickinson Museum, in Amherst, Massachusetts.

The restored room, along with the parlor, library, and conservatory, is part of the guided tour that starts as a literary pilgrimage of sorts at The Homestead, where Dickinson spent most of her life. From there visitors move across a broad lawn, through old trees, to an Italianate-style home, The Evergreens, that is a virtual nineteenth-century time capsule—down to the wood stove, toilet closet, and nursery bedroom—of the way it was when Dickinson's older brother, Austin, and his wife, Susan Gilbert Dick-
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STAFF PICK: Atwood’s Tavern

Every Monday night, an infectious, foot-stomping—and free—bluegrass show goes live at Atwood’s Tavern in East Cambridge, one of the only bars in Greater Boston devoted to American roots and folk music.

“There are only two places where you can see bluegrass: at festivals and at bars like this,” veteran Boston-area banjoist Eric Royer, a regular performer at Atwood’s Mondays, told the crowd on a recent night. Royer and another local favorite, the multi-instrumentalist and singer Sean Staples, are frequent performers, but fans of the art form will also find a rotating cast of bluegrass musicians belting out classics and original songs. Newcomers are warmly welcomed: even those who know nothing of the genre can easily hum along with lyrical, crowd-pleasing tunes like “Little Liza Jane” and “Long Black Veil.”

The bar’s lineup encompasses Americana and jug bands, too—along with an eclectic mix of folk musicians. The ethereal singer-songwriter Pieta Brown and Boston-based rock/blues artist Danielle Miraglia, among others, take the stage in March and April. Some matinee and Sunday shows, like those by the wry-humored, orange-electric-guitar-wielding Matt Heaton, are geared to kids and families. These homey events lend a community, Irish-pub feel to the place.

Atwood’s is an ideal spot for a unique dinner date or a meet-up to enjoy drinks and music with friends, thanks to the extensive whiskey menu that matches its bluegrass mood, and moderately priced dishes with options for every palate. Try the Bantam Rojo, a tart cider made with sour cherries and black peppercorns, from the Somerville-based Bantam Cider Company, with the tofu tikka masala, a delicious take on the Indian dish, featuring crispy tofu and sweet potatoes. The grainy, house-made dill hummus with warm pita makes for a perfect start, while the oat and black-bean burger with guacamole is a heartier entrée option. A dusting of cornstarch makes the sweet potato fries perfectly crisp, with none of the mushy sweetness that has given the dish a bad name.

Only a handful of tables frame the stage in the rear of the small space, with additional seating along the bar and at adjacent tables. (If the early spring weather’s right, the seating on the cozy, communal-style patio fills quickly.) “A pretty loyal following of 20-ish regulars will come in every Monday,” says manager Alex Sirigu, but “a table isn’t too hard to find” by the time the music begins at 8:30. The barely elevated stage and brick and wood-paneled walls add to the feeling of intimacy. Audience members almost become participants in the performance; bartender Liam Dav-enport playfully heckles the musicians. These days, Eric Royer said, bluegrass is reaching broader, younger audiences beyond its Appalachian roots because listeners crave these small, acoustic shows: “It’s almost like a reaction to a lot of technological stuff that we’re experiencing now.”

“The beautiful thing about this music is it’s not really...designed to be put on a stage,” Staples added. “It’s designed to be an inclusive kind of music—to be in small rooms like this.”

Clockwise, from above: Sean Staples, Hazel Royer, and Eric Royer perform; the tasty tofu tikka masala; a stylish exterior; and a typical lively night at the bar from the Somerville-based Bantam Cider Company, with the tofu tikka masala, a delicious take on the Indian dish, featuring crispy tofu and sweet potatoes. The grainy, house-made dill hummus with warm pita makes for a perfect start, while the oat and black-bean burger with guacamole is a heartier entrée option. A dusting of cornstarch makes the sweet potato fries perfectly crisp, with none of the mushy sweetness that has given the dish a bad name.

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～MARINA N. BOLOTNIKOVA
and terse verse forms; those compact and concentrated little quatrains with the emphatic dashes linking and yet binding in the energy of her phrases, and it seemed to me the smallness of the desk was itself part of the form of the poetry, part of her gift."

So, it seems, are the large windows of her corner room, through which light pours throughout the day. And the wallpaper: a vivid pattern of entwined wild pink roses, now reproduced based on an excavated scrap. Much of Dickinson's poetry explores death, grief, nature, and an unearthly spirituality. She could be highly theatrical, and self-referential. Questions about her physical and mental health have long spurred speculation: was she a depressive? Bipolar? Agoraphobic? “There’s talk about her as this quiet, meek ‘spinster’ who was a recluse, and lived this sort of terrified life,” Lackey points out. But seeing the vibrancy of her restored room, and learning of her devotion, and playful writings, to a circle of family and friends, reveal that hers was “not a sort of dark and humble life. It was really bright and beautiful.”

Through her windows, Dickinson would have viewed a sweeping meadow and The Evergreens' picturesque landscape. She was a passionate amateur botanist, as a teenager collecting more than 400 specimens and pressing them into her Herbarium (also at Houghton), and a lifelong gardener. Her father built her a small conservatory on the side of the house, where she tended calla lilies, gardenias, and the delicate blooms of her own robust gardens eventually.

The museum plans to reproduce some of Dickinson's own robust gardens eventually.
Beginning your spring home search?

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Katie Malin  
katie.malin@compass.com  
781.799.5981  
@compasskatie

Insiders’ Event: PorchFest  
Every year, musicians and bands throughout Somerville come together to celebrate and utilize an underused public venue: The Porch.

Robin Repucci  
robin.repucci@compass.com  
617.388.3312  
@robinrepucci

Favorite Restaurant: Giulia  
It feels like a trattoria in Italy. Order the chicken liver crostini and pasta, or try the Chef's Table—a five-course menu at the whim of the Chef. Buon appetito!

Chris Roy  
chris.roy@compass.com  
781.801.4215  
@chris_ray_realty

Go-To Brunch Spot: Mistral  
No misses on this menu. Grab a seat at the bar, where the elegant yet relaxing scene is the perfect way to unwind after a long week. Try my personal favorites, the wild mushroom omelette with boursin cheese or the blueberry lemon poppy seed pancakes with whipped ricotta.
Weekend Routine: Fresh Pond and Sofra Cafe
Calm your mind and excite your taste buds! Get a nature fix on the paths around Fresh Pond and then head to Ana Sortun’s Sofra Cafe for scrumptious Middle Eastern pastries or lunch. You won’t be disappointed!

Robin Repucci
robin.repucci@compass.com
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Bryan Joyce and Teresa Surette
bryan.joyce@compass.com     781.727.9284
teresa.surette@compass.com  617.435.5473

Favorite Free Outdoor Activity: Minuteman Bikeway
Easily accessible from the city, this bikeway connects the vibrant downtowns of Arlington and Lexington with the Great Meadows wildlife refuge of Bedford. You can stop for breakfast, lunch, coffee, or all three on your tour de force of some of the greatest Greater Boston locales — all along a well-maintained paved path.

Melissa Baldwin
melissa.baldwin@compass.com
617.749.6006
@melissaheartshomes

Best Bakery: Elmendorf
This is my favorite café spot right now — and it’s just down the way from the newly renovated Valente Branch Library. Win-win!

Bryan Joyce and Teresa Surette
bryan.joyce@compass.com     781.727.9284
teresa.surette@compass.com  617.435.5473

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ALL IN A DAY:
The New England Folk Festival

Why not launch your day with a rousing ukulele workshop? Then waltz over to sessions on English hand-bell ringing and South African choral music before hitting a Balkan dance party.

This year’s New England Folk Festival (April 24-26 at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School) offers well over 200 dance and music events during a marathon 25 hours. The majority—like English and Scottish country dances, Italian tavern tunes, and Yiddish songs—are participatory. All ages are welcome, and no expertise is required, says Janet Yeracaris, president of the nonprofit New England Folk Festival Association.

“The main aim is to actively preserve living folk traditions and culture, bringing people together to build a shared sense of community through them.”

There are loads of lively musicians—fiddlers, banjoists, and accordionists among them. They jam together, accompany dances, and play impromptu concerts out on the lawn. Enthusiastic singers also turn out for NEFFA’s sessions on 1950s and ’60s American folk classics, Shaker songs, ballads, hymns, and much more. “People are singing all the time,” Yeracaris asserts. “Anyone can join in singalongs,” and plenty of the dance and music activities are specifically geared for beginners. (NEFFA also runs some weekend events, and its regular Thursday Contras sessions in Concord, Massachusetts, with introductory lessons before the dances.)

At the festival, it’s also possible to just watch. Among the dozens of performances are the popular Morris and rapper-sword teams. A rambunctious bunch, Yeracaris explains, they generally dance outdoors, “and heckling is encouraged.” Morris dance (below), dating to fifteenth-century England, typically features white-costumed members sporting hats, shin bells, flowers, and ribbons who perform to traditional melodies. Rapper-sword teams emerged in northeast England’s coal-pit region: five dancers in percussive shoes hold bendable “swords” at both ends and move in artful, military-tight configurations, often accompanied by fiddle and drum.

About 3,000 people attend the festival, most drawn by the large-scale contra dances (akin to square dancing) and the international folk dancing. Balkan music and dance is Yeracaris’s particular passion, but popular, too, are dances from Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and elsewhere.

NEFFA’s first festival was held in 1944—as an outgrowth of weekly square dances at the Boston YWCA, partly as a way to ease wartime duress and foster cross-cultural understanding. A fiftieth-anniversary history reports 24 dance performances, including those reflecting local and regional ethnic communities connected to Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden—many of whom still attend NEFFA today.

This year, Yeracaris will teach Bulgarian village dances and an introduction to international folk dancing. She also sings with Zdravets, a Boston-area Bulgarian band whose repertoire includes songs drawn from field recordings. The haunting polyphonic sounds exemplified by adherents of old traditions, like Trio Bulgarka, have a mesmerizing droning quality coupled with harmonic intervals unfamiliar to many Western listeners. It projects an inestimable immediacy that “hits at the heart,” Yeracaris says. “I really can’t explain that—what it is that resonates in the human ear that feels like it resonates in the human soul.”

For those who enjoy foot-stomping, familiarly rhythmic fiddle-heavy Americana music, NEFFA’s many contra-dancing sessions are the focus. The dances originated in English, Scottish, and French styles from the seventeenth century: callers lead couples in patterned movements—do-si-do, butterfly whirl, promenade, in set formations—without prescribed footwork.

Folk dancing, Yeracaris declares, is a natural, safe, and joyous form of human contact. “Getting people together to play music and dance and sing—participating, holding hands, being face-to-face—these ‘old’ traditions keep something primal alive, and connect us in powerful ways,” she says. “And this seems like an antidote to so much of what is isolating and digital about the world we live in.”

—N.P.B.
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HARVARD SQUARED

(continued from page 16K) and inland buttercups. Nature, as The Gardens of Emily Dickinson, by Judith Farr, indicates, lent vitality and endless inspiration: one-third of Dickinson's poems, and half her letters, mention her favorite flowers. Often, she records the most precious, minute observations: "A Bird, came down the Walk /He did not know I saw /He bit an Angle Worm in halves/And ate the fellow, raw./And then, he drank a Dew/From a convenient Grass /And then hopped sidewise to the Wall/To let a Beetle pass –..."*

From her perch, Dickinson could also glimpse Amherst's town center, although that vista was likely a mere backdrop to the infinitely more compelling world of her own mind. "There is a solitude of space/A solitude of sea/A solitude of Death, but these/Society shall be/Compared with that profounder site/That polar privacy/A soul admitted to itself."

Tours of The Homestead, opening for the season on February 28, also stop in the "poetry room" (likely the former bedroom of Emily's sister, Lavinia), to convey a sense of how revolutionarily different Dickinson's verses were from those of her more floridly descriptive contemporaries like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Highlighting her process (and supporting the notion that she herself sometimes created different versions of essentially the same poems) a wall exhibit depicts her line "A chilly Peace infests the Grass," showing how she'd marked the manuscript with asterisked potential replacements for "chilly"—"warning" or "lonesome"—and how they completely shift the poem's meaning. Because different people later transcribed and edited her work, it can be impossible to track the original intent (or intents).

Downstairs, another exhibit displays a copy of the only verified daguerreotype of the poet, taken when she was a teenager, and spotlights a few replicas of her handwritten poems and letters. It also tells the basic story of her life, explaining key Dickinson family members and the complex dynamics surrounding the posthumous publication of her work.

Her father, Edward, was a reserved man, prominent lawyer, and state representative; her mother, Emily Norcross Dickin-

*This Dickinson text—#359—and #1696 and #1091 below, are from R.W. Franklin, The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).
Harvard Squared

son, a talented gardener, was apparently quite aloof, at least at times, in her daughter’s eyes. For years, she suffered from a mysterious ailment, and was later bedridden from a stroke and a broken hip. Both daughters tended her (Emily’s room connected to hers by a passage).

In contrast to Dickinson's quiet life, Austin and Susan lived gregariously with their three children at The Evergreens. A girlhood friend of Emily’s, Susan was the reigning emotional, and possibly erotic, center of her life. Nothing at the museum characterizes their relationship that way, but guides do address it on the tour. “Emily’s correspondence to Susan in their late teens and early twenties was highly charged and, I think, clearly shows someone who is in love,” says museum executive director Jane Wald. “We don’t have the other side of that correspondence, so we don’t know what Susan’s frame of mind was.” (Complicating matters later, the exhibit notes, was the scandalous affair between Austin and Mabel Loomis Todd, an Amherst faculty wife, begun in 1882.)

Friends and family knew Dickinson was a poet: she saw maybe 10 poems published, and sent up to 500 to people (more than 250 to Susan alone). Yet only after Dickinson’s death from Bright’s disease in 1886 did her sister find the volume of works that today form her legacy. “Some of them were on chocolate wrappers and the backs of recipes,” Lackey says—Dickinson was a devoted baker—and 800 were neatly penned in 40 fascicles: delicate, stringed booklets that Dickinson created between 1858 and 1865.

Lavinia saw their literary value, and asked Susan Dickinson first, and then Mabel Loomis Todd, to help publicize them. Todd and prominent literary critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson, A.B. 1841, edited a batch—changing Dickinson’s signature spacing, sparseness, and punctuation, and adding titles—for publication in 1890. Todd then produced two more volumes before an acrimonious legal fight over the fate of Dickinson’s poems ensued that ultimately delayed their publication in full until 1955. Despite the liberties taken, Lackey says that, without that initial push and Higginson’s professional stature, Dickinson’s unorthodox poems “likely would not have the fame that they do today.”

At Dickinson’s request, Lavinia burned her sister’s personal papers. But, puzzlingly, despite preparing the fascicles, Dickinson never specified what to do with them. During her most creative period she had initiated a correspondence with Higginson—famously asking, in 1862: “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?”—that would last until she died. In one letter, she described herself: “I am small, like the wren, and my hair is bold, like the chestnut bur, and my eyes like the sherry in the glass that the guest leaves.” In another, she alluded to his support of her writing as saving her life. Yet she coyly danced around publication, and refused his invitation to travel to discuss it—“I do not cross my Father’s ground to any House or town”—instead inviting him to Amherst. In 1868, he came, and found her to be a plain woman dressed in white, writing later that he had never met “with any one who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her.”

As Dickinson retreated, her brother’s Tours of The Evergreens—an 1856 Italianate house—focus on Dickinson family members and on an unusual collection of period art and objects.
Your fitness resolutions may not last, but we’ve got your real estate ones covered.

	house next door became a “hot spot in mid-1800s Amherst,” Lackey notes. Austin practiced law with his father, and later became the Amherst College treasurer; Susan was known as a highly capable and intelligent woman—and a careful, valued reader of Dickinson’s poems. The couple entertained, enjoying an intellectual, “high-society life” in the bustling college town. Their art-filled home reflected European works—a replica of Antonio Canova’s sculpture of Cupid and Psyche over a marble fireplace—and paintings echoing the Hudson River School; the roughly 8,000 objects represent a relatively rare assemblage of a nineteenth-century household, Wald notes. The pieces stand intact with the vintage wallpaper, amid streaks of dust and soot, and plaster, crumbling in spots. In the room of their younger son, Gib (Emily Dickinson’s much-loved nephew), who died of typhoid fever as a child, his jacket is neatly folded across the little bed. Their daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, kept the house, living among the relics, until she died in 1943. Her heirs eventually established a trust to ensure its preservation and use as a “cultural facility.” The Homestead and The Evergreens were merged to form The Emily Dickinson Museum in 2003.

Yet even as The Evergreens and family tales contextualize Dickinson’s art and life, she herself can never be fully known—just as her writings are continually reread to reveal new facets. As a late poem implies, her own “room,” her universe—or maybe anyone’s interiority—was all there is to know.

Sweet hours have perished here,
This is a mighty room -
Within its precincts hopes have played,
Now shadows in the tomb.

On a last tantalizing note, that poem’s original manuscript is now lost. The text above comes from a handwritten transcription by Mabel Loomis Todd, as she prepared to publish it in her 1896 Dickinson volume. At some point, she lined out the transcribed word “timid,” writing “mighty” in blue pencil instead, and changed the transcribed word “fallow” to “shadows.” Todd’s version is widely quoted, although Dickinson scholar R.W. Franklin chose timid and fallow for his seminal 1998 text. But—what was Dickinson’s intent? Was the room “mighty” or “timid”? Were her hopes “shadows,” or the more unfulfilled “fallow”? By guarding her writings and failing to publish them while alive, Dickinson reserved the right “To own the Art within the Soul,” as she once put it. Forever.
A Night at Gustazo

Modern delights of Cuban cuisine, in Cambridge
by NELL PORTER BROWN

Since 2011, Gustazo Cuban Kitchen & Bar has grown from a homey storefront in Belmont, serving a handful of authentic specials, to two locations—in Cambridge and a new Moody Street, Waltham site—that can seat more than 500 diners a night.

Such leaps are risky for any restaurateur and maybe more so for those serving ethnic food that requires fresh non-local ingredients, nuanced spicing, and long, slow cooking times. Jazzing up ropa vieja—shredded flank steak in a refined tomato sauce—by dumping in paprika at the last second doesn't work. Carelessly handled, empanadas become tasteless wads of dough. Happily, none of this occurs at Gustazo, where Cuban-born owners Patricia Estorino and Adolfo de la Vega have scaled up without tapping out.

The Cambridge Gustazo opened last year. Its huge Porter Square space sports wood-heavy décor and rusty red walls lit with wrought-iron fixtures and brightened by art-house movie posters.

For a more festive evening, sit near, or at, the bar, with its rows of sparkling spirits and Spanish-style tiles. Beers, ciders, and wines from around the globe are all fine—but splurge for an elegant cocktail: a classic gimlet or margarita (get the optional guanábana), or the Rumba Rye, with hints of walnut and chocolate. A radiant wall sculpture depicts the island, and an eclectic salsa soundtrack puts one in the mood for intimate club-dancing.

Diners seeking less buzz may prefer tables across the room; the menu's vibrant tapas and entrées compensate. The modern, inventive options ultimately stay true to Cuba's Spanish, African, and Caribbean culinary heritage. Roasted cauliflower with pistachios ($13) is flecked with manchego—Spanish sheep's milk cheese—and plump lamb chops are paired with piquant romesco ($15). Caribbean maduros (fried sweet plantains) and tostones (flattened, fried savory plantains) often appear on the side—but don't miss the truffled yuca fries, thick and crunchy logs dipped in cilantro aioli ($9).

Vaca frita tacos ($14) replace tortillas with soft, slightly sweet tostones that enfold juicy strips of flank steak and chunks of avocado in a limey dressing laced with cilantro. Hot croquettes the size of golf balls are filled with a mash of Serrano ham and chicken ($7).

Do order the ensalada verde ($14). Whole grilled Little Gem lettuce leaves are dotted with fried ham and calabaza (squash); feta and pepitas add cream and crunch, and grilled tomatoes acidity. More decadent is the jibarito ($10): a spongy mélange of pork, smoked ham, gruyere, and pickles layered on tostones with a slather of mustard.

Shellfish and calamari in the large-plate mariscada ($32) swim in a velvety coconut-milk and lobster sauce. Or try the traditional arroz con pollo ($24), laced with saffron and topped with a poached egg. Market-priced ceviche comes piled in a seashell, amid raw onions, radish, and a sprinkling of pomegranate seeds.

Finish with a not-too-sweet tres leches cake with fresh fruit and crispy meringue ($10) or the dreamy dulce de leche-filled crépes with vanilla ice cream ($8).

In all, an evening out at Gustazo is, as the name declares, a great pleasure.
HOME SWEETER HOME: Increase Your Property Value

Don’t curb your enthusiasm: Spring is the ideal time to maximize your home’s value, whether by sprucing up your surroundings with a small renovation or leveraging equity for bigger changes. Real-estate, organization, and mortgage experts in and around Cambridge offer helpful ideas on how to make “home sweet home” even sweeter.

For big-picture savings, consider making your home more energy efficient, says Joseph Kennard, M.Arch. ’92, of Boston’s Kennard Architects. “Low energy consumption is the new curb appeal,” he says. “Valuation in this market is going to increase exponentially as buyers and sellers become more informed.” Kennard suggests first visiting masssave.com for a no-cost energy assessment. Some priorities: Ensure all sides of your home are properly insulated and that your mechanical equipment is contained within a conditioned space (not in a cold basement or hot attic); stop air leakage from around windows, doors, electrical outlets, and inefficient ventilation systems; select triple-glazed windows for maximum insulation (and reduced noise); and consider purchasing renewable electric power through your utility company.

Looking to sell? Compass, with real estate offices throughout the Cambridge area, offers a customized concierge program to make the process nearly painless. “We help maximize the odds of a quicker sale and an improved sale price, especially helpful in a real-estate market that’s slowing down,” says Michael Coscetta ’03, chief sales and strategy officer. The program fronts the cost of home-improvement services (de-cluttering, staging, flooring, painting, and more) to make your abode appear move-in ready; pay for services once it sells.

Also consider toning down potentially polarizing designs. Pauline Donnelly, principal at Boston real-estate agency Donnelly + Co., suggests staying neutral to appeal to broad tastes. “Keep things classic: Even though you might love the idea of bright red kitchen cabinets, they don’t have universal appeal,” she says.

Peter Fickeisen of Luxury Mortgage Corporation, with offices outside Boston, notes that certain targeted renovations help boost value. “Updates that add equity are kitchens, baths, and adding square footage—finishing a basement or adding a bedroom,” he says. “Build value in your home by updating it on your schedule and pace.”

In this market, “A home-equity loan can be a great way to fund a renovation. The mortgage rates are very low at the moment, and it’s worth exploring a refinance with the option of taking some equity from your home to make upgrades,” Donnelly adds.

Finally, if a major renovation isn’t in the cards and you need to sell, fear not. “Tackle the more minor items that buyers will appreciate,” urges home organizer Sarah Solomon of Moving Simply, which works with sellers in and around Boston. “Re-caulk the tub or shower. Put new handles or knobs on the cabinets. Upgrade the faucet or shower head. Paint the trim; patch up that spot on the wall where a child threw a ball or where the dog scratched the door. Replace the lightbulbs that are out or put in a new light fixture altogether. Even though they may seem like little things, other people will notice.”

〜 KARA BASKIN
Reworking the Workplace

American labor law is broken, argues a report released in late January by Clean Slate for Worker Power, a project of Harvard Law School's Labor and Worklife Program. This is not just an academic problem, the report argues: in an era of flat wages and extreme inequality, fixing labor law is key to correcting the imbalance of power between the wealthy and everyone else.

By most estimates, American workers' wages have fallen far behind productivity growth since the 1970s, while a small socioeconomic cohort has captured an ever-increasing share of the nation's income growth. During the same period, union membership has fallen to a low of just over 10 percent of the workforce, as the composition of employment itself has changed (more service jobs, fewer unionized manufacturing ones), and policies have changed as well (for example, more states have passed "right-to-work" laws that ban unions from requiring workers whom they represent in collective bargaining to pay dues). Anti-union policies have made it difficult for employees in industries that now make up most of the working-class labor force—including retail, restaurant, and healthcare jobs—to organize. Starting a union requires "herculean battles against nearly impossible odds," the report states, making the right to unionize guaranteed to U.S. workers by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) all but meaningless.

The ambitious, 100-plus page report lays out an agenda for a revitalized labor law for
the twenty-first century. It would make it easier for workers to organize (by, for example, banning right-to-work laws), to have a voice in corporate decisions that affect them, and to participate in electoral politics. At bottom, the project aims “to shift power from corporations to workers,” said Sharon Block, executive director of the Labor and Worklife Program, at the project’s launch.

Clean Slate engaged from more than 70 activists, workers, union leaders, lawyers, professors, and others. The report provides a policy blueprint for those working to rebuild the labor movement; along with it, the project has launched a grant program to support projects that pilot, implement, or advance its recommendations, for up to $50,000 each.

Clean Slate begins with the premise that the United States faces two linked crises: economic and political. “It would take an Amazon worker about 4 million years working full-time to earn what Jeff Bezos now has,” said Kestnbaum professor of labor and industry Benjamin Sachs, the co-leader with Block of Clean Slate. “This vast disparity in material wealth means that millions of American families struggle just to barely get by.”

And “This economic inequality translates seamlessly into political inequality,” he continued. “Put simply, when it comes to policy, our government pays no attention to what the poor and middle class want, listening only to the wealthiest....Today in America, the majority does not rule.

“This project is not based on nostalgia for the past,” Sachs added. Even though the labor movement was more powerful in the twentieth century than it is today, especially during the decades after the NLRA became law, he and Block stressed that the labor laws of yesterday were designed to exclude vast swaths of the workforce. The NLRA entirely excludes domestic and agricultural workers, for example—two sectors then dominated by women, people of color, and immigrants.

Before anything else, Sachs said, labor law needs to be expanded to include everyone currently written out of it, including farm and domestic workers, as well as workers who are undocumented, disabled, or incarcerated. The report also stresses employers’ widespread use of independent contractors to skirt labor laws.

“A true independent contractor is someone who runs her own separate business, sets her own rates, builds a customer base, and takes on the risk of business failure,” said Sarita Gupta of the Ford Foundation, one of Clean Slate’s funders. But corporations have applied independent-contractor status to millions of workers who don’t meet this definition: ride-share-app drivers, janitors, nannies, construction workers, and others. The report advocates making it much harder to classify workers as independent contractors, effectively assuming that all workers are employees unless the company can prove otherwise.

The report would make it significantly easier to organize traditional unions or other forms of representation, like works councils or workplace monitors. Its host of recommendations include significantly increasing penalties on employers that try to intervene in organizing; making strikers eligible for unemployment insurance; and creating “digital picket lines” to tell online shoppers if they’re buying from a company whose workers are on strike.

Clean Slate also recommends making it easier for workers to participate in U.S. civic life by mandating nationwide same-day voter registration, early voting, and voting by mail—as well as giving them paid time off to vote.

Workers should have a voice not just in the issues that unions traditionally bargain over, like wages and benefits, the report argues, but also in larger corporate decisions that affect them. It proposes giving workers 40 percent representation on corporate boards, and requiring a board supermajority to approve decisions that most affect employees’ lives. This “co-determination” structure, as Ruben Garcia, professor of law at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas put it, would “change the presumption of shareholder primacy...toward a presumption toward workers themselves.”

Another major reform advocated by Clean Slate is a system of sectoral bargaining, similar to that in many European countries: workers would bargain not just with their employers, but also at the industry level. Such systems provide collective bargaining to more workers and help remove the incentive for individual employers to fight unionization if they think it will put them at a disadvantage relative to their competitors. It also makes it easier for people like nannies and freelancers, who aren’t employed in a traditional workplace, to organize.

Such a system would address the proliferation of “fissured” workplaces in the economy, where employers farm out their work to independent contractors to avoid labor laws, said Larry Cohen, the labor chair for Senator Bernie Sanders’s organization Our Revolution.

Work on Clean Slate began after Block, formerly head of the policy office at the U.S. Department of Labor during the Obama administration, arrived at Harvard Law School in 2016. She felt that real progress had been made on labor issues during her service in Washington, but says that with the election of Donald Trump, “We ended up with a president and an administration that does not care about the rights and dignity of workers.

“Rather than fold, give up the fight, or lose focus,” she continued, “I and others...gained clarity. We realized that there was still a hunger among many to make sure that labor laws work in the way intended, to the benefit of the people doing the work.” To that end, Clean Slate has advanced an alternative vision for debate now and in the years ahead. Read additional details at harvardmag.com/labor-law-20.

---MARINA N. BOLOTNIKova
“THIS IS A STORY about kids succeeding, about the success of an experiment,” says Cabot professor of American literature Elisa New, describing the online poetry course she taught last fall to an unusual set of enrollees: eleventh- and twelfth-graders from more than two dozen Title I high schools (serving mainly low-income students) across the country. At the end of the semester, roughly 250 students came away with four credits from the Harvard Extension School and a wider sense, New suggests, of what other possibilities might lie before them.

The 12-week course was titled “Poetry in America: The City from Whitman to Hip Hop.” Lesson by lesson, it walked students through poetic expressions of the ever-changing American metropolis: Walt Whitman’s New York (and Langston Hughes’s, Maya Angelou’s, and Frank O’Hara’s), Robert Hayden’s Detroit, Gwendolyn Brooks’s Chicago, Kendrick Lamar’s Compton, California.

Most weeks’ readings revolved around broad themes: work, protest, leisure, the Great Migration, urban adolescence and coming of age. In a video introducing students to a unit focused on the poetry of immigration, New highlighted Emma Lazarus’s sonnet “The New Colossus,” engraved on the Statue of Liberty. It is a cultural touchstone that “begins to unpack what we mean by mobility”—both literal and symbolic—she said, but also a poem that puts literary devices like rhyme, allusion, and formal rhetoric to powerful use. At the end of the six-minute video, New concludes, “From navigating its sonnet form to understanding its place in its own historical moment, and ours, you can be—we all can be—changed by this poem.”

The course is one of several online classes developed as a part of Poetry in America, a public-television series and multimedia digital initiative created and directed by New. But it is also a class that has been building since 2013, when New first starting offering poetry instruction online through HarvardX and discovered that almost half the people signing up were schoolteachers—and that they were hungry for more. She came to realize how “thin” humanities content was in K-12 classrooms, where teachers were tasked with presenting literature that of-
Elisa New explains “that talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not.”

“Kids of this age need support, and for many of them, it’s not possible to get it at home,” New explains. “Some of the students were living in homeless shelters; some were living in foster homes.” Others had to care for younger siblings while their parents worked multiple jobs. The students also had regular videoconferences with Harvard teaching fellows, who graded all their work and helped coach them through the writing assignments. And the high-schoolers took part in online conversations with classmates at their own schools—and with fellow students taking the course across the country.

Preliminary findings show that of the 363 who first logged on to the course, 81 percent finished. That by itself is remarkable: the typical retention rate for online courses ranges between 5 and 15 percent, and an MIT study from 2019 found a 96 percent dropout rate over five years for online courses offered by MIT and Harvard. Of the 277 who finished New’s course, 63 percent received either an A or a B; 10 percent failed. One surprise, though, Cornfeld says: in follow-up surveys, students with the lowest grades were equally likely to report that the class helped prepare them for college, and some who failed have expressed interest in trying again.

Not everything went smoothly. New describes a blizzard of administrative problems: “Just any number of barriers and impediments to docking these two types of...
institutions together,” she says. “You have to have a certain kind of infrastructure to do group enrollment of high-school kids,” and Harvard doesn’t yet have it. She says about 100 students originally slated to be in the course were unable to take part, mostly because of scheduling or system login issues.

Money is another consideration. Extension School courses usually cost $1,800 per term, but New says she learned early on in designing curricula for wider public audiences that, “If you want to be making change in American education...outside of elite environments, you have to offer credit, and you have to make it affordable.” She has long pushed for reduced rates for the teachers and high-schoolers in her classes, and Harvard charged school systems only $250 per student to enroll last semester (the Education Equity Lab helped raise money to close the gap for schools that couldn’t afford to pay). Cornfeld notes that “Harvard has long demonstrated that universities can both do good and do well.”

This spring, New is offering her course again, to students in the same schools—but this time through Arizona State University, while Harvard steps back to assess last fall’s pilot project and determine whether to proceed with similar courses. (New and Cornfeld serve on the task force weighing this question.) In the meantime, New is immensely pleased. “We proved that what Larry Bacow says is true, that talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not,” she says. Her purpose is to change that. “We taught many very, very talented students who absolutely deserve to thrive in a college course.”

—LYNIALYE GIBSON

Upending U.S. Politics

Among the many ways U.S. politics has been transformed in the past decade, the rise of nationwide citizens’ activist groups devoted to resisting a president—the Tea Party on the right, and Indivisible on the left—has been especially remarkable. These groups reflect both the renewed grass-roots energy animating civic-minded Americans, and the severe polarization that now frames seemingly every dimension of national politics. A new book released this January, edited by Thomas professor of government and sociology Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo ’18, presents fresh, scholarly essays exploring these movements.

Upending American Politics: Polarizing Parties, Ideological Elites, and Citizen Activists from the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance (Oxford University Press) is itself from the grass roots, in a sense: it includes work by five recent undergraduate thesis writers advised by Skocpol, one current undergraduate, and three current Harvard graduate students. Their contributions reflect an impressive breadth of fieldwork in politically important states. The book began to come together last March, Tervo explained in an interview, just after the class of 2019 completed their theses: “Theda was looking around and I was looking around, realizing that there had been a lot of interesting and important research done that added up to a coherent story of American politics over the last decade.” Much of that story is about the role of extra-party organizations—groups other than the two major political parties—in shaping policy and re-ordering the American political landscape. These developments, and particularly the election of President Donald Trump in 2016, “have flummoxed many observers of American politics, including political scientists and sociologists,” Skocpol and Tervo write. “Established perspectives such as median voter theory—the idea that parties will lean to the middle and avoid polarizing extremes—are misleading at best when applied to recent U.S. developments.”

“Most political scientists who study U.S. politics rely these days on national social surveys or election data or data about votes in Congress,” Skocpol wrote in an email. “We use all those kinds of information, but are also reviving some field and interview methods of the kinds all social scientists used to use—go out and look and talk to people. I learned in my Tea Party work a few years ago that there is no substitute for that when you are trying to understand breaking, new developments” (see “Tea Party Passions,” January-February 2012, page 8). Tervo’s chapter, for example, based on her senior thesis on her home state, North Carolina, draws on field interviews she conducted with local conservative and progressive activists. “The craft brewery was where the local Indivisible group met,” she notes, “and the Olive Garden and the IHOP are where the local Tea Party groups met.”

Tervo, her classmate Sally Marsh, and three members of the class of 2019—Alexandra Caffrey, Maximilian Frank, and Sophia Young—adapted their senior theses for chapters in Upending American Politics. Within weeks of turning in their theses, the 2019 graduates had to edit their texts down to short, jargon-free chapters accessible to non-specialist readers. (“That’s very, very impressive to me,” Tervo says. “I know when I submitted my thesis, I wanted to wash my hands of it.”)

For Caffrey, “The combination of a bunch of senior theses and people who are younger academics or not academics at all...getting to write about the current political era with a renowned political scientist like Professor Skocpol is a really cool, different thing. I’m really excited to see what [the book] does.” Skocpol says it’s “not usual for undergraduate work to be published this way, but I was delighted we could pull this off in just a few months, to get this timely work out for this year’s pivotal U.S. election season...We want all educated citizens, policymakers, students, and political analysts trying to make sense of current U.S. politics to read our work and use it as they can.”

Tervo’s contribution examines how the Republican-dominated legislature there moved far to the right, enacting policies that are unpopular with most residents, like refusing federal funds to expand Medicaid. She first became interested in these
questions when, as a high-school student in Wilmington, she watched the passage of highly contentious policies like an extensive 2013 voter ID law. “I remember a general sense of bewilderment among a lot of people about how these policies were happening, what was driving them, why now?” she says.

To answer these questions, Tervo, now a research coordinator in Harvard’s government department, looked at how strong conservative organizational networks linked grass-roots activists, like members of the Tea Party that emerged in 2009 in opposition to Barack Obama’s presidency, with elite right-wing institutions like the Koch brothers backed Americans for Prosperity-North Carolina (AFP-NC). These connections, she writes, “helped them jointly fashion a policy pipeline that capitalizes on each organization’s unique strengths.” For example, she continues:

If the Locke Foundation produces a new report on wasteful government spending, AFP-NC holds a rally about this issue at the General Assembly and encourages activists to contact lawmakers in support of a bill that reduces spending. In turn, Civitas sponsors a poll surveying the attitudes of North Carolinians about “wasteful government spending,” holds a Raleigh luncheon where lawmakers are invited to learn the results, and proceeds to attack Democrat-enacted legislation for embodying such spending.

Conservative political activism in North Carolina has had the seemingly paradoxical effect of energizing participation in democracy while producing policies that are unpopular with most residents. “It’s very easy to assume that whatever’s most popular is going to happen or be protected or be passed into law, but that’s not actually how American politics works and American democracy works,” she says. “If you are an organized, active minority, you’re going to be able to have sway in ways that maybe a disorganized general majority will not.... An interesting opportunity for all of us is to think about how those forces are in tension, and maybe think more critically about what structures would look like that are enhancing of a little-D democratic system and would better represent the voices of a lot of people.”

Caffrey’s chapter, “From Obama Victories to a GOP Edge in Florida,” tells a story about that state that is in some ways similar to Tervo’s on North Carolina. After candidate Obama’s field organizing across Florida in 2008 and 2012 demonstrated the potential of grass-roots campaigning, she writes, “Florida Republicans have become the ‘Obama-ites’ in their campaign strategy...they have literally read the Obama organizing textbook and implemented a systemic strategy that invests in sustained grass-roots organizing. In the same period, Florida Democrats have allowed their own grass-roots organizing system to fall into disarray.” Accordingly, Florida resisted the blue wave that swept much of the country at 2018’s midterm elections, despite some pockets of effective Democratic organizing. (Caffrey now works for former Florida gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum’s organization, Forward Florida Action, which aims to build progressive organizing infrastructure there.)

The research throughout Upending American Politics strives to be objective and nonpartisan, but Skocpol and Tervo are also clear about what they see as the stakes of this year’s presidential election. “Will American voters in 2020 and beyond reconfirm the Trump-GOP’s fusion of white ethnic defensive-ness with ultra-free-market governance?” they ask in conclusion. “Or will they repudiate that synthesis and redirect the country toward a future where governments at all levels further social inclusion and greater economic equality?” The answer, the book suggests, depends on how proficient progressives are at organizing.
Yesterday’s News
From the pages of the Harvard Alumni Bulletin and Harvard Magazine

1930 The Harvard Engineering Society enjoys an illustrated address on the building and running of the first vehicular tunnel under the Hudson River from Manhattan to New Jersey: the two-year-old Holland Tunnel, named for its first chief engineer, Clifford M. Holland ’05, S.B. ’06.

1940 The editors encourage readers to help the University Archives by clipping news of Harvard men, particularly from papers outside the Boston and New York areas: “the more obscure the man and the paper, the more useful the clipping.”

1945 Among the 189 degrees awarded at the close of winter term is the first posthumous A.B. for a student killed in action during the current war: Pfc. William Sco-ville Moore Jr., who died on a battlefield in France on Armistice Day 1944.

1955 Signs of spring: the Cambridge police begin a crackdown on the latest undergraduate vehicular craze—second-hand hearses. Local citizens, reports a spokesman, find them “depressing.”

1970 Despite limited publicity, note the editors, some 150 people turned up for the first meeting of the Harvard University Ecology Coalition in February. The loose union of campus groups “worrying...about the decline of our environment” made plans for teach-ins and other activities scheduled for April 21 and 22.

1995 Inaugurating its new business section, The New York Times reports publishers’ fevered efforts to find a new college-level introductory economics textbook, noting that Harvard’s N. Gregory Mankiw has received a $1.4-million advance for his nearly finished volume.

2005 The Corporation announces the divestment of stock holdings in Petro-China (which sought drilling rights in Sudan during the brutal war in Darfur) on the recommendation of its Committee on Shareholder Responsibility. Seniors Matthew Mahan and Brandon Terry had launched a campaign urging classmates to put their senior gift into an escrow account unless divestment occurred.

News Briefs

University Professor Arrested
FRIEDMAN University Professor Charles M. Lieber—a much-honored leader in nanoscale science and bio-compatible electronics, and chair of the department of chemistry and chemical biology—was arrested on January 28, charged with misleading investigators from the Department of Defense about his work for a Chinese government-sponsored program designed to identify and support leading researchers in China and abroad. The U.S. government, which is investigating China’s efforts to gain access to technical and scientific expertise by legal and extralegal means, has characterized the program as a threat to national security. An affidavit accompanying the criminal complaint also accused Lieber of making false statements to the National Institutes of Health (a major funder of his research)—and to Harvard—about his connections to the Thousand Talents program and the Wuhan University of Technology.

A brief statement by the University noted: “The charges brought by the U.S. government...are extremely serious. Harvard is cooperating with federal authorities, including the National Institutes of Health, and is conducting its own review of the alleged misconduct. Professor Lieber has been placed on indefinite administrative leave.” Those on such leaves typically are denied access to campus and separated from Harvard teaching and research.

During last November’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences meeting, dean of science Christopher Stubbs addressed colleagues on the subjects of federal concerns about “academic espionage” involving the transfer of unclassified information overseas, and of increased scrutiny by sponsoring federal agencies regarding faculty members’ commitments and conflicts of interest. He focused particularly
Coming to Terms with Slavery

As this and other universities probe their founders’ and early supporters’ connections to slavery (see harvardmag.com/slavery-initiative-19 for details of Harvard’s $5-million initiative on “the legacy of slavery”), the University of Cincinnati announced in December that it would remove the name of slave owner Charles McMicken from its College of Arts and Sciences, its largest school. And Harvard Law School dean John F. Manning has appointed a “Shield Working Group,” led by Warren professor of American legal history and professor of history Annette Gordon-Reed, to devise a new school shield, following the 2016 retirement of the prior device, which was based on the family crest of Isaac Royall Jr., an eighteenth-century benefactor whose fortune derived from slave labor. The task force includes representatives from the school’s faculty, staff, student body, and alumni. Harvard is an institutional member of the Universities Studying Slavery consortium organized by the University of Virginia (slaveryvirginia.edu).

On Other Campuses

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, founding supporter of the MIT-Harvard Broad Institute (for genomics research), has made a $100-million gift to the Yale School of Organization and Management to train future K-12 education leaders, provide advanced training for current school-system executives, and underwrite research on public-education leadership....Separately, Yale renewed its existing $50-million program to augment and diversify its faculty with a new $85-million, five-year commitment; it also leased space for a 240,000-square-foot multidisciplinary neuroscience facility....Columbia announced a university-wide scholarship providing full tuition, housing, and expenses for up to 30 refugees or other displaced students annually; it is open to displaced foreign nationals with refugee status; those who have received or applied for asylum in the United States; and U.S. residents under temporary protected status.

The Federal Fisc

Even as the U.S. House of Representatives focused on impeachment, Congress staved off a government shut-down in the week before Christmas by passing an omnibus spending bill. Higher education fared well. The maximum award for Pell Grants, vital for lower-income families, increased by $150 (to $6,345). And, of greatest interest to Harvard, an additional $2.6 billion was allocated for the budget of the National Institutes of Health, the principal source of University researchers’ sponsored-support funds. There was also a provision for $25 million to support research on gun violence after such work had been banned for decades (see “Doing Less Harm,” January-February, page 43).

Around the Medical Quad

In a flurry of appointments, professor of developmental biology Vicki Rosen was named interim dean of Harvard School of Dental Medicine effective January 1, succeeding Bruce Donoff, who has concluded 28 years of service. Presley professor of global health and social medicine Anne E. Becker becomes the Medical School’s dean for clinical and academic affairs, effective April 1, succeeding Wang professor of radiation oncology Nancy J. Tarbell, who returned to research and clinical practice last July. And Roberta Herman, who was most recently executive director of the Massachusetts Group Insurance Commission, became president and CEO of Joslin Diabetes Center on January 9, succeeding Peter S. Amenta.

Fake News News

Fake news—not the reports in leading journalistic enterprises, but misinformation campaigns, hacking, and social-media scams—have become so pervasive and powerful that the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy has launched the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, an online, peer-reviewed journal. The first issue, posted January 14—just in time for the presidential campaign year—covers Russian Twitter misinformation campaigns, the limited reach of “fake news” beyond true believers, and more. Follow the sad stories at misinformationreview.hks.harvard.edu.

Leaving Legacies Behind

Johns Hopkins University has quietly

Brevia
phased out legacy preferences (for children of alumni) in its admissions. As The Chronicle of Higher Education reported in January, Hopkins president Ronald J. Daniels revealed that the institution had altered its policies on legacy admissions, given their inhibiting of social mobility. The freshman class entering in 2019 had 3.5 percent legacy members, down 9 percentage points from 2009, and the legacy benefit has been formally “extinguished” in admissions. During that period, the share of students eligible for federal Pell Grants (an indication of low family incomes) increased from 9 percent to 19.1 percent. According to admissions and financial aid vice provost David Phillips, the resulting classes are “much more diverse, much more high achieving,” in part because eliminating the preference enabled admissions officers to cast their net more widely. As Daniels noted, “the very significant largess” of alumnus Michael R. Bloomberg (Harvard M.B.A. ’66, L.L.D. ’14), who in 2018 gave his alma mater $1.8 billion for undergraduate financial aid, helped some, too.

**Valuing Liberal Arts**

For those despairing of liberal arts, Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce telegraphed the findings of its new research in the title of a report published in January: “ROI of Liberal Arts Colleges: Value Adds Up Over Time.” Amid the usual academic caveats, the researchers found that the median return on investment for acquiring an education at a selective liberal-arts college is nearly $200,000 more than the median for all colleges. And although it takes a good long while for these advantages to appear (the liberal-arts grads lag a decade out), the 40-year median liberal-arts return, $918,000, is similar to that from a four-year engineering or technology education—or from many leading research universities.

**Nota Bene**

**Students’ studies.** Economics continues to rock, apparently: it was the concentration choice of 639 undergraduates last academic year—the favorite course of study. Next in order were computer science (503), government (238), applied math (293), and social studies (271). Nary a humanities field among them.

**Medical studies online.** Harvard Medical School has unveiled HMX Pro—online courses on subjects such as genetics and immunology, aimed at customers in the scientific and business communities. The units, designed to take 10 to 20 hours to complete, are priced at $800 apiece, with significant discounts for enrolling in multiple offerings. The school’s strategy seems similar in many ways to the fee-based Harvard Business School Online courses unveiled about five years ago.

**Esteeled educators.** Harvard Graduate School of Education professor of education Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine, Ed.D. ’71, have received the 2020 Graemeyer Award in Education and a $100,000 honorarium for their research and book, *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School*. Their work was featured in these pages in “Rethinking the American High School” (May–June 2019, page 11).

**Poet of promise.** Amanda S.C. Gorman ’20, the U.S. Youth Poet Laureate, who delivered an original poem at President Lawrence S. Bacow’s installation (see harvardmag.com/bacow29-poet-18), has won a 2020 Poets and Writers’ Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award. She is in good company: a fellow honorand is Oprah Winfrey, L.L.D. ’13.

**Early admissions.** The College admitted 13.9 percent of early-action applicants to the class of 2024 (895 of 6,424)—up marginally from the 13.4 percent of applicants in the prior year. Further details appear at harvardmag.com/early-action-19.

**Title IX.** The fiscal-year 2019 annual report of the University offices responsible for receiving and hearing complaints of sexual and gender-based harassment reflects a 20 percent increase in disclosures of such incidents, to 500, continuing a multiyear trend. The number of formal complaints brought forward for resolution remained relatively constant, at 43—consistent with the two prior years, but still up nearly threefold from 2015, when the office for dispute resolution was established. The full report is available at https://titleix.harvard.edu.

**A leader lost.** Quincy House faculty dean Deborah Gehrke died December 25, of breast cancer. She is survived by her husband Lee Gehrke, professor of health sciences and technology and professor of microbiology, and other family members. He announced in January that he would step down as faculty dean at the end of the academic year.

**Miscellany.** As part of its Stephen A. Schwarzman [M.B.A. ’72] Centre for the Humanities, the University of Oxford has created an Institute for Ethics in AI—a subject of wide interest on this campus as well (see “Artificial Intelligence and Ethics,” January-February 2019, page 44)....Keeping current, Harvard’s Campus Services holiday breakfast (for staff members ranging from dining services to facilities maintenance and this magazine), served December 20 in Annenberg, offered a “plant-forward” station, including delicacies such as quinoa “hash,” to go with the traditional eggs, lox, bagels, and more. (See “Eating Greener,” July-August 2019, page 22, on related programs.)
on government concerns about scientists affiliated with China who might be involved in stealing biomedical research. Stubbs then reviewed Harvard research policies, changes in procedures to accommodate full internal reviews of funding proposals, faculty training, and better monitoring of compliance.

A report on the arrest, with the affidavit, is at harvardmag.com/lieber-20

～JOHN S. ROSENBERG

Giving Guidelines

Amid public and campus dismay over gifts to many universities—including Harvard—by the late sexual predator Jeffrey Epstein (News Briefs, November-December 2019, page 25), and the abuses at other institutions revealed during the “Varsity Blues” admissions and bribery scandal, the University is conducting a broad review of its gifts policy. Outlining the issues during a December conversation, President Lawrence S. Bacow highlighted several matters the initiative aims to address, including:

• Admissions. The institution is trying “to will be disappointed, as many are.
• Core values. Bacow also observed that it is easy to propound the notion that any institution should avoid taking gifts that conflict with its core values. But as a practical matter, “[T]hose values are often contested in a university,” so devising workable general rules is not simple—and those Harvard may devise are unlikely to satisfy everyone. Moreover, he cautioned against interpreting accepted gifts as University endorsements of their donors’ views on controversial issues, or of the donors themselves. Quite the contrary: in making a gift, “They’re endorsing Harvard, Harvard is not endorsing them.”
• Codifying common practices. Finally, Bacow said, there are several generally understood rules of thumb and clear principles that have not been made concrete. Thus, Harvard does not accept anonymously any gift that it would be embarrassed to accept publicly—and he expects that to be spelled out. As a core value, the University explicitly limits donors’ influence on Harvard academic operations once a gift is made: a donor may underwrite a professorial chair, for instance, but does not have a say in who holds it. The same principles apply to corporate support for research, or similar gifts.

Comparable concerns have arisen at peer institutions, where such conversations are also under way, so Brian Lee, vice president for alumni affairs and development, is consulting with his counterparts elsewhere. There will be plenty to talk about in the wake of outside counsel investigations of the long-term gift relationship between members of the Sackler family—and their company, Purdue Pharma (implicated heavily in the opioids crisis)—and Tufts; and on the handling of gifts from Epstein, after his conviction as a sex offender, principally to MIT’s Media Lab. The Tufts report, dated December, found possible ways for Purdue to lessen ties between members of the Sackler family—and Tufts; and on the handling of gifts from Epstein, after his conviction as a sex offender, principally to MIT’s Media Lab. The Tufts report, dated December, found possible ways for Purdue to influence medical-education programs, and insufficient conflict-of-interest policies. The MIT report, released in January, documented policy loopholes, efforts to conceal the source of gifts, and errors of execution in accepting the monies.

The result of Harvard’s review, Bacow indicated, is intended by the end of the academic year to be a written policy for the entire community, made public—as the current gift policy is not, but as Brown University’s recently developed statement is (see Brevia, January-February, page 28), and other institutions’ are likely to become.

Graduate-Student Strike Update

After a nearly monthlong strike, the Harvard Graduate Student Union—United Auto Workers (HGSU-UAW) went back to work on New Year’s Day. In mid-December, about two weeks into the strike, the University proposed working through federal mediation, a public service available to help resolve particularly difficult labor disputes.

“Over the course of our strike, we’ve shown the university administration that Harvard works because we do,” HGSU-UAW wrote in a statement announcing the end of the strike. “Instead of working to reach a fair agreement, over the course of our strike, the administration showed their true priorities. They decided to threaten student workers instead of agreeing to protections against workplace abuse. Nevertheless, in response to our strike, the administration—for the first time ever—announced that they intend to reach a contract by the end of January. We now expect the administration to put all their energy into reaching a fair agreement.”

The parties had not reached an agreement as of early February. During federal mediation, it’s customary for the negotiators not to offer public updates about their progress. Some union organizing has continued: on February 3, HGSU-UAW and graduate students in the government department co-hosted a panel condemning Harvard’s process for investigating sexual-harassment cases.

Although it’s not clear why the union decided to end its strike, Harvard has been criticized for an internal email, leaked to The Harvard Crimson, suggesting that departments should ask graduate students whether they planned to work in the new semester even if the strike were continuing. Critics, including Winthrop professor of history Walter Johnson, have argued that this is tantamount to making employment contingent on a pledge not to strike. The University has maintained it was meant only to plan for appropriate levels of teaching personnel: “The University is committed to ensuring that all of Harvard’s students can pursue and complete their academic work,” said Harvard spokesman Jonathan Swain in a December statement. “Ensuring appropriate staffing levels for academic activities is a part of that.”

～MARINA N. BOLOTNIKOVA

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ON FIRST-YEAR Family Weekend the fall of my sophomore year, a lone father wandered down the steep concrete stairs of Canaday Hall and through the basement doors into the Harvard College Women's Center. As a part-time intern, I was there to answer questions from curious parents about what we do. The father carefully examined our walls, filled with students’ artistic depictions of our concept “Gender Is a Constellation,” colorful posters of groundbreaking women in STEM, and a treasured signed photo of transgender actress and activist Laverne Cox from her talk on campus in 2014. On the table beside a large tray of assorted safer-sex supplies, our signature combination of freshly baked cookies and assorted Trader Joe’s teas was laid out to nourish visitors: on any given day, students pass through our space to fill their mugs with coffee or tea on the way to a morning lecture, or nap on the couches between classes.

“This is wonderful, don’t get me wrong,” the father said to me, finally. “But I just can’t believe that Harvard in this day and age still needs a women’s center.”

The father said to me, finally. “But I just can’t believe that Harvard in this day and age still needs a women’s center.”

The critical work taking place in our basement space sometimes seems to escape visitors, friends, and family members, who hold preconceived ideas of what a “women’s center” might be. Are we a shelter? A sorority? A women’s health clinic? Gender inequity and the role of our space have certainly changed since the first women’s center opened at Harvard-Radcliffe in 1971. The 1970s saw a nationwide growth of campus women’s centers as a result of a growing feminist movement and student activism. Given the historical exclusion of women from universities, the new centers centralized resources related to sexual health and daycare, while providing a physical space for women to meet, disseminate information, and organize for gender equity on and off campus.

Nearly 50 years later, part of that father’s confusion likely stemmed from the following facts: Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges officially merged in 1999, and today, women constitute 48 percent of the undergraduate population. Six iterations after the center’s initial founding, its current incarnation was established in 2006, seemingly after great strides in gender equality on campus. So why did Harvard still need a Women’s Center?

When I posed the question to another intern and two of my bosses, they each answered without hesitation, “That question itself is exactly why we need a Women’s Center.” If that father had never stumbled upon our space, I wondered, would he ever have considered what it’s like to be a woman-identifying student at Harvard today? Across the University, women hold just 31 percent of tenured and tenure-track faculty positions. Women are underrepresented among students concentrating in STEM fields. Among undergraduates, 32.5 percent of women (and 11.4 percent of men) have reported some type of nonconsensual sexual contact. The pervasive gender inequity that ignited the movement to establish women’s centers in the 1970s has not fully disappeared.

The feminism guiding our work at the center has evolved since the twentieth century to address inequity beyond comparisons between men and women. After all, not all women were assigned “female” at birth. As a woman’s center, we often reckon with how to serve and empower non-binary students who don’t identify as either “man” or “woman” and more generally, transgender or genderqueer students who don’t identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. These students often face additional barriers and marginalization that get erased in conversations about gender inequity or the experiences of women on campus.

Gender and womanhood that way also benefits someone like me, assigned “female” at birth and identifying as a “woman” today. When I give “Gender 101: Beyond
the Binary” workshops to students, faculty, and staff, I bring everyone into the conversation to show how often we do not neatly map onto categories of biological sex or common gender stereotypes. I am not a woman simply because I was assigned “female” at birth or simply because I like wearing makeup and have certain anatomical body parts. Nor am I a woman despite my love for beer or my ability to be a leader. I am a woman for all of the reasons I choose to be, and the bits and pieces that make up my own definition of womanhood are shaped by the ways I inhabit this world as a Harvard student, a daughter of Korean immigrants, an American, and more.

The success of twentieth-century feminism has enabled young women like me to attend an integrated Harvard College and enter Harvard’s traditionally masculine spheres and spaces. Yet these same spaces often undervalue traditionally feminine traits like emotional care—an important expression of my personal identity as a woman. The Women’s Center’s emphasis on community care and emotional well-being is sometimes dismissed as “fluff.” But that care has been critical to fostering a feeling of belonging on this campus that is often overlooked in University discussions about “inclusion” or “belonging.”

The center’s director, Heidi Wickersham, agrees. “There’s that tangible aspect we can quantify—in the access to opportunities and development fostered by our Women in STEM program, for example,” she acknowledges. “But how do you quantify the feeling of the space? It’s hard to describe that intangible essence of what we do.”

**Part of that intangible essence is a deep sense of community and belonging based on shared values of equity, justice, and empathy.** The numbers in the center’s annual report may fail to capture its comforting care, but I feel it through the famous hugs of Bridget Duffy, the department administrator of the College’s Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, which includes the Women’s Center and four other units. I smell it in the aroma of cinnamon-dusted snickerdoodles baking in our small kitchen’s oven to celebrate our weekly “Woman Crush Wednesday.” I taste it in the sip of warm hot chocolate I take during a conversation with fellow interns about Janelle Monáe’s new album. On a campus where Annenberg Hall, with its high, chandelier-lined ceilings, can feel daunting and far from home, students like me yearn for the familiarity and small creature comforts found in the kitchen, sofas, and television in our intimate lounge.

I also find home in the radical openness of the Women’s Center, especially amid a hustle-and-bustle campus where social backgrounds, present reputations, and future success can seem paramount. Where do you go on campus to cry? To share good news? To make mistakes? There is an important distinction between a “house” and a “home” captured by the answer to these questions. “Finding a community at the Women’s Center was a thousand times easier than in the Houses,” recalls Courtney Okawara ‘18, a previous intern. “When I had a bad day at my House, I wanted to run to the dining hall and run right back to my room. The Women’s Center was a space where I could be vulnerable and know I would still be loved and respected. I didn’t feel the need to put on appearances.”

It may be cliché to lament Harvard’s “networking” culture, where all social exchanges on campus can seem transactional, and every social organization or extracurricular affiliation can appear mere résumé-padding or social climbing. But at the Women’s Center, there’s no barrier to entry. There’s no comp process, feeder school, or income bracket to prove your status. The transactional social landscape of Harvard is uneven terrain; there are groups for women-identifying students to join on campus, but stratification and exclusion remain. “Not all so-called women’s spaces are created equal,” explains Maggie Beazer ’20. “As a lesbian, as a queer woman, I just find a lot of affirmation of that part of my identity, and a willingness to embrace that aspect of womanhood, at the Women’s Center that I don’t necessarily find in other women’s spaces, like sororities, for example.”

Previous interns who identify as men have also told me that the center embraced them—and challenged them to think critically about the ways gender shaped their Harvard experiences. For Matthew Stolz ’15, the center’s commitment to serving all genders required conscious, constant self-examination: “I always felt welcome in the space, but I also knew that the Women’s Center wasn’t built for me, and that was an important tension to navigate.” Even I feel like Matthew sometimes. My own experience as a traditionally feminine woman—instead of a non-binary or trans student whose experiences have long been overlooked—meant that I never questioned that the Women’s Center was made for me. Inclusion without critical examination of who exactly have been, and continue to be, excluded can too easily make all experiences of exclusion seem equal.

For me, the center’s feeling of “home” also stems from the enduring spirit of activism that first drove the creation of such centers in the 1970s. At a woman-of-color crafting event I attended a couple of years ago, Jenna Gray ’19, the organizer, asked me: “If Audre Lorde is writing and thinking through the importance of community and connection, how do we make that come alive in this crafting event we’re having for women of color?” That poet and activist on black feminism, sexuality, and class wrote, “Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression.” Jenna wanted to know what that quote meant for someone like me. Though I was a first-generation college student who’d never taken a gender-studies course in my life, I felt the core philosophy of Lorde’s words, sitting there on the carpeted floor of the center’s lounge, making velvet scrunchies with members of different women-of-color organizations and jamming out to our favorite music.

The Women’s Center’s activist strain fuses with its professional-development goals in sometimes hilarious ways. “Can we SMARTIE goal our way out of oppression?” both my bosses, Heidi Wickersham and assistant director Michæla “Mickey” Mobley, asked in half-jest when I stopped by their office to take a break from writing my senior thesis during Winter session. SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) is an acronym used to help guide goal-setting; just one of the many sessions I’ve benefited from while working at the center. Before I started there, I didn’t know what professional development meant; none of my family members had worked in office or white-collar jobs. I was also trying to grow into the nebulous role of “leadership” that is often thrust upon us during college without any direction. Only at the Women’s Center did I learn to be a professional and a leader without compromising my sense of womanhood.

A friend once told me that the sight of women congregating in a space generally prompts two interpretations. They are
On New Year’s Eve, the Harvard women’s hockey team suited up for a long-anticipated rematch. Last February, in the first round of the 2019 Beanpot Tournament, the Crimson had stunned Boston College, ranked seventh in the nation, with a 4-1 victory. The Eagles scored 45 seconds into the game, and then never again. That was partly the work of Harvard’s rookie goalie, a lanky then-freshman named Lindsay Reed, who stopped 52 shots that night. A few weeks later, she stopped another 51 in the Beanpot final, an overtime loss to Boston University, and immediately after the game was named the Bertagna Award winner, as the tournament’s top goaltender.

This winter, Harvard traveled across town to Chestnut Hill, undefeated in conference play but still underdogs to higher-ranked BC. And again, the Crimson pulled off an upset win, this time even more decisive: three players came away with two goals each, and the team scored five times before the Eagles were able to bury their first puck in Reed’s net, a point-blank shot midway through the third period. At the end of the game, BC had taken nearly twice as many shots on goal as Harvard, but the final score was 7-1. Reed had made 45 saves.

In becoming a goalie, Reed followed a traditional path: she learned to skate shortly after learning to walk, and one day, while playing pick-up hockey with friends, her older brother stuck her in the net. “And that was it,” she says. “Basically, the rest is history.” She discovered she was good at fending off pucks—really good: a few of the other dads watching that afternoon turned to her father and joked, “You have a problem. Your daughter’s a goalie.” She was seven. “Part of it was, your big brother tells you to do something, and you want to do it and have fun with him. But also, I just loved it. It sounds a little psychotic, like ‘Oh, I like getting hit with pucks.’ But it’s just really fun.”

After that, things moved quickly. The outdoor rink and hockey club in her suburban New Jersey hometown became a second home. Reed had a goalie coach by sixth grade and joined a boys’ travel team soon after that. By the time she reached high school, USA Hockey had started to take notice; she was invited to player-development camps, and as a junior and senior played on the U.S. Women’s under-18 team, helping to bring home gold medals from world championships in Russia and the Czech Republic. In the middle of high school, a growth spurt hit, and she arrived at Harvard in 2018 with a six-foot frame and a massive wingspan. Out on the ice, she’s a striking figure, towering head and shoul-
iders (and then some) above the net. Goalies that tall are a rarity in the women’s game. “I’m closer to six-three with my helmet and skates on,” she says. “I sometimes forget that I’m intimidating when I’m on the ice.”

Throughout her freshman year with the Crimson, Reed proved a mostly unsolvable puzzle for opponents. She made 927 saves altogether, setting a program record, and in 17 of the 27 games she played, she stopped at least 30 shots. Three games were shutouts. Her .940 save percentage led all freshman collegiate goaltenders by a wide margin, and she finished the season ranked number three in the country, with a goals-against average of just 2.18. This season, she—and the team—came out playing similarly strongly.

“It’s nice to know that if somebody goes by you, she’ll make the save,” says defensemen and senior co-captain Ali Peper. “I mean, Lindsay’s special... When she’s on and rolling, she brings a totally different energy to the team.”

“She’s a gamer. That’s what I’d call her,” says sophomore forward Anne Bloomer, who was also Reed’s friend and teammate on the U.S. National under-18 squad (and whose father, Andrew Bloomer ‘88, played hockey at Harvard). “She’s always very dialed in, very, very focused. Everything she does has purpose.”

The energy and intensity that Reed’s teammates describe are impossible to miss on the ice: the diving toe saves, the vaulting leaps, the flash of her glove—or stick, or wheel. He doesn’t even seem to notice the half-dozen people who have gathered to observe.

“Plus, her consistency,” says Katey Stone, the Landry Family head coach. “She’s very reliable back there.” That’s one of the things that first prompted Stone to recruit her. At 19, Reed plays like a seasoned goalie. Part of that is vision and perspective: in high school, during the months when she wasn’t competing on the ice, she played field hockey—not as a goalie, but as a forward. The experience helped broaden her game in both sports, she says. “When you’re in goal, you realize what the forwards want you to do”—opponents as well as teammates. “And you can use that.”

But for good goalies, confidence can be as important as vision or skill. “For me, mental toughness is the biggest thing,” Reed says. “Because you’re back there by yourself the entire time—you almost never get to go to the bench with the others, and so you don’t get the same team culture throughout the game.” It’s important, she says, not to think too much, not to dwell on mistakes or missed chances, but instead to just let discipline and instinct and trust in her teammates guide her. Communicating helps, too, she adds—by which she means yelling down the ice at the top of her lungs. “Talking to your teammates, even if they can’t hear you from all the way back there in the goal, is really important. I like to think that you, when they pass the puck, it’s because of my yelling, because I told them to,” she says, with a laugh. “I try to be a quarterback back there.”

This season, Harvard had its best start in more than a decade. After blazing through Dartmouth, Brown, and Yale, the Crimson upset seventh-ranked Princeton 6-2 on their own ice in early November, a game in which Reed stopped 40 shots and Bloomer, one of the top goal-scorers in the country, scored twice; junior forward Becca Gilmore, a nationwide leader in assists, had four. The following day, Harvard won in overtime against Quinnipiac. “That one felt good,” Peper says. “In my time at Harvard, it’s been hard for us to win once the game goes to overtime.”

This season’s team is deep. “Lindsay’s a huge part of it,” Stone says, “but it’s a complementary effort.” In the Princeton game, nine players tallied points on the stat sheet (recording either a goal or an assist). Peper says she, too, feels a level of depth and strength on the team this season that propels her own play. “When you’re playing well, you can usually feel it, like your body feels different,” she explains. “One thing I pay attention to is passing—if I’m hitting people’s sticks, if I’m setting people up right.” Another is her gap—the space between herself and an opposing forward: “You know if you’ve challenged people, if you were able to take the puck from them and turn it the other way.” Reed’s goaltending, she adds, often makes those other plays possible. “With Lindsay out there, you can have some chances,” Peper says. “You never want to hang her out to dry, but knowing she’s there allows you to try some things.”

Harvard’s first goal in the New Year’s Eve game against Boston College looked something like that. A minute and a half into the first period, the Eagles made a rush in the Crimson’s zone; Reed deflected one shot and then another, and then swallowed a third in her glove. In the ensuing faceoff, Peper came away with the puck and, sidestepping a defender behind Reed’s net, bounced it up the ice toward freshman forward Shannon Hollands, who made a pass to Bloomer, already sprinting ahead for a breakaway. When Bloomer lobbed the puck into the Eagles’ net, there were cheers and hugs on the ice, then a string of high-fives from the bench. Reed skated toward center ice to tap the goalscorer’s glove in congratulations, before gliding back to her own net and crouching into position, eyes forward, shoulders squared, ready for the next shot.

“The Ideal Sheet”

Matt Gilmore sits straight up on the Zamboni’s elevated seat, his left hand guiding the steering wheel, his right controlling the water spurring out the machine’s back. He leans leftward, his eyes trained on the few inches of space between the vehicle and the boards. Hitting the wall with the five-ton machine would be one of the worst things he could do, but his 14 years of experience ease the concern. “Once you’ve done the pattern for long enough, you can basically do it with your eyes closed,” he says. But Gilmore’s focus is palpable as he handles the Zamboni; a self-described “social butterfly” and popular figure at the Bright-Landry Hockey Center, he’s noticeably less talkative behind the wheel. He doesn’t even seem to notice the half-dozen people who have gathered to observe the legendary vehicle in action.

The quality of the ice affects the quality of the game. Bad ice—chipped, slushy, sticky—can lead to slow skating, errant passing, sloppy attacking, and even broken bones. Highly variable ice conditions are a problem that has plagued the National Hockey League for decades. Some of the world’s best players find their speed and skill squandered on rough ice. Quick, precise exchanges are easiest when the ice is level, smooth, and cold (but not too cold).

On a Thursday afternoon, rink manager Scott Anderson and Zamboni operator Gilmore perform “ice maintenance.” During this three-hour period, they restore the rink to ideal conditions, repairing any spots affected by the gradual wear-and-tear of hockey, figure skating, open-skate sessions, and even broomball—each of which leave different “scratch patterns.” Figure skating produces divots and holes, but hockey produces a more even shave of the ice, with the most wear in the rink’s center.

Anderson and Gilmore begin by drilling 23 holes into the ice at specific locations, to

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measure its depth. If a spot’s too high, they’ll shave it with the Zamboni. If it’s low, they can “flood” the area with cold wash water. Anderson, who’s been working at Harvard since 1978—as the head men’s lacrosse coach between 1988 and 2007, director of athletic facilities, and assistant director of athletics for facilities and operations—knows how high the ice should be kept at each spot. Because the concrete base beneath the rink is not completely even throughout, the ice thickness ranges from about one to one-and-a-half inches. Within the concrete, glycol-filled pipes keep the surface stable and quickly freeze any added water to between 20 and 22 degrees, the hockey coaches’ preferred temperature. Figure skaters tend to prefer a temperature in the mid-to-high twenties for softer landings, but colder ice makes it easier for hockey players to push off and fly down the ice, and creates less slush. A temperature in the teens could mean brittle, easily fractured ice.

At Harvard, ice maintenance is slow and regimented, with an eye toward perfection; just before the game is not the time to make major adjustments.

Before the Zamboni’s invention in 1949, rink employees would attach a scraper to a tractor, and then drive the machine around the ice. A few workers followed the contraption, swept away the shavings, squeegeed the surface, and sprayed on a new layer of water. Lacking a tubing system beneath the ice, they had to wait for the water to freeze naturally; the process took more than an hour. The Zamboni revolutionized ice resurfacing, cutting the total time to around 10 minutes, and removing the need for a team of dedicated squeegee men. It’s become so popular that Zamboni (the name of inventor Frank Zamboni’s company) has become the de facto name of the machine for those unfamiliar with its less catchy, technical name: ice resurfacer.

The machine itself is a picture of efficiency. A long, heavy, razor-sharp blade shaves a thin layer—typically about one-thirty-second of an inch—from the ice’s surface. A horizontal auger gathers the shavings and pumps them into a vertical auger, which sends them into the snow tank. Cold water is fed from a wash-water tank to the “conditioner,” which rinses the ice as dirty water is vacuumed, filtered, and returned to the tank. Finally, warm water is delivered through a pipe, and spread by a cloth towel across the floor, which gives the ice its glossy, even coat. “The ice resurfacer is really a brilliant machine,” says Zamboni operator Joe Marrero. He takes the responsibility of driving it seriously: “I’ve been here for 14 years. It doesn’t matter how much you perfect it. I get anxiety every single time.”

On a Friday night two hours before a women’s hockey game against Quinnipiac, Marrero, Gilmore, and a small group of others prepare for action. Once all the youth-hockey athletes clear off the ice, two men remove the goals, and Marrero backs the firetruck-red Zamboni around a tight corner, ducking his head under a metal gate as he approaches the ice. He heads straight for the boards, angling himself parallel to them, a fingertip away. “He’s about as flush as he can be,” Gilmore tells me from behind the glass. “Joe’s been doing it for a long time, so he has a big range.” As he slows down on tight turns, he decreases the rate of water delivery, making sure the machine’s speed variation doesn’t affect the evenness of the ice. Marrero hopes to hit the sweet spot: a nine- to-10-minute ride, with clean passes (not much overlapping), that uses about two-thirds of the machine’s water and fills up about three-quarters of the hundred-cubic-foot snow tank. This time, he nails it. “The ideal sheet,” he announces as he pulls into the garage. “Three-quarters.”

The crew stays vigilant as the game continues. Commercial breaks and time-outs are a good time for a quick sweep in front of the benches and goals. When a Quinnipiac player tumble into the Harvard net, knocking it out of place, Gilmore runs on to re-anchor it in two flexible Marsh goal pegs. The 15 minutes between periods present the greatest stakes. As Marrero sits in a back room, filled with extra clothing, shoes, and boots, Gilmore sticks his head in and nods, indicating the second period’s end. About two minutes later, when the “Chuck-a-Puck” challenge is over and the crowd’s rubber pucks have been cleared off the ice, Gilmore nods again and Marrero climbs atop the Zamboni. This time he completes his rounds in a tight seven and a half minutes. Given the time restrictions, it’s a good shave.

After 60 minutes, Quinnipiac comes out on top, and the ice, thankfully, has played no part in the outcome. Most of the crew leaves, and after about 14 hours straight at the rink, Marrero does too. Gilmore, the last man standing, is proud of their work tonight. “For me it’s fun,” he says, “It’s an honor. You’re being trusted to make ice for a nationally televised game. I know it’s not a big deal, but it is in my eyes.” He takes out the Zamboni one last time. The nine-minute ideal-sheet time comes and goes, and he’s still on the ice, traveling in neat concentric ovals. As he pulls back into the garage, he explains that he did two ices in a row, filling the whole tank completely with snow. I check my stop-watch: 18 minutes—perfect timing for two flawless, glistening sheets.

~JACOB SWEET
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SMALL GIFTS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.
Healthy Plate, Healthy Planet

Frank Hu confronts the triple threats of obesity, undernutrition, and climate change.

by Jacob Sweet

Hu believes a plant-based diet can help feed a growing population in a healthy, sustainable way.
Frank Hu and Kentucky Fried Chicken arrived in Beijing around the same time. Hu, a recent graduate of Tongji Medical University, in Wuhan, had never seen a restaurant like it. Three-floored, gleaming, and distinctly Western in atmosphere, KFC proved irresistible to a country unfamiliar with the greedy efficiency of American fast food. On a frigid day in November 1987, thousands waited two hours in line to be among the first Chinese citizens to try the Colonel's crispy drumsticks and gravy-doused mashed potatoes.

A few decades later, China's first KFC remains open, a few blocks from Tiananmen Square. At first it stood alone. By 2007, KFCs were popping up around the country at a rate of one per day. Now there are nearly 6,000 KFCs, 3,000 McDonalds, and thousands more Pizza Huts, Burger Kings, and Dunkin’ Donuts.

In 1980, seven years before that first KFC, the prevalence of Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes in China was less than 1 percent of the population. In 2001, that had risen to 5.5 percent. Now, with an estimated 116 million diabetics in the country, the number is 12 percent—and still rising.

Hu, now Stare Professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, moves along the salad bar in HSPH's Kresge Cafeteria, serving himself a bountiful vegetable medley: arugula, cherry tomatoes, carrots, chickpeas, radishes, Brussels sprouts, a splash of balsamic vinaigrette. Some days, he includes a piece of salmon or chicken. Today, he adds half a hard-boiled egg and some crunchy noodles, for texture. He almost never brings lunch from home; with a cafeteria like this, he doesn't need to.

Eating unhealthily in the Kresge Cafeteria is almost difficult. Hu works with staff to keep it that way. Above the lengthy salad bar spreads a huge depiction of the “Healthy Eating Plate,” which HSPH and Harvard Medical School (HMS) developed in response to MyPlate, an illustration of Dietary Guidelines for Americans issued by the U.S. departments of agriculture (USDA) and health and human services (HHS) and updated every five years. HSPH thought it could do a better job at following the science. “The Healthy Eating Plate is based exclusively on the best available evidence and was not subjected to political or commercial pressures from food-industry lobbyists,” the school’s Nutrition Source website notes—a jab at the government recommendations. If guests miss the several-foot-long poster—or don't want to strain their necks while scooping leafy greens—they will notice, behind the bowls of food, six smaller images of the Healthy Eating Plate.

At the beginning of the line, beside the utensils, cardstock handouts offer more in-depth advice about vegetables and fruits, cholesterol and fats, calcium and milk, and fiber. “Limit milk and dairy foods to no more than one to two servings per day,” says one card. “More won't necessarily do your bones any good—and less is fine, as long as you get enough calcium from other sources.” On MyPlate, a glass of milk sits next to the meal. The Healthy Eating Plate recommends water, coffee, or tea, suggestions that would likely displease the dairy-industry groups—including the National Dairy Council, International Dairy Foods Association, and National Milk Producers Federation—that gave presentations before the USDA’s 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), on which Hu served.

Hu shows off the cafeteria like a proud father displaying his child's trophies. “The salad bar is the most popular among the students and faculty,” he notes, with understated satisfaction. “We have people coming from the hospitals to our cafeteria just to get a healthier lunch.” If he's busy, and the salad line is particularly long, he'll skip to the “Heart of the Plate” section, which offers five healthy, pre-made dishes. Today he scoops the lentil, sorghum, and chick-pea pilaf into his container, already filled with salad. The pizza section is not quite as healthy. “Sometimes we have whole-grain pizza and mostly vegetable pizza,” he says, smiling. “But we also have some unhealthy pizza.”

Hu is the third chair in the HSPH nutrition department’s 78-year history. As a nutritional epidemiologist, he studies the relationship between diet and health. Though he’s arguably the world’s leading expert on diet’s connection to chronic diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease, his research interests range widely. In almost two decades at Harvard, he’s written or co-written more than 1,000 peer-reviewed papers, almost all of them group efforts.

Some of his research is large-scale: identifying the healthiest eating patterns using dietary surveys and disease outcomes provided by hundreds of thousands of people; studying the preventability of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes through diet and lifestyle; working out how genetic and environmental factors relate to obesity. He has published papers in the population-wide health impacts of sugar-sweetened beverages, of coffee and red meats, and of polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids. He and his colleague Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition, have helped push their field toward understanding the health impacts of such eating patterns, a step beyond examining the impact of one particular nutrient or food.

He also works on a smaller scale, pinpointing the precise mechanisms and biological pathways that explain why certain food groups affect people as they do. It’s one thing to know that among large populations, heavy consumers of red meat are at a greater risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and premature death. It’s another to know how red meat, compared to plant proteins like nuts and legumes, increases blood levels of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, which clogs arteries and can lead to atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease. Hu was one of the first in his field to stress the potential importance of metabolomics—the study of the chemical by-products specific cellular processes leave behind—which may allow for better diet measurements and earlier disease-risk identification. When media sources need an expert on any nutrition topic, Hu often receives a call. The New York Times has asked him to comment on the health impacts of eggs, fish, red meat, walnuts, the Mediterranean diet, calorie restriction, carbohydrate as a replacement for fat, fats as a replacement for carbohydrates, and instant noodles.

Right now, no one study or topic is as pressing to Hu as the intersection of three threats: obesity, undernutrition, and climate change. Of the seven and a half billion people in the world, about two billion are overweight, and two billion more are undernourished. “Both overnutrition and undernutrition are affected by climate change,” he explains. “When the temperature rises—when carbon dioxide increases—that can actually reduce the amount of zinc, iron, protein, and other nutrients in crops like rice or wheat...and that can further exacerbate the problem of undernutrition in the poor regions of the world [see “Climate Change and Crops,” November-December 2017, page 14]. In the meantime, our food system undermines human health because the Westernization of diet has led to high consumption of red meat, processed meats, sugars,
and saturated fats. That has led to a global epidemic of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.” Animal agriculture, the second-largest contributor of human-made greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions worsens the problem.

An increase in food production during the past 50 years has helped decrease world hunger and increase life expectancy. But a shift to “Western-style dietary patterns”—high in calories, highly processed foods, and meat—is unsustainable, Hu and his colleagues believe, because it damages not only individual and population health, but also the environment.

Since 1963, global meat consumption has risen by 62 percent. In developing nations, the increase has been about five times that, with China increasing its meat consumption nine-fold. The more meat, the greater the cost to the environment. Food production is the world’s largest cause of biodiversity loss, responsible for 80 percent of deforestation, more than 70 percent of fresh-water use, and 30 percent of human-generated GHG emissions, wrote Hu and HSPH project coordinator Elena C. Hemler in the November issue of Advances in Nutrition. Animal products play an outsized role: meat and dairy production accounts for more than 80 percent of the food sector’s GHG emissions, and requires 11 times more fossil fuels to supply a single unit of protein than grain-based sources (see “Eating for the Environment,” March-April 2017, page 11). Red meat is especially inefficient. Producing 50 grams of beef protein yields 17.7 kilograms of carbon dioxide on average. For tofu, beans, and nuts, it’s 1.0, 4, and 1 kilograms, respectively.

If eating red meat were clearly healthy, nutrition scientists might face a predication. But in Hu’s view, red meat—and processed red meat in particular—isn’t. Much of the data he relies on comes from huge longitudinal cohort studies, in which researchers collect information on participants’ diets and health status over decades. A 2012 study of men in the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (who had been followed for 22 years) and women in the Nurses’ Health Study (followed for 28)—both collaborations among HSPH, HMS, and Brigham and Women’s Hospital—found that a single-serving-per-day increase in processed and unprocessed meat increased mortality risk by 13 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Hu estimates that if all study participants had consumed less than a half-serving of meat per day, 9.3 percent of premature deaths in men and 7.6 percent in women recorded in the studies could have been prevented.

“Without [considering] the health of the population, or the health of the community, it’s not really meaningful to talk about personal health,” he says. “In the same vein, without [considering] the health of our planet, I think it’s really futile to talk about the health of the human population. They are all interrelated and intertwined, and they have to be considered and looked at simultaneously rather than separately.” He believes a healthy, plant-based diet could be the answer.

As a member of the 2015 DGAC, Hu had a chance to compile evidence for dietary guidelines that reflected the importance of diet not just to human health, but to that of the environment. Each member is assigned to a number of overlapping working groups and subcommittees, which focus on a specific topic. The two-year process of reviewing the evidence and writing the final scientific report requires all 14 nutrition scientists to reach a consensus. Almost every week, Hu spent hours on the phone with his fellow committee members, analyzing the available science, and developing their recommendations. Every few months, he traveled to Washington, D.C., for lengthy committee meetings that were open to the public.

Hu was proud of the nearly 450-page final report. For the first time, the committee set a recommended daily limit for added sugar, emphasized type of fat over total fat consumption, recommended lowering the intake of red and processed meat—like bacon, sausages, hot dogs, and most cold cuts—and created an entire chapter on “Food Sustainability and Safety.” The introduction to the new chapter made the case for why food sustainability matters, and why the subject was worth including within the dietary guidelines, pointing to precedents in the nutrition policies of Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, and Brazil, among other countries.

In the end, though, the environmental recommendations couldn’t withstand powerful industry lobbyists and congressional opposition. The USDA decided that environmental sustainability was outside the scope of the dietary guidelines, and the final report ignored any suggested limits to red-meat consumption. “Sometimes it’s one step forward, two steps back,” Hu says. Willett was a bit more demonstrative at the time. “This is virtual proof that the USDA is not allowed to say anything negative about red meat,” he told The Boston Globe. “The basic censorship of the report from the Advisory Committee is deeply troublesome.”

Hu still calls his time on the committee valuable. “I think during the process I learned that, of course, developing the strongest scientific evidence base is still the most important, most fundamental in terms of developing dietary guidelines,” he says. “But political leadership is also very important. And advocacy is important, and communications....Nowadays, we have so much misinformation or fake information through social media, I think it’s become even more urgent to disseminate evidence-based nutrition messages to the general public and to policy makers.”

In recent years, he has spoken and published frequently about plant-based diets. Contrary to popular belief, he often explains, plant-based diets do not have to be vegan or vegetarian. For most people, complete elimination of meat or animal products is unrealistic and not necessary for improving health. He often cites a January 2019 report from the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet and Health—a joint effort between the non-profit EAT, which hopes to improve the global food system, and The Lancet, a peer-reviewed medical journal. Written by a team of 37 scientists and co-chaired by Willett, the summary report concluded that “a global adoption of healthy diets from sustainable food systems would safeguard our planet and improve the health of billions” and recommended how to feed 10 billion people while limiting environmental degradation. Hu also pushes for public-health strategies to make healthier diets cheaper and more accessible—from soda taxes and agricultural subsidies to fast-food marketing and zoning restrictions that could make junk food less appealing and ubiquitous, to public-education campaigns and reforms to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps).

And the 2015 DGAC report, though not wholly incorporated by the USDA, remains online in its full form. The 2020 DGAC will have less to say. Instead of allowing the committee to decide for itself what to cover, the USDA has limited the scope of the report to answering 80 questions provided by itself and HHS. Not one specifically addresses red and processed meats, ultra-processed foods, sodium—or climate change.

Growing up in a small rural village, Hu was not familiar with overnutrition. With the Cultural Revolution in full swing, he and
his parents, living in landlocked Hubei Province, relied on rations from the government, exchanging their state-supplied tickets at the local corner store for rice and small amounts of meat, salt, and cooking oils. His parents, both peasants, supplemented those supplies with vegetables from a backyard garden.

Hu's father had finished only elementary school; his mother had no schooling at all. Although Hu attended the local grade school, higher education seemed remote. During the Cultural Revolution, the country's universities were closed. But in 1976, with Mao Zedong's death, China began a period of economic reform. The Hu family's small, self-sufficient farm and fish pond now belonged to them—not the state. His parents had always emphasized education, and universities were beginning to re-open.

Hu had become interested in medicine after being rushed to the hospital with a stomach problem during high school. “A doctor made a really good impression on me,” he reflects. “I wanted to be someone like this person.” His chances of admission to any medical school were slim. But as high school came to a close, he was accepted at Tongji Medical University—one of just a handful among the few hundred students in his graduating class to pursue a higher degree.

Medical school required a clinical internship, which Hu remembers as a few months of patient care in a county hospital. “In the beginning, it was very exciting to see patients, to prescribe drugs,” he says. “But after a while, it became routine, and you’d see the same types of patients over and over again.” He could do very little to help those with chronic diseases. “I realized that the medical approach—treating one patient at a time—is not sufficient to deal with major public-health problems.”

That experience directed him toward preventive medicine and public health: he wanted to help people make behavioral changes before they got chronic diseases. He focused especially on nutrition-related problems like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, becoming interested in epidemiological research that relied on large populations to identify risk factors.

Rather than practicing as a doctor after graduation, Hu knocked on doors and performed health surveys in Beijing for the Ministry of Public Health. He measured people’s height and weight, asked about their typical diets, and sometimes drew blood. He also looked for cardiovascular conditions: hypertension, obesity, and high cholesterol. And at each house, he provided official dietary advice. Epidemiological studies often rely on data collected from thousands of people, and nowadays, Hu says, “almost anyone can just get their data from the computer without knowing where the data come from.” But this study required him to meet each person face-to-face, and the experience gave him the sense that fieldwork is hard. “The participant has to trust you,” he explains. “You have to be very patient explaining the questions.”

Although Hu noticed, based on his fieldwork, that rates of chronic diseases were higher than they had been decades earlier, he didn’t make any connection at the time between his findings and changes in diet like the arrival of KFC. He does recall the restaurant’s unfamiliarity and extreme popularity: he even went himself. “It was a special treat,” he says. “It was expensive, [with] a kind of upscale atmosphere….You could almost see the Westernization of diet happening before your eyes.” Not until he arrived at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1992—where he started reading hundreds of papers on the connection between diet and health—did he notice.

At UIC, Hu learned the strengths and weaknesses of different study designs. For example, epidemiologists often start their investigation of a given hypothesis with a simple correlational, or cross-sectional, study. Researchers might look at roughly 100 people to...
see how what they eat relates to their hypertension status, for instance. Such surveys are one-offs, with no updates over time. They may provide some insight, but leave much to be desired.

Retrospective case-control studies are a bit more sophisticated. Researchers might select 100 recent heart-attack patients and 100 controls—matched by age, sex, and other variables—and compare their diets. The method is better, but far from perfect. Human recall, already an imperfect measuring system, may be altered by life events: the study subjects may think cause heart attacks, for example, and overestimate their level of consumption.

But Hu recognized in particular the importance of large longitudinal cohort studies, including the all-female Nurses’ Health Study II and the all-male Health Professionals Follow-Up Study, both led by Walter Willett. Those studies followed, and decades later continue to follow, hundreds of thousands of health professionals. Every two years, researchers ask participants for information about their smoking and physical-activity habits and their overall health. Every four

years, an extensive nutritional survey goes out, assessing what types of food and how often and much they eat, per day, on average. Researchers have also collected biospecimens like blood, urine, and toenail clippings—providing data on some dietary factors that are difficult to assess through self-reporting. This type of cohort study enrolls people who have not yet been diagnosed with any chronic disease, and will continue to follow them until they die. (“It’s a morbid business,” Eric Rimm, professor of nutrition, once told The Boston Globe.) Across the decades, researchers have gathered a trove of data about each participant, allowing them to conduct detailed statistical analyses that link diet, lifestyle factors, and risk of chronic disease.

Through this research and his own, Hu began to connect the dots between changes in diet quality and increasing risk of chronic diseases across the world. He noticed that the effect was especially jarring in countries experiencing rapid economic development. The short-term economic effects of inundating a country with fast food may be positive, but the long-term increase in healthcare costs has not been. “Of course policymakers usually don’t look at long-term outcomes,” Hu says. “They typically focus on what will happen in the next few years. So we have to take a long-term view of nutrition and diet and their consequences on health and society, and on the economy.”

After finishing his Ph.D., Hu applied, and was accepted, for a postdoctoral fellowship under Willett himself. He gained research skills from the most cited nutritionist ever, and admired his adviser’s tenacity. “Walter is a food warrior,” Hu says, pointing to his defense of public-health guidelines against industry influence. (Willett’s steadfast defense of key nutritional findings has sometimes led to spats with those whose work he vehemently disputes.) Hu also saw in his mentor someone who practices what he preaches. Willett has always extolled the virtues of exercise, and at 74, still bikes from his home in Cambridge to work in Longwood.

Hu himself, though low-key and reserved, also made an early impression. Willett recalls editing his first paper. It was scientifically sturdy, but contained a few typos, as Hu had spent most of his life in China. “But the amazing thing is, once I made a correction, I never saw that error again,” Willett says. Rimm, then an assistant professor, remembers speaking with the new arrival for the first time and saying, “You know, these analyses are really hard because the data sets are so complex. We have all this information we’ve collected for decades on hundreds of thousands of people…let me know if you want some help.” And within four months, he had figured out how to do the analysis and written his first paper, which was unheard of.

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Hu’s first Harvard paper refuted then-accepted recommendations to limit dietary fat. It was the type of fat that mattered most with respect to risk of heart disease, he concluded, not the amount. Trans fat was the most dangerous; women who consumed the most were 53 percent more likely to have a heart attack than those who consumed the least. His findings received front-page coverage in The New York Times.

His publishing accelerated over the years, reaching out into all aspects of nutrition, from broad relationships between diet and health, to precise metabolic pathways that explain why certain dietary choices, like increased red-meat consumption, can lead to inflammation and chronic diseases. He emphasizes that his research is far from an individual endeavor. Hu works not only with Harvard faculty colleagues and students, but also with researchers in Spain, China, and beyond. “I think the whole team deserves more credit than myself,” he emphasizes. To perform serious research, write strong papers, and advocate for policies that make plant-based diets more accessible and affordable, Hu needs a robust team, across disciplines, and across the world. And as he has learned, sometimes progress isn’t just about producing the best available evidence. Sometimes, it’s about fighting to defend it.

Late this past September, Hu received emails from several reporters requesting comment on a group of five systematic reviews about red-meat consumption and health outcomes to be published in Annals of Internal Medicine. The reviews preceded dietary recommendations from an ad hoc committee, including many of the papers’ authors, who concluded that people should continue eating as much of it as they saw fit.

For Hu and his HSPH colleagues, who had reached consistently different conclusions for decades, the findings were baffling. And even though contradictions appear among published papers, especially those dealing with popular topics, the recommendations took an especially inflammatory approach, directly naming and
“Globally, if we always just wait for the absolute proof or conclusive evidence, then it’s going to be disastrous. It’s going to be too late for both human health and the environment.”

disputing recommendations from the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans; the United Kingdom dietary guidelines; the World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research; and the World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer. Hu was not thrilled by the sensational title for the press release: “New guidelines: No need to reduce red or processed meat consumption for good health.”

He took particular issue with the bold headline claim, fearing that media sources would distribute the new study without context, giving people the impression that the controversial findings were the most conclusive to date. Nutritional epidemiologists often find themselves in this predicament: a contrarian study is more interesting than one that supports a widely accepted view. Shortly after receiving the news release, several nutrition department faculty members who received interview requests began working together to figure out how best to respond.

Hu and Willett found that the ad hoc committee, made up mostly of “methodologists” without backgrounds in nutrition, had applied the GRADE standard—designed for controlled drug trials—to nutrition studies. As a result, most of the studies were judged to be of “low” or “very low” quality for “certainty of evidence,” because the GRADE approach categorizes observational studies as low-quality evidence, and randomized clinical trials—often impossible to perform in nutritional studies for practical and ethical reasons—as high-quality evidence. Even under this system, which Hu called “inappropriate” for evaluating nutrition studies, he argued that the committee’s own data showed that red meat did have a negative impact overall, but that the evidence was dismissed due to its “low certainty.”

To add context to the report and explain the problems with the new guidelines, the department developed an online Q&A page, spelling out why it believed the reviews were neither as rigorous nor as conclusive as the Annals authors claimed. In the days preceding the study’s official release, Hu, Willett, and other faculty members handled dozens of calls from reporters, answering a variety of questions about its findings.

Their efforts stirred controversy. In late January, John Sharp, chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, accused Hu and Willett of working with the True Health Initiative (THI), an independent organization that promotes healthy lifestyles, to “discredit scientific evidence that runs contrary to their ideology.” (The pair are listed among several hundred council members on the THI website.) In a letter to President Lawrence S. Bacow, Sharp cited a Journal of the American Medical Association article in which Annals editor-in-chief Christine Laine stated that her inbox was inundated with about 2,000 caustic bot-generated emails in a half-hour before the Annals issue was released. She accused Hu and Willett, among others, of breaking embargo policy, and criticized their decision to send a letter that urged her to “withhold publication of potentially damaging misinformation pending all due and appropriate review of the matter by [her] office.”

Willett, in a phone interview, referred to THI as a “very informal organization” and denied any wrongdoing, including using a bot to send emails. “I think none of us would know what to do with a bot if we saw one, or had one,” he said. “It would’ve been much worse had nobody said anything about the fact that this was very incon-

Hu knows that there is plenty of room for improvement in nutritional studies. It’s easy to see relationships between population-wide chronic diseases and red-meat consumption, but harder to find proof that this relationship is causal. Double-blind randomized clinical trials are the gold standard for drug tests. In nutrition studies, such tests can be run for dietary supplements that can fit into a pill, like fish oil, but that won’t work for most foods: it would be hard for subjects not to notice that they are eating large quantities of red meat over a long period of time. It’s also unethical, according to the principle of “First, do no harm,” to encourage this type of consumption. Even without large clinical trials, he believes scientists can make causal inference based on consistent evidence from large cohort studies and small intervention trials.

He and his colleagues are working on these problems, aiming to improve nutritional epidemiologic studies and develop more accurate and reliable dietary assessment tools. Hu thinks that new technology like metabolomics—which can measure thousands of small molecules derived from the metabolism of specific foods and nutrients in blood and urine samples—holds promise in identifying at-risk individuals and tailoring dietary interventions to improve their health.

But even now, Hu thinks there’s enough evidence to act. “In many situations, we cannot afford to wait until so-called conclusive evidence or absolute evidence is obtained,” he says. Just as observational studies made it clear that smoking increased disease risk, he believes that obesity, chronic disease, and climate change present challenges too severe to be pushed to the future. “Globally, if we always just wait for the absolute proof or conclusive evidence, then it’s going to be disastrous,” he says. “It’s going to be too late for both human health and the environment.”

Jacob Sweet is a Harvard Magazine staff writer and editor.
In March 2016, days after Donald Trump surged through Super Tuesday toward the Republican presidential nomination, Harvard political scientist Pippa Norris published an online op-ed in The Washington Post that carried a striking data point. In a survey from 2011—well before the candidate’s rise—44 percent of Americans without college degrees approved of having a strong leader who, in the words of the study, “doesn’t have to bother with congress or elections.” Norris warned, “This is not an isolated finding or quirk of fieldwork.”

In the article, headlined “It’s not just Trump,” Norris pointed to a thesis that has become familiar since the election. Although candidate Trump seemed to some observers to have appeared from nowhere, an unlikely and almost inexplicable figure, Norris placed him in a much larger pattern. For two decades, she wrote, populist authoritarian leaders—appealing to nationalism and tradition, preaching hostility toward outsiders and elites—had attracted swelling support across Europe and the Americas, winning legislative seats and ministerial offices, gaining government power. Trump was a part of the wave.

The phenomenon, she suggested, was not primarily driven by economic inequality and dispossession—just look, she says, at the rise of populist authoritarians in Sweden and Denmark: affluent societies with “cradle-to-grave” welfare systems and well-educated, economically secure populations. Instead, Norris wrote, “populist authoritarianism can best be explained as a cultural backlash in response, more secular, more cosmopolitan, more global—that transformation has triggered a deep and intense reaction among traditionalists, whom she identifies as older, whiter, more traditionalists who feel threatened, marginalized, and left behind. Norris argued that as societies have become familiar since the election. Although candidate Trump seemed to some observers to have appeared from nowhere, an unlikely and almost inexplicable figure, Norris placed him in a much larger pattern. For two decades, she wrote, populist authoritarian leaders—appealing to nationalism and tradition, preaching hostility toward outsiders and elites—had attracted swelling support across Europe and the Americas, winning legislative seats and ministerial offices, gaining government power. Trump was a part of the wave.

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Exploding America’s Myths
As a scholar of contemporary global politics, Norris is a curious figure—influential but restless, leaping from subject to subject, conundrum to conundrum. “I look for problems, basically,” she says. “And I try to find good evidence and interesting ways to think about what’s happening. And then I move on to other problems.” In an academic career spanning not quite 40 years, she has written two dozen books and edited two dozen others, examining gender politics, the digital divide, media, political communications, religion and politics, elections, public opinion, democratic institutions and cultures, voter trust, and voting behavior. What unites this constellation of interests is the breadth of Norris’s comparisons. It’s not unusual for her to absorb and analyze data from 30 or 40 countries—or 100. “Inglehart, my co-author, has always said that you can either fly over a place and get the big view, or you can walk in the fields and get the small view,” she says. “And they’re both useful, and lots of people are walking in the fields, which is great. They’re telling us details about what’s happening. But you also need people who can go over it all and see patterns—to see, for example, that Trump isn’t just Trump. Because if you only see him that way, then you mistake the evidence.”

This broad focus developed by degrees. Norris grew up in the middle-class London borough of Richmond upon Thames, where her father was a pharmacist and her mother stayed home. She was one of the first in the family to attend college, earning a joint honors degree in politics and philosophy at the University of Warwick. “I didn’t want to go to Oxford,” she says. “I wanted to go somewhere that was new.” Warwick was founded in 1965; Norris arrived six years later, when “It was still being built.” The student body was small: “That was quite exciting—I was more engaged in developing that university than almost anything I’ve done in my life. They were known as ‘white tile universities,’ or ‘red brick universities,’ these brand-new universities founded by the Labour Party” and located in major industrial cities. “The idea was there’d be much less emphasis on class.” From Warwick, she went on to a Ph.D. in politics at the London School of Economics, followed by teaching positions at Northumberland University in Newcastle and then Edinburgh University, where she focused on British elections.

The Authoritarian Reflex
Pippa Norris puts America’s flagging democracy in global context.

Western societies against long-term, ongoing social change.” Drawing on data that included the World Values Survey, an international research project tracking attitudes and beliefs in nearly 100 countries (she is a board member), Norris argued that as societies have grown more liberal on social issues during the last half-century—more open to diversity and LGBTQ rights, more egalitarian about gender roles and racial equality, more expansive in democratic representation, more secular, more cosmopolitan, more global—that transformation has triggered a deep and intense reaction among traditionalists who feel threatened, marginalized, and left behind. Those traditionalists, whom she identifies as older, whiter, more rural, and less well educated, have tended to turn toward forceful leaders promising to hold back the rising tide.

To her, all this seemed like common sense. The parallels between the 2016 election and the hard-line European parties she had been studying for more than a decade—France’s National Front, the UK Independence Party, the Swedish Democrats, the Danish People’s Party, the Alternative for Germany, Hungary’s Jobbik, Greece’s Golden Dawn—were unmistakably clear. “I thought everybody already kind of knew what I was saying,” recalls Norris, the McGuire lecturer in comparative politics at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS), where she has taught since 1992. Norris found herself inundated with responses from readers, some of whom wanted to argue, but many more who were simply astonished. And so a few months later, about the time Trump was accepting his party’s nomination, she and her longtime collaborator, Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist at the University of Michigan, expanded the essay into a working paper—itself widely cited—and then into a book, Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism, which appeared in February 2019, dense with data and footnotes. The cover featured an image of three world leaders, lined up next to each other like faces on an alternate Mount Rushmore: Donald Trump, France’s Marine Le Pen, and Hungary’s Viktor Orbán.

by LYDIALYLE GIBSON
In 1992, she came to Harvard on sabbatical and never left, transitioning from a visiting lectureship to a named one. For several years, she was also associate director of research at HKS’s Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy. She has sometimes taught classes in the Law School and the government department. Working at Harvard, she says, “forced me to go worldwide in thinking about data sets and evidence and theories, because coming here, you can’t teach about British elections, because nobody cares.” Even focusing on Europe seemed too narrow: “So I began trying to understand the issues in a much broader global context. And I always bring the United States in as one of the countries in my comparisons,” she adds. “You know, in America, they think that comparative politics means looking at the rest of the world. Like, ‘America’s not part of that.’” She laughs. “Oh sorry, it is!”

Those comparisons sometimes have a way of undercutting Americans’ collective mythology. Since 2012, Norris has directed the Electoral Integrity Project, an initiative she co-founded to evaluate the quality of elections around the world. The project is based at Harvard and the University of Sydney in Australia, where Norris is a professor of government and international relations, and it analyzes problems that occur throughout the electoral cycle, from media coverage to campaign finance, electoral law and procedures, district boundaries, party registration, voting, the vote count, election results, and the authorities who oversee the process. Norris and her colleagues collect data from rolling surveys sent in by thousands of social scientists and election experts in more than a hundred countries. The resulting “perception of electoral integrity” score runs from zero to 100. One thing she’s learned, she says, is that “Institutions are really important.” And governments with multiparty elections and power-sharing arrangements—as in Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands—fare better than places like the United States and the UK, with winner-take-all elections: “The rules of the game matter a lot.”

The United States consistently scores lowest among established democracies. “And it’s not just one election,” Norris says—she and her colleagues have found this to be true in every election they surveyed. The group’s most recent report, issued in May 2019, gave the United States a score of 61, on par with Mexico and Panama—and 10 to 20 points behind its European peers and Anglo-American democracies like Australia and New Zealand.

One overarching problem with American elections, Norris says, is partisanship. Decisions about voter registration and electoral procedures and district boundaries—which, ideally, she suggests, should be handled by an independent authority—are instead left to politicians in state houses and city halls. And unlike other West-
ern democracies, the United States lacks professionally trained poll workers and does not set uniform standards across all polling places. After the disputed results in Florida during the 2000 presidential election, she adds, a flurry of new voting restrictions in some states have disproportionately disenfranchised voters who are poor or young or mobile, minority groups, and senior citizens. The result of all this, wrote Norris in a 2016 book titled Why American Elections Are Flawed (And How to Fix Them), is a “bewildering hodgepodge of state laws and local procedures determining some of the most basic electoral procedures and voting rights.”

The places that score highest on Norris’s index are Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland—as well as Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada. Some newer democracies also perform very well, she says: Uruguay, Costa Rica, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, South Korea, Benin.

The Rise of the Authoritarians

The rise of populist authoritarianism began to catch Norris’s attention a decade or so ago. In 2006, she took a leave of absence from Harvard to spend a year and a half at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as director of democratic governance, working to strengthen and support democratic governments and nongovernmental organizations in UN member states. “It was the largest practice since the second began after World War II). All the indicators seemed to point toward steady expansion of democratic rights.

“So, the idea that authoritarianism would make a comeback…” Norris trails off. “But of course, nowadays, what we can plainly see is that the trends globally show the levels of democracy going down.” Hybrid regimes, whose electoral mechanisms combine democratic and autocratic elements, are most immediately at risk of receding into electoral autocracies, as seems to be occurring in Hungary and Turkey, and perhaps even India. In those countries, Norris says, “Elections are being manipulated, and the judgeships are packed with partisans. You find that the parliaments have weakened, and the free press is really under threat. Nationalism is raising its head.” Social science, she says, doesn’t yet have a clear explanation for this reversal. “It means we have to re-examine some of our assumptions,” she says. “We have good explanations for why countries democratize, not for why they find authoritarianism attractive.”

The theory she and Inglehart put forward in Cultural Backlash begins with the concept of a “silent revolution,” which he first documented 40 years ago: the gradual but steady spread of socially liberal ideas in Western democracies beginning during the early civil-rights era and gaining momentum through the 1960s and ’70s, as each successive generation, with increased education and urbanization, pushes further away from the traditional values that baby boomers and their parents were raised with. During the past 20 years, countries like the United States have been approaching a tipping point, Norris says, in which traditionalists, once accustomed to easy predominance and a national culture that reflected their values, now find themselves newly—but still barely—in the minority and feeling insecure; meanwhile, they still make up a majority of people who actually vote. “And so an authoritarianism reflex kicks in,” she says. “They want a strong leader who can push back. A transgressive leader, who doesn’t care if it’s politically correct.”

In 2018, a few months before Cultural Backlash was released, Norris delivered a talk at the University of Wisconsin, laying out its major findings and arguments. The screen at the front of the auditorium flashed with one graph after another, charting voters’ education levels and authoritarian values, moral conservatism, income gaps, generational turnover. During the question period that followed, one faculty member stood to ask a “short but very provocative” question: did Norris believe that this cultural backlash might actually imperil the free press is really under threat. Nationalism is raising its head.” Social science, she says, doesn’t yet have a clear explanation for this reversal. “It means we have to re-examine some of our assumptions,” she says. “We have good explanations for why countries democratize, not for why they find authoritarianism attractive.”

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and other Western democracies find themselves in now—"is the maximum point of conflict, when people become aware of the differences, become aware of the loss." Americans are in the early stages of what Norris predicts will be the most intense period of anger, on both sides. She told the audience in Wisconsin, "This is a problem for the next 30 years."

Norris and Inglehart’s argument relies in part on a number of large social-science surveys—some global, others focused on particular countries or regions—that try to get at people’s deeper values and attitudes, rather than opinions on particular issues or events. The World Values Survey and the European Social Survey, for example, seek to predict how people might behave in particular political contexts. Others, like the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and the Expert Judgment Survey of European Political Parties, track the policies, positions, and ideologies of national parties.

What Norris and Inglehart found points to an uptick in what they define as authoritarian values: the importance respondents place on security and order, and on conventionalism. “Because they feel under threat from the outside,” Norris says, “they are hostile to outsiders”—often those with different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Another authoritarian value is loyalty to the leader: someone “who protects the tribe and reinforces the norms that are seen as morally right.” Some observers have spelled out more proximate motivating factors in recent elections in the United States and abroad: racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, nativism. But the deeper motivation underlying those attitudes, Norris maintains, is a turn toward authoritarian values. Her research compares data on that rise, and on other factors like moral conservatism and education level, with election outcomes in various Western democracies. In country after country, they coincide: as the numbers go up for authoritarian values and social conservatism, so do the vote tallies for authoritarian political parties.

Norris takes seriously the most widely cited competing argument—that elections of leaders like Trump, and the passage of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, are part of a revolt against economic inequality and reflect the resentment of those who feel left behind in the global economy. *Cultural Backlash* devotes a chapter to analyzing that view. But the data show a much more mixed picture: if economic grievance were really an underlying cause, Norris says, she would expect to find solid support for Trump among the working poor in inner cities and the unemployed. Instead, she finds that income level is not a reliable predictor of support for authoritarian parties: the urban poor voted against Trump, and many higher-income Americans voted for him. A similar dynamic holds for Brexit support, the other major case study in *Cultural Backlash*. The highest economic correlation of support for Trump was among voters who were neither rich nor poor, but moderately well off. Norris sees economic inequality and the decline of industrial jobs as accelerants to votes for authoritarian leaders, but not by themselves a root cause. “You can use the economic thesis to explain certain cases in some ways, and it fits sometimes,” she says. “But it doesn’t fit the big pattern.”

Similarly, she argues that social media, also frequently blamed for worsening polarization, plays a supporting, not a causal, role. Norris points out that email and the first visual Internet browsers started appearing in the early 1990s, and social media did not launch in a widespread way until a decade later. By then, authoritar-
The most popular German author most Americans have never heard of is Karl May, whose adventure novels have sold more than 100 million copies in the German-speaking world. Though the son of poor weavers in Saxony, May nevertheless received supplementary training in music, English, and French in school; meanwhile, his avid reading of popular robber tales, and a visit to a puppet theater at the age of nine, no doubt stimulated his childhood imagination. He trained as a teacher, but lost his license after being charged with stealing a roommate’s watch. Banned from his profession, he became a con man, impersonating among others a doctor and police detective, and spent several years in jail in his twenties. Perhaps these fictional self-projections were the embryonic beginnings of his becoming a best-selling novelist.

The books May wrote in his prime that made him a publishing phenomenon are riveting travel narratives set around the world, but mostly in the Middle East and the Wild West, where his fictional alter ego performs daring actions almost nonstop—a type of mid-nineteenth-century German Indiana Jones. These tall tales playing out in a picaresque fashion in landscapes vividly imagined in great detail, from the Rocky Mountains and American prairies to the sands of the Sahara, have been a perennial favorite of young readers in Germany and beyond. Albert Einstein acknowledged that “my whole adolescence stood under his sign. Indeed, even today, he has been dear to me in many a desperate hour.” Arnold Schwarzenegger stated that May’s books “opened up my world and gave me a window to see America.” But another young Austrian was also a fan: Adolf Hitler.

May spent his years behind bars as a voracious reader, using the prison library to prepare himself for a literary career. After his release, he emerged in his thirties as the
editor of several journals as well as the pseudonymous author of stories in magazines and of pulp fiction novels. He began writing full-time in 1875, and hit his stride as a hugely popular author in mid-career. The first of his famous three novels about Winnetou, the Mescalero Apache chief, and his German friend and sometime sidekick, Old Shatterhand—May's most heroic alter ego—appeared in 1893, when he was 51. His novels have been translated into many languages, and a number of films are based on them. A Karl May Museum opened in Germany in 1928, there are annual Karl May festivals, and a publishing house, Karl May Verlag, keeps his works in print. (None of this German May fervor, though, has had any notable impact on the anglophone world, which has its own repository of Wild West fictions, from James Fenimore Cooper—a major influence on May—to Zane Grey and classic films and television shows. What's more, some of May's legendary “Westmen,” like Old Shatterhand and Sam Hawkens, were actually Germans.)

Though May's tall tales are full of gore and gun smoke, they are also consistently informed by a Christian message: Old Shatterhand will kill only as a last resort. He prefers to shoot those trying to kill him in the hands or knees. May's most idealized Indian character, Winnetou, dies as a Christian after a moving conversion experience: “I believe in the Savior. Winnetou is a Christian. Farewell” are his final words. From a contemporary perspective, this conversion seems an uncalled-for abdication of his Native American identity, but part of May's idealization of Winnetou is the intense homosocial bond between him and Old Shatterhand as they become devoted and loving “blood brothers.” This happens after the “greenhorn” Shatterhand is captured by the Apaches on his first venture into the Wild West, as a surveyor for a railroad company planning to lay tracks across tribal territory without permission. Nearly killed by Winnetou, Shatterhand gains his freedom and the trust of the Apache chief and his tribe through his heroic deeds and devotion to them. The story of their friendship up to Winnetou's untimely death is both highly sentimental and moving. In May's overarching Christian and Eurocentric vision, his sympathetic portrayal of Native Americans in their inevitable decline as they war among themselves, only to be marginalized and destroyed by the inevitable advance of the whites into their shrinking territories, is a tragic one.

May's colorful and dramatic presentation in the Winnetou saga of “the Wild West around the year 1868,” a landscape imagined only from his wide reading, is thoroughly inflected, not surprisingly, by the colonial and racial assumptions of the nineteenth-century imperialist European culture that shaped his vision of a place he never visited. But despite these Victorian-era stereotypes haunting his novels, his fictional paean to his “dear, dear Winnetou” was a powerful protest against what he saw as the genocidal treatment of Native Americans. Their demise is symbolized by the tragic fate of Winnetou, that “splendid human being,” who was “eliminated...just as in short order the entire race will be eliminated, whose noblest son he was.”

In his later years, having achieved wealth and fame with his riveting adventure stories, May turned to writing tendentious philosophical novels with allegorical speculations about humanity's rise from evil to good. In the spring of 1912, shortly before his death, he delivered a public lecture in Vienna, “Up into the Realm [Reich] of the Noble Humans,” in which he paid tribute to the peace movement and the pacifist ideal of Nobel Peace Prize winner Bertha von Suttner, who was a guest of honor. In this lecture, May declared that human worth was not defined by skin color and championed an evolutionary ideal of a noble humanity. The young, impoverished Hitler attended the lecture, but seems to have appropriated May’s pacifist “Reich” ideal for his own infernal ideological purposes, failing to process May’s powerful Christian and pacifist message against genocide.

Eugene Stelzig, Ph.D. ’72, is Distinguished Teaching Professor of English emeritus at the State University of New York at Genesco.
S

lavery, said historian Vince Brown last year, is a perpetual state of war. He was quoting the formerly enslaved eighteenth-century British abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, who bought his freedom in 1766. What did Equiano mean? Slavery resembles war in an immediate sense, Brown continued: it is a “forceful, collective assault” sustained by constant state terror.

But it is also true in a literal sense. European colonial empires were created through vast networks of war and conquest, which created the displaced Africans sold into slavery and forced to power the economic and military engines of those same empires.

“How do you make a slave? You take dislocated, alienated people who are removed from their networks of care and connection, and they become vulnerable to predation,” says Brown, who is Warren professor of history and professor of African and African American studies, during a subsequent conversation. Maintaining that system requires war. “If we recast what we think of as slavery not just as work—which it mostly is—but as war, as a kind of military activity, you see all kinds of things…Wars to produce slaves. Wars to make territory for plantation slavery. The British, the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch and others fighting each other in the New World to take territory that they can exploit with those African slaves who are often themselves the products of dislocation caused by warfare in Africa.”

Brown, like a growing number of historians, sees slavery as an extension of the transatlantic wars that embroiled Europe, Africa, and the Americas during the era of European colonization. “Often in conversa-
tions about African-American history and African-American politics," he says, "we don't situate them as firmly as I think we ought to in the context of empire and militarization and warfare." Brown's writing on these subjects, most recently in his new book, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, has also taught him to view racism itself as a kind of "anti-black militarism": "The racism that attended, supported, and outlived Atlantic slavery is a species of war as well."

*Tacky's Revolt* tells the story of the Jamaican slave revolt of the same name, the largest such rebellion in the eighteenth-century British empire, and a part of the larger Seven Years' War among Europe's colonial powers. The rebels—about 1,500 of them, possibly many more, marching across the island between April 1760 and October 1761—didn't succeed in wresting their freedom from the British. But the revolt reverberated across the Americas and, along with other uprisings in the region, helped bring
about the end of the slave trade. It also helped forge perceived links between blackness and violence that endure to this day.

Despite these connections, the revolt has not previously been understood as a part of the web of war that shaped the history of the Atlantic. “This has always been part of the history of slavery and the history of slave revolt, not part of a larger history of imperial warfare,” Brown says. Historians at the time “were willing to recognize the threat posed by black people, but were unwilling to concede that they were genuine political actors,” he writes in Tacky’s Revolt. That’s a mistake, he argues, because it ignores the military acumen that many of the insurgents had brought with them from Africa’s Gold Coast. They were revolting not from a position of inexperienced panic, but with the martial training and leadership they had gained on a continent that had been transformed by colonial slave wars. Apongo, one of the rebellion’s leaders, had been a West African military leader and, after his capture and sale, a sailor in the British Royal Navy and a driver on a Jamaican plantation. The insurgents were not merely victims of imperial warfare, but participants in it.

In fact, communities of Africans, known as maroons, managed to create free societies of their own on the margins of empire throughout the Americas. In Jamaica, huge numbers of enslaved people were imported during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resulting in what Brown calls “a seemingly unrelenting series of slave rebellions.” Bands of runaways built villages and cultivated crops in the mountains, where it was difficult for the colonists to fight them. Some of them officially won their sovereignty after the First Maroon War in 1739, in exchange for helping to catch future runaways and providing military support to the British. News of these insurrections no doubt reached future rebels like Apongo.

“More and more historians are seeing that the African background of the slave system is really critical,” says Marcus Rediker, a historian at the University of Pittsburgh. Rediker’s The Amistad Rebellion (2012) showed that the key to that pivotal 1839 revolt, which resulted in a U.S. Supreme Court case, had been the rebels’ training as warriors in Sierra Leone. “Vince’s work,” he explains, “is taking this theme and showing how Tacky’s Revolt in Jamaica was premised on a whole set of experiences that people brought with them from West Africa.”

The tradition that he and Brown work in, Rediker adds, is sometimes called “history from below”: “This is the history of people who have been left out of a great many historical accounts...Who gets to count as an historical agent? Who is seen as someone who helps make history? By recovering these military traditions in West Africa and showing how they drove a slave revolt, Vince is in a very real way restoring agency to the enslaved people that he studies.”

Brown speaks, even off the cuff, in polished, fully formed paragraphs, as he connects his lifelong interest in warfare to his childhood in San Diego: “one of the largest military garrisons in the history of the world, and one of the most potent.” He saw war all around him: his father and uncles, like many black men of their generation, had served in the military. It was the 1980s, at a time when “the Cold War was heating up again, so talk of war and militarization suffused my childhood. And I often think that we separate off our national history, especially African-American national history, from this larger history of militarization and, frankly, empire that was very present to me growing up.

“I was born in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, and I think that I look back on those 50 or so years and it looks like permanent, endless warfare,” Brown continues. “And I grew up in a military town that was part of that, that was fundamental to the expansion of U.S. militarism across the world. How could my work not think about those themes?”

In college at the University of California, San Diego, he focused on the threat of nuclear war in the contemporary world, studying history, with an emphasis on arms control and diplomacy. “The way people talk about Extinction Rebellion now—climate change—was the way we thought about the potential of nuclear warfare in the 1980s,” he remembers. “The reanimation of the Cold War with Ronald Reagan’s election was something that really scared a lot of people...This was, for me, an urgent priority, to think about how it is that arms control could work.” During Reagan’s arms-control negotiations with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Brown took part in a mock negotiation: “one of the best, most illuminating classes I had, where half the class were Soviets and half were Americans and we tried to negotiate an arms treaty...In some ways, I kind of had of training as an undergraduate in great-power strategy, diplomacy, histories of warfare.”

After the end of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear annihilation seemed less urgent. Still, Brown says, “I still think despite the fact that it’s not as present a topic as climate change is now, the potential for nuclear war between great powers, the problem of warfare and endless war, is, to me, like an existential problem...It’s just assumed, for the most part, that the United States is going to be engaged in warfare somewhere in the world forever.” Brown’s work is preoccupied with the many ways that war is never merely war: with how it metastasizes and gives shape to enduring horrors like slavery and racism. So, he asks, what does it mean for the United States to be in an endless war? “I think we need to start thinking about that a lot more seriously.”

Brown says he was always drawn as much to the arts as to history: growing up, he loved to draw, and he was “a big thespian” in high school. He minored in theater in college, and after graduating in 1990, thought he might try it out as a career, auditioning for stage and on-screen roles in San Diego and Los Angeles. That path didn’t work out, he remembers, in part because the opportunities available to black actors were so limited in the early 1990s: “To the extent that there were black roles on screen, they were mostly what they called ‘urban’ roles, which was kind of a euphemism for ‘street.’ And that just wasn’t me.” Pursuing history instead, he explains, allowed “more control over my own representation.”

Alongside his college work on nuclear-arms control, Brown had also studied African-American history. In an independent study with historian Steven Hahn, he read The Black Jacobins, a history of the Haitian revolution by Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James. “When I read that book I thought, ‘Ah, here is a kind of global history of..."
societies and knew different practices: “In the course of placating new communities of the enslaved, who had come from different how they were used in their New World context to bind together at nearly every home in the slave quarters to demand reparations one way or another by the spirit, which made a point of stopping of death”: “As pallbearers carried the body…[t]hey were directed spirits of all kinds.” Perhaps most interestingly, funerals also in - extensive basis of social communion.” They involved “song, an urgent priority and were perhaps [enslaved people’s] most could hear the sounds of black funerals…funerary rites were in the daily lives of the living: “Everywhere in Jamaica, one spiritual practices were influenced by constant death. “Death the 1750s would have seen almost half their cohort die in that decade. “And then [the book] said something to the effect of: ‘We can’t know what that meant?’”

Brown's curiosity had also been shaped by his post-college environment. He'd spent time working in San Francisco before graduate school, during the initial age of AIDS. “Thinking about that epidemic disease and all the people who were dying during that period raised a question: what does it mean, culturally, to have so many people dying all at once?” he explains. “I did wonder what it meant to be…going to funerals every weekend as just a kind of daily part of your life.”

The idea for his dissertation came when Brown encountered a book on Brazilian sugar plantations by historian of Latin America Stuart Schwartz. Enslaved Africans put to work on one of these plantations in the 1750s would have seen almost half their cohort die in that decade. “And then [the book] said something to the effect of: ‘We can’t know what that meant.’ I took that as a provocation. I remember when I saw that passage, I thought, ‘Well, can we know what that meant?’”

The resulting research, which would become his first book, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (2008), argued that death wasn't just a demographic fact. It transformed the cultural landscape of colonial Jamaica through what he calls “mortuary politics”: the complex ways that inheritance, property ownership, social networks, and spiritual practices were influenced by constant death. “Death in Jamaica destroyed individuals, while generating a society,” he writes. High mortality intensified the presence of the dead in the daily lives of the living: “Everywhere in Jamaica, one could hear the sounds of black funerals…funerary rites were an urgent priority and were perhaps [enslaved people’s] most extensive basis of social communion.” They involved “song, dance, and percussive rhythm, the means of communicating with spirits of all kinds.” Perhaps most interestingly, funerals also included what Brown calls “supernatural inquests into the cause of death”: “As pallbearers carried the body…[t]hey were directed one way or another by the spirit, which made a point of stopping at nearly every home in the slave quarters to demand reparations and atonement from debtors and enemies.”

These rituals were West African in origin, but Brown focuses on how they were used in their New World context to bind together new communities of the enslaved, who had come from different societies and knew different practices: “In the course of placating the dead person and sending the soul on its way, the supernatural inquest shaped values among the enslaved in a very significant way,” he writes. “Offenses that had been committed against the deceased had to be atoned before the spirit could leave the community.... When friends and relatives acted as mediums for the deceased, they not only made criminal accusations on behalf of the dead, but also complained about petty conflicts—‘treachery, ingratitude, injustice, slander’—that threatened the peace of the slave quarters.”

On a more earthly level, slaveholders’ deaths could set in motion events that re-ordered the lives of their human property. Estate executors could sell the enslaved off to repay outstanding debts. As one observer put it: “[F]amilies are torn asunder, a complete disper - sion takes place, and all the horrors of the African trade are again repeated.” Slaveholders might also leave inheritances to enslaved people or free them, as in the not-uncommon cases of children fathered with enslaved concubines. But wills were not always carried out as the deceased intended: executors could ignore or delay such stipulations for their own gain, or for what they deemed to be in the estate’s best interest, leading to fights over property and freedom.

“I just thought that the work he was doing was spellbinding,” recalls Walter Johnson, Winthrop professor of history and professor of African and African-American studies, about watching Brown presenting his research for *The Reaper’s Garden*. “He’s able to think about things that historians have a hard time thinking about in a way that doesn’t destroy the complexity or the vitality of it.”

There had already been decades of scholarly debate over the extent to which West African culture took root in the New World—and whether these cultural practices necessarily constituted a form of resistance to slavery—by the time Brown’s book appeared. “Some people would say there was more Africanness and some people would say there was less,” Johnson explains. “And Vince comes along and makes this very simple point. He says it doesn’t matter where a cultural form is from—it matters what it’s used for.” Slaveholders learned the cultural practices that the enslaved brought with them and then used those practices to terrorize or punish. Enslaved people frequently killed themselves, for example, perhaps believing that they would return to their ancestral lands and relatives after death. To deter such suicides, Brown wrote, slave owners mutilated the bodies of the dead and displayed the remains as terrifying public spectacles, such as hanging decapitated heads, or mounting them on poles. Their actions sought to show that not even death brought deliverance from the island; in addition, enslaved people who died by suicide were denied the funerary rites that enabled their transition to the afterlife.

Brown’s observation about how cultural practices were transformed, and by whom, in their new context was a revelation, Johnson says. “Vince gave this question (please turn to page 69)
Deep Roots

Playwright Antoinette Nwandu confronts race, religion, and her personal history.
by Olivia Schwob

Antoinette Nwandu ’02 has a lot to say. Dressed for battle in the Brooklyn writer’s uniform—sunglasses, leather jacket, boots that clip the pavement—she walks as she talks, uninhibited by uncharted destinations.

Exploratory dialogue is the métier of any good playwright, and Nwandu is very good. Her break-out hit, Pass Over, was hailed for its linguistic signature: languid volleys and rapid-fire wordplay, straddling black vernacular, Beckettian deconstruction, and Biblical prophecy. A reinterpretation of Waiting for Godot for the era of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, the play centers on two young black men who pass their days and nights pinned—by metaphysics, fate, or oppressive social structures—to a street corner. Then tragedy strikes.

During an afternoon hour, Nwandu’s own speech will jump from Beckett to the Kardashians, from church pews to Soul Cycle, from Toni Morrison to the Goonies. She’ll plumb her own history and aspirations, and the core of her artistic mission, even as she reflects on why Instagram makes her so uncomfortable. She is a master bridge-builder between high and low art—or, more to the point, she makes an art of rejecting the distinction.

Although she says, “Change is very slow for me,” it becomes clear, as she begins to...
describe her current projects, that some kinds of change have come on quite suddenly. “Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and then a few things at once,” is how she describes her career trajectory so far.

The “few things” include a screenplay for Amazon Studios, an adaptation of Nafissa Thompson-Spires’s short story “Wash Clean the Bones.” As Nwandu’s first paid studio-writing job, the project has meant learning the industry ropes, on top of adjusting from the stage to the screen. She has another screenplay in the works, as well as a TV show in development with Annapurna Pictures, both in the early stages. And then there are the plays: yet another commission, this one for “a fairly large institution” in the theater world. Meanwhile, she is working through rewrites of her newest play, Tavulu or, The Saddest Song, for its forthcoming premiere at Manhattan’s Vineyard Theater.

Graduating from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts with an M.F.A. in playwriting on the brink of the 2008 financial crisis was her stark awakening to the economic realities of theater; Pass Over marked the light at the end of a long tunnel. The play was first performed in 2017 by Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre Company and ignited some controversy and excitement. It earned a second run, at Lincoln Center, but it was Spike Lee who accelerated Nwandu’s growing career. He filmed one of the performances for Amazon Studios, making Nwandu a Writer’s Guild of America-eligible screenwriter, and then invited her to write for his Netflix show, She’s Gotta Have It, based on his 1986 film of the same name. Now, Nwandu says, the question is: “Do I like being the sort of person who has a normal life for a little while and then does a big thing, or do I like being the sort of person who has a few big things going at the same time?” But that’s mainly rhetorical: like it or not, big things are happening.

She never meant to be a playwright or a screenwriter. She grew up in Los Angeles in the 1980s, raised by a single mother in a fundamentalist Baptist church that Nwandu now considers a cult. She speaks frankly about the aftershocks of her upbringing. Theater was nonexistent; television and movies were tightly controlled. The process of coming to the theater—at Harvard as an English concentrator and beyond—coincided with eradicating the authoritarian voices that had filled her head.

Looking back, she describes her earlier school years that was so memorable and implicitly historical contained a series of comparisons on facing pages of towns in England and New England that bore the same names. Thus there were photos with comment on the towns of Biddeford, Devon, and Biddeford, Maine; of Bath, Somerset, and Bath, Maine; of Portsmouth, Hampshire, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire; of Newhaven, Sussex, and New Haven, Connecticut; and of Hartford, Hartfordshire, and my own town, Hartford, Connecticut. It was

Harvard University citizens. Illuminating History: A Retrospective of Seven Decades (W.W. Norton, $28.95) contains five of his razor-sharp portraits of “small, strange, obscure, but illuminating documents or individuals,” extending from each “datum” to “its meaning for the world at large.” Harvarians may value even more having the texts of his Memorial Minutes for fellow giants Samuel Eliot Morison and Oscar Handlin (see The College Pump, page 64). Historians will value his epilogue on his scholarship, “The Elusive Past.” All readers will cherish the unusually warm, personal introduction, “Entering the Past,” from which this excerpt comes—explaining an education that “began in an addiction I had somehow acquired to reading.”

My parents were complicit in this addiction, and they had an expert to advise them. Hartford’s biggest and best bookstore, which once had sold books to Mark Twain, was then owned by a friend of theirs, Israel Witkower, an émigré from Vienna.

He knew about books of all kinds, in several languages, and visiting his store, with its deep central corridor crowded with books, its alcoves, and its jumbled bargain basement, was an adventure.… History was of no special interest, but I recall two books…that I read before high school and that I later realized were historical in essence. I read and reread them, and I never forgot them. One was a big coffee-table book with a deeply embossed purple cover, published, I think by the Collier’s magazine company, largely consisting of close-up photos of the great men and events of the early twentieth century. The pages were printed in the brownish, “rotogravure” process, but to me they were vivid, and the commentary was readable. The faces of the presidents and other celebrities were intriguing. But it was the battle scenes of World War I that mainly gripped my imagination.…The comments were innocuous, but the scenes were fearful and unforgettable.

The other book of those pre-high-

only later that I would understand that these were mainly towns of England’s West Country and south coast, and why their names would have carried over to New England. But it was enough for me, then, to search for the similarities and differences of these towns on either side of the Atlantic, and to puzzle about how that could have come about.
Bach’s Musical Universe: The Composer and His Work, by Christoph Wolff, Adams University Professor emeritus (WW. Norton, $40). The preeminent Bach scholar (and biographer) here places the composer’s music in context by diving deep into selected works, organized not by period or genre, but by their “transformative musical ideas” for Bach himself.

Fighting Words, by Nancy F. Cott, Trumbull research professor of American history (Basic Books, $32). In a volume subtitled “The bold American journalists who brought the world home between the wars,” Cott follows the correspondents who worked the globe from Palestine to revolutionary China, as well as Europe, during the ascent of Hitler and Stalin: Dorothy Thompson, James Vincent Sheean, John Gunther, and Rayna Raphaelson. Given many Americans’ current inwardly directed state, a successor generation who might explore and interpret the rest of humanity would be refreshing, welcome, and important.

1774: The Long Year of Revolution, by Mary Beth Norton, Ph.D. ’69 (Knopf, $32.50). Cornell’s Alger professor of American history emerita looks at the 16 months between the Boston Tea Party and the battles of Lexington and Concord, during which war between colony and parent became inevitable. A brisk, informed narrative, it amply rewards revisiting what may initially have seemed familiar events.

Serious Noticing: Selected Essays, 1997-2019, by James Wood, professor of the practice of literary criticism (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $35). The critic (The New Yorker, the London Review, etc.), collects writing about writers canonical and contemporary. He aims, he observes, to “do three things at once” in his work: speak about fiction “as writers speak about their craft”; write “criticism journalistically, with verve and appeal”; and bend such criticism “back towards the academy in the hope of influencing the kind of writing that is done there.”

Spenserian Moments, by Gordon Teskey, professor of English (Harvard, $45). Barely four years after his expansive The Poetry of John Milton, the author is back with a vast essay collection centered on Edmund Spenser’s Faerie Queene—which he says is, “unlike Paradise Lost, capable of indefinite extension, like the opening spiral of a nautilus shell;” and therefore examines not as a poetic object but rather as “an ongoing creative project into which the unpredictable enters with time.”

The Rule of Five: Making Climate History at the Supreme Court, by Richard J. Lazarus, Albel professor of law (Harvard, $29.95). The author, expert in both environmental law and Supreme Court advocacy, combines those perspectives to craft an exciting, accessible narrative about Massachusetts vs. United States Environmental Protection Agency, the 2007 opinion that, after much litigating, authorized federal regulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse-gas emissions. Beyond that focus, many readers may find the book especially valuable for its explanation of the practicalities of winning a court ruling: getting to those five votes in favor of one side or the other.

Alan I.W. Frank House (Rizzoli, $65). In this Bauhaus centennial year (see “What a Human Should Be,” March-April 2019, page 44), the stupendous Pittsburgh home designed by Walter Gropius, newly arrived to lead the Graduate School of Design, and Marcel Breuer, and built by the family behind Copperweld—intact, restored, and still inhabited by their son, Alan I.W. Frank ’54—is documented and celebrated in a lush, large-format book appropriate to the scale and importance of the residence as an icon of modernist design. With essays by architectural historians Kenneth Frampton, Loeb Fellow ’73, Barry Bergdoll, and Charles A. Birnbaum, Loeb Fellow ’98.

What Remains: Bringing America’s Missing Home from the Vietnam War, by Sarah E. Wagner, Ph.D. ’06 (Harvard, $29.95). The haunting double meaning of the title underscores the difficult subject: the search for the unaccounted-for war dead, the new technologies used to identify remains, the people who do this work (always in demand, given the nation’s long wars, and the devastation wrought by terrorist attacks like 9/11), and the multiple meanings of the results. The author, an anthropologist at George Washington University, writes with an ethnographer’s sensitivity and eye for detail.

The Frank House, in 1940: the study (left), with a large collection of books on architectural modern art from the 1930s; and an exterior view of the dwelling’s iconic Bauhaus features.
Visualizing Taste, by Ai Hisano (Harvard, $39.95). A former postdoctoral fellow in business history at the Business School, now at Kyoto University, explains how the “natural” appearance of foods (why margarine is yellow) was socially, and most often commercially, constructed. Original and with vivid color plates: check out the advertisement for Du Pont Cellophane protecting red meat in the grocery stores of an earlier era.

Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America, by Thomas J. Brown ’81, J.D. ’84, Ph.D. ’95 (University of North Carolina, $29.95 paper). How did a nation wary of a standing army come to erect war memorials seemingly everywhere? The author, a University of South Carolina historian, locates the phenomenon in the aftermath of the Civil War—and thus exposes a less observed and contested aspect of these memorials than the current reinterpretation of their connections to the legacy of slavery and the Confederacy. Harvard’s Memorial Hall appears numerous times.

Citizen Outlaw, by Charles Barber ’85 (Ecco, $27.99). A written-with-access account of William Outlaw’s trajectory from leading a cocaine gang in New Haven, through extended imprisonment for homicide and armed assault, to release and a new, constructive role as community advocate on those same streets. The author knows the terrain well: he is a lecturer in psychiatry at Yale, and writer-in-residence at Wesleyan.

The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India, by Ajantha Subramanian, professor of anthropology (Harvard, $49.95). An academic, demanding study of the persistence of caste and severe social stratification in India, as exemplified by access to its elite engineering universities. Useful for understanding contemporary India and—in its explication of how “the notion of meritocracy, like that of a color-blind society, has come to serve the reproduction of inequality”—the contemporary United States.

India’s Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy, by Madhav Khosla, Junior Fellow (Harvard, $45). A legal scholar and political theorist examines the constitution—effective in 1950, after the end of British colonial rule—of the world’s largest democracy. The “universalism” it embodies seems threatened today, to say the least. “Modern political life,” he notes in conclusion, “will of course remain an area of rational and irrational contests, a sphere that is home to frustrated hopes, dangerous fantasies, and surprising victories.” For India’s democracy today, one may well wish that the last of these descriptions holds true.

Why Liberalism Works, by Deirdre Nansen McCloskey ’64, Ph.D. ’70 (Yale, $28). An economist revisits the traditional, eighteenth-century—Locke, Smith, Voltaire, et alii—meaning of the word to remind today’s tribal politicians and citizens that the best way to overcome poverty and tyranny is through the “true liberal values” invoked in the subtitle: freedom, equality, and prosperity.

Magdalena: River of Dreams, by Wade Davis ’75, Ph.D. ’86 (Knopf, $30). The anthropologist/ethnobotanist/explorer delivers a loving paean to Colombia, where he came of age, and its mighty river, the Magdalena. He is alive to the country’s “mountains and forests, rivers and wetlands…and the beauty and power of every tropical glen and snow-crested equatorial peak”—and to the character of the people they have shaped, who “long for peace” from the world’s, and their own, cocaine-fueled conflicts.


My City of Dreams, by Lisa Gruenberg, assistant professor of medicine (TidePool Press, $28). In this carefully researched and hauntingly written memoir, the author—the daughter of a Holocaust survivor—not only records her own life, but also that of relatives long lost to darkness, terror, and murder.

Recognizing Wrongs, by John C.P. Goldberg, Carter professor of general jurisprudence, and Benjamin C. Zipursky (Harvard, $45). A legal theorists’ revisionist interpretation of tort law, written with admirable clarity. Given that “those who spend their time studying tort law…often are least in tune with its commensensical roots,” they clear the air thus: “One who wrongfully injures another can be held accountable by the victim.” From there, naturally, many complications, philosophical and otherwise, ensue.
work, including *Pass Over* and its predecessor, *Breach*, as attempts to use theater as “therapy.” (*Breach* presents a young writer-teacher trapped between competing expectations and struggling to forge her own identity.) She stands by those plays, and the version of herself who wrote them, but now sees them as “masochistic” at the root, she says. “I’ll never hurt myself to make art again.”

But Nwandu’s childhood also bequeathed her artistic instincts: the theatrics of the church, the particularities of her family dynamic, and the ideas of ’80s popular television. And she remains interested in autobiography, if not in reopening old wounds: the protagonist in *Tuvalu* is a black woman looking back on her adolescence in Los Angeles, amid the O.J. Simpson trial and violence in her own home. Now, Nwandu says, the challenge is to marshal those elements to leave the audience with something more than a reiteration of pain.

The current political moment sharpens the urgency of that challenge. Living through what she calls “the day-by-day formation of a fascist state” has given her a new mission: to build community through storytelling and create a space to heal. For Nwandu, television, especially in the era of streaming, presents an unparalleled opportunity to experiment and to speak to a diverse America that exists nowhere in physical space. “I’m not asking people to forget their hatred as a way of glossing over it, but to engage with their hatred as a way of letting it go.”

But for transformative emotional journeys through storytelling, Nwandu believes theater remains the place where it’s truly possible for humans to really connect. In her words: “We are meat packets who need to sit next to other meat packets sometimes, at a very basic level.”

In *Tuvalu*, Nwandu meditates on the notion of apocalypse. What happens after the worst happens? What new kinds of relationships and realities become possible in the wake of true disaster? But for the moment, in the midst of intensive rewrites, she can’t be much more specific than that. “I just don’t want to pin it down yet, even for myself.”

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**Hot Pursuits**

*Bassist Matthew Berlin*

*by Lydialyle Gibson*

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atthew berlin ’89, a jazz and blues bassist who also knocks around in folk, ragtime, and classical and performs sometimes three or four nights a week, is quick to tell people that he’s not a real musician. “A hack,” he insists, half-kidding. His regular job is as a trust and estates lawyer in a Boston firm. But the truth is, he’s been a musician—a serious one—longer than he’s been anything else. “It’s just always been there,” he says.

That comes through in his most recent project, a jazz album released this year: *I Just Want to Be Horizontal*. Berlin produced it and played bass; the album is a collaboration with two of his oldest friends and bandmates: singer Samoa Wilson and the legendary folk guitarist Jim Kweskin (whose eponymous 1960s jug band attracted imitators including the Grateful Dead and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; for this album, Kweskin gathered a nine-piece jazz ensemble).

The album takes its title, and its inspiration, from the music of swing pianist Teddy Wilson (no relation to Samoa), who ran a studio band in Kansas City during the 1920s and ’30s and played with jazz greats Benny Goodman, Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday. “His band was incredibly tight,” Berlin says. “The feel was that they were swinging so hard, and it just was so effortless and clean and dignified and cool.”

That’s a feeling the album tries to replicate: the way the piano intro to a song like “Lover Come Back” opens up into a winsome, easy swing; the way the guitar and bass take their time soaking into the notes of the title track, “I Want to Be Horizontal”—a 1934 jazz ballad transformed here into a modern blues—while Wilson’s voice glides across the melody. Many of the album’s songs were recorded by Teddy Wilson’s band; Berlin and Kweskin made a point of unearthing old verses, lost in the intervening decades, even as they updated some of the arrangements.
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— Mario Puzo
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Chapter & Verse
Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Margaret Lindsey hopes someone knows the source of “Unmeasur’d space is the Lord’s habitation, His hand upholds creation’s realm...”—“the beginning of a hymn-like chorus which was one of the pieces our school choir sang at a schools’ competition at the Sydney Town Hall some 60-plus years ago. Certain things on Google are somewhat similar textually, but no cigar, and there is nothing musically. Any assistance would be most welcome; this has been driving a friend and me mad for decades.”

Send inquiries and answers to Chapter and Verse, Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via email to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.
could always get work. Kids like us could put in for a grant and somebody would find the money to put up a stage and lighting for a concert at two o’clock in the morning at some square in the old Barrio Gótico.”

A year later he came back, renewed, to Cambridge and Harvard, where he concentrated in social studies and played with the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, the Bach Society, the Mozart Society, and a handful of campus ensembles and pop-up jazz clubs. “My days were just totally lit up, after the academics, with jazz and classical music.” That was also true after college, when Berlin headed to law school at the University of Oregon: “Eugene has a great music scene.” Today he plays regularly with half a dozen Boston-area bands with evocative names: the Dixie Cookbook, the Busted Jug Band, Jazz Is in the Air, the Racky Thomas Blues Band. Whenever he puts together an ensemble of his own, he calls it the Berlin Hall Repertory Orchestra, a nod to the juke joint that his grandfather, a Latvian immigrant, ran above the family’s dry-goods store in Newport News, Virginia. For some years, Berlin played and traveled with country-bluesman Howard “Louie Bluie” Armstrong, “the last of the great black string-band musicians.” When Berlin goes to other cities for work, he tries to set up gigs with musician friends, who are scattered all over. But most of his performances are local: Sinatra standards at a cocktail fundraiser with pianist Shinichi Otsu, or Chicago-style electric blues with the Tall Richard Blues Band at a club on the South Shore. Last October, on one of the late mild evenings of the year, he was in Somerville’s Davis Square, busking with the Dixie Cookbook, which plays early New Orleans jazz. An instrument case stood open for tips at their feet, as the quartet filled the plaza with jaunty syncopation: “My Blue Heaven,” “We’re in the Money,” “Tiger Rag,” “Sweet Sue.” Students and after-work commuters lingered, while children gamboled over from a nearby restaurant’s outdoor tables, dragging their fathers by the hand.

“One thing I’ve learned,” Berlin says, “the more you play a tune”—whether an improvisation or rehearsed set pieces—“the more dimensions open up, the more space for interpretation.” In improvised music, “The opportunity for open landscapes is quite extraordinary, but even if you’re playing the same tunes over and over, it’s like you find these little internal structures. It’s like discovering a cathedral inside something very small.”

Legal journalist Adam Cohen ’84, J.D. ’87—last seen in these pages with an excerpt from his book on eugenics, focusing on University leaders’ support for that species of social engineering (“Harvard’s Eugenics Era,” March-April 2016, page 48)—has now cast his eye at the past half-century of Supreme Court jurisprudence. What he has found is summed up in the title of his new book, Supreme Inequality: The Supreme Court’s Fifty-Year Battle for a More Unjust America (Penguin Press, $30). The introduction begins with several examples, including an African-American catering assistant at a university who was racially harassed at her workplace, followed by this one:

Jack Gross, an Iowa insurance executive, had a similar difficulty with the Court a few years earlier. He was one of a group of high-performing workers over the age of 50 who were demoted by his company on the same day. Gross was forced to hand his responsibilities over to a younger worker he supervised. A jury ruled that he had been a victim of age discrimination and awarded him damages.

The Court overturned the jury’s verdict, again by a 5-4 vote. Gross met the standard of proof required in race and sex discrimination cases. The Court decided, however, that victims of age discrimination had a higher burden of proof, even though the federal laws against race, sex, and age discrimination used identical language. The dissenting liberal justices accused the majority of “unabashed judicial lawmaking.” ...The financial and emotional toll on the losing parties in these cases has been considerable. Jack Gross was devastated when the

“The more you play a tune, the more dimensions open up.... It’s like discovering a cathedral inside something very small.”
“Wild Dreams”

Yangsze Choo’s novels are infused with the tropical mysteries of her childhood.

by STUART MILLER

For a three-year-old Malaysian girl, the “magic hour” came in the heat of the afternoon, when everyone else in the small white bungalow was resting. She’d stand at the window, watching in wonder.

“The world is full of this shimmering heat, a tropical dream,” she recalls. “This old house that is basically falling down and is surrounded by the jungle. There were monkeys and wild chickens and other animals out there.”

The girl held that experience close as her family moved to cities in far-off lands like Japan and Germany for her diplomat father’s work. (Her mother, a Chinese school teacher, couldn’t work while they were abroad.) At each stop she was the new kid, always the foreigner on the outside looking in. She carried the images with her when she crossed the ocean to America, where she graduated from Harvard, worked in the corporate world as a management consultant, then moved to California, where she lives now, and had two children of her own. Along the way, as a stay-at-home-mom, she started translating those childhood memories—not the specifics, but the magic, the wild lushness of a mysterious world—into words, into stories.

Yangsze Choo ’95 became a novelist. Initially, she wrote simply for herself. “For a long time, writing was my secret life,” she says. “I never thought I would get published.” Her first novel was a first-person tale told by an elephant-detective (yes,

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you read that right); it collapsed under the weight of that concept and remains hidden away for eternity.


She returned in 2019 with *The Night Tiger*, another well-received bestseller. Kirkus Reviews declared it “a sumptuous garden maze of a novel that immerses readers in a complex, vanished world.” The book is set in what was then British Malaya, in 1931; it’s a riveting, luminous tale that splits the narrative between Ji Lin, a dance-hall performer whose ambitions are stunted by societal sexism and a strict stepfather, and Ren, an orphaned houseboy for two British doctors with a decadent taste for the exotic.

There are mysterious deaths and rumors of a legendary “weretiger” that’s part-man, part-beast; a deathbed request by one of his masters sends Ren in search of a severed finger. Choo lets her characters follow their own paths. “I wind them up and they go,” she says. So while Dr. Acton, one of the Englishmen Ren serves, is a metaphor for colonialism, he’s also a complete character, with charms and flaws. Choo says he’s a variation of a Silicon Valley “tech bro” in his obliviousness to his own privilege.

“It’s a historical novel, but the themes are incredibly relevant,” says Caroline Bleake ’10, a senior editor at Flatiron Books who worked with Choo on *The Night Tiger*. The novel explores colonialism, power dynamics, gender, and class, and the narrative pulses with peril for both protagonists, thanks to what Choo calls “a big dolloping heap of Agatha Christie” with a touch of the supernatural.

In a broader sense, her literary models include Haruki Murakami, Orhan Pamuk’s *The Eye of the World*, and Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, “all wonderful stories of new and strange worlds interspersed with the ordinary.” She also reached back to her childhood, reading historic traveler’s tales about Malaysia by Isabella Bird and R.H. Bruce Lockhart. There was also some Somerset Maugham lying around her family’s house, including short stories, set in 1930s colonial Malaya. She was too young to fully grasp them, so “I put some of that feeling into the idea of Ren, the houseboy who is privy to a lot of grown-up secrets that he doesn’t quite comprehend.”

Despite the dark undercurrents (Ji Lin is filled with “an inky, twilight gloom” as events become “cold weights on a string of bad luck”), Choo’s characters are energetic and exuberant, much like their creator. She says those evocative phrases, and even the narrative streets that infuse her work with a deep and detailed sense of place. “Writing or reading a novel is like entering someone else’s vivid dream,” she says. “I had to build up a world with specific details, so readers feel like everything is there and it doesn’t get blurry.”

“Writing is like riding a bicycle at night with no lights. You never know what’s coming up, but when you’re on a roll, it’s wonderful.”

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Rallying Cries

Steven Choi works at the vitriolic epicenter of immigration politics.

by NELL PORTER BROWN

As the United States struggles with unauthorized immigration, and the administration of President Donald J. Trump sharply constricts legal means of entry, such as appeals for asylum, political counter-forces have been mobilizing.

In New York City, the essence of multicultural America, few organizations are more fiercely focused on advancing immigrant rights than the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), directed by Steven Choi, J.D.’04. “We need to rebuild a new, expansive, forward-facing vision for what we think a strong immigration system should be,” he says, “engaging with presidential candidates, figuring out what leverage we can use to get them to align with us—all while responding to the continued distortion of an immigration system designed by white supremacist Stephen Miller and the Trump administration.”

The NYIC was instrumental in pushing for state legislative wins last year: the DREAM Act, granting undocumented students access to financial aid and scholarships for higher education, and the “Green Light Law,” allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses. Choi also leads the New York Counts 2020 initiative, having obtained $60 million in city and state funding to reach communities that are traditionally undercounted in the census.

Those “bellwether” victories, he says, cleared the way for the NYIC’s 2020 priority, a statutory “right to counsel”—akin to the public defenders provided for Americans accused of serious crimes—for those facing deportation. Meanwhile, he has expanded NYIC’s political arm and is cementing policy commitments (as he did when endorsing Hillary Clinton in 2016) with candidates in the April 28 New York Democratic primary. The ultimate goal, according to Choi, is “to use New York as the tip of the spear for the rest of the country on immigration policy overall.”

Ideally, he wants a focus on a “robust path to citizenship, a reinforced family-based system that eliminates backlogs that keep some immigrants separated from their families for decades, and an end to the wasteful, inhumane, and cruel practices of our current ‘enforcement’ system.” He envisions an endorsement based on “a common, unified platform, with partners across the country making similar endorsements, so that we can speak with one voice.”

That’s a gargantuan task. But Choi’s been working up to it. Born in the United States, to Korean-immigrant parents, he grew up talking politics at the dinner table, and went on to work in public legal services and community organizing, primarily with Korean Americans, while studying history at Stanford. After earning a master’s in Korean studies from the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, he lived in Korea, “connecting with grassroots progressive and leftist movements there and spending a lot of time thinking about ideology,” before finding a place within the public-interest community at Harvard Law School (HLS).

In 2013, fresh from leading the major expansion of the Korean-American focused MinKwon Center for Community Action, in Queens, he was hired to head the far more diversified NYIC. Its members range from smaller, grassroots groups like South Bronx United and Mekong NYC to SEPA Mujer to mainstay social-service agencies, like Catholic Charities in New York and the Legal Aid Society. Within six years, Choi has built the NYIC into the largest, most diverse organization of its kind in the country—quintu-
plunging its annual budget to $10 million and increasing staff from 16 to 55.

Most significantly, he has opened new, permanent satellite offices in Long Island, Westchester County, Buffalo, and Syracuse, reaching and rallying rising immigrant hubs, including the most recently resettled refugees, from war-torn regions like Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. New York State is home to about 4.5 million immigrants (defined as foreign-born individuals), according to 2017 statistics published by the Migration Policy Institute: 23 percent of the state’s population (a 2.5 percent jump from 2000). In a continuing trend, more than a million live outside New York City.

That growing statewide base was critical in winning the 2019 driver’s license law, and disproved, from Choi’s perspective, the “traditional notion that immigrant issues are a political loser outside of” New York City. Twelve other states already offer licensing options; in New York, debate on the issue spanned 18 years, raising concerns across party lines, and was also used as a partisan wedge. A handful of clerks in Republican-held counties sued over the law (courts have so far upheld it) and some commentators railed against it. “What message are we sending?” asked Fox Nation host Tomi Lahren when the law took effect in December. “Come here illegally, remain here illegally, and instead of paying the consequences, our government will rubber-stamp your illegal activity and hand out perks, like driver’s licenses?”

Choi is undeterred. Everyone benefits when every driver on the road is certified and insured, he argues. “It also pumps millions of dollars into our economy and tax coffers by allowing maximum mobility for all members of our economy, workforce, and society.” Most importantly, he adds, it enables people “to take their kids to school or the doctor’s office, and attend places of worship free of the worry of arrest and po-

Honoring Alumni Leaders

At its winter meeting, the Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) celebrated both those who have made exceptional contributions to their local Harvard clubs and Shared Interest Groups (SIGs), and those organizations that have especially benefitted their alumni communities.

This year’s Outstanding Volunteer Leadership Awards recipients are:

Lewis Auerbach ’63, A.M. ’64, who, during nearly 40 years of leadership with the Harvard Club of Ottawa, has fostered a strong sense of community among generations of alumni. As club president, he expanded membership, improved finances, forged joint operations with the local HBS Club, and strengthened ties to local charities. As HAA director for clubs and SIGs in Canada, he enriched alumni-student engagement and bolstered connections across the six clubs, especially in support of financial aid.

M. Carolyn Hughes ’54, who since 1960 has held nearly every title on the board of the Harvard Club of Long Island, including president, and has chaired its schools and scholarship committee since 1975. Instrumental in developing robust club programming, she continues to contribute ideas and wisdom, and her time as an HAA director for clubs and SIGs has made her an engaging, inclusive Harvard ambassador.

Madeleine Mejia, Ed.M. ’00, a pivotal leader of the Harvard Club of Southern California. As co-vice president of programs for the past five years (helping present more than 60 annually), she has chaired the annual dinner committee, and—as an HAA director for clubs and SIGs—has aided the creation of InstaHarvard events to welcome graduate students into the alumni community. Mejia has also contributed to the growth and success of the Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance in Southern California.

The Outstanding Alumni Community Awards winners are:

The Harvard Club of Hong Kong, which in the last five years has recognized the scholastic and personal achievements of 726 students through its Harvard Prize Book program. Building on these efforts, the club has created a mentorship program pairing alumni with promising young scholars and a sponsorship enabling underprivileged teenagers to attend a summer program at Harvard. The club has also revitalized its programming, engaging alumni and their families through popular events and partnerships. By restructuring its governance and succession planning, the club has established a strong foundation for years to come.

Harvard Alumni for Global Women’s Empowerment, aka GlobalWFE, founded in 2013, which has grown to include nearly 1,200 members and supporters in 44 countries. The SIG has raised awareness about honor killings, the trafficking of girls in Nepal and sexual enslavement of Yazidi girls by ISIS, and the plight of female refugees in Syria. GlobalWFE’s 13-member board, volunteers, and affiliated student group continue to develop a multigenerational community, notably through an essay contest, offered in seven countries, that invites high-schoolers to answer the question: “What’s the biggest challenge facing women and girls in your country today?”

As co-chair of the New York Counts 2020 Coalition, Choi meets with colleagues and constituents at a conference.

Such a volatile political climate, he argues, has at times required a more combative approach.
tential deportation by doing these activities without a license.

There are significant numbers of “persuadables,” Choi explains: people undecided on the licensing and other immigrant-rights issues. Much of the anti-immigration sentiment was fueled primarily by those county suits, he says. Such a volatile political climate, however, has at times required a more combative approach. “One thing that’s changed in the last couple of years,” he asserts, is that “now I have no qualms picking fights with anybody.” That includes challenging New York’s powerful Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo, state legislators, and anyone else “not doing the right thing or engaging in immigrant hatred and demagoguery.”

Cuomo ran his 2018 re-election campaign on a heavily anti-Trump platform, holding his inaugural address on Ellis Island, touting his family’s own immigrant Italian roots. And Choi has dogged him to deliver. When Cuomo’s “Liberty Defense Project”—a public-private venture to help immigrants access legal services, regardless of document status—turned out, at the eleventh hour, to be only $1 million in foundation donations, Choi says, “We went on a scorched-earth campaign.” Eventually $10 million in public funds annually were earmarked for legal services, he says, “but at significant cost to our political relationship with Cuomo.”

Last summer, during the license campaign, it was reported that Cuomo’s office was undermining the effort, so Choi wrote a New York Daily News op-ed piece questioning Cuomo’s courage and comparing him, unfavorably, to his father, former legendary governor Mario Cuomo. “We were like, you know what?” Choi says. “There’s only one opportunity to do driver’s licenses. We’re going all out.”

Such adamancy derives in part, he says, from “growing up as a non-white racial minority and constantly feeling like I was not up to par, that I was overlooked.” His parents had graduated from a top South Korean medical school, but then spent nearly a decade gaining credentials through grueling hours as peripatetic medical residents in the
United States before settling their family in Chappaqua, in Westchester County, in 1983. They were the only immigrants, and the only non-white residents, in their neighborhood. (That county is now 25 percent immigrant, Choi adds.)

During a 2016 interview for KoreanAmericanStory.org’s Legacy Project (viewable on YouTube), he described himself as a goofy-looking Asian kid with glasses who loved basketball, but was immediately discounted on the court because of his looks. “I just got used to having a chip on my shoulder,” he says in the video, laughing good-humoredly. But the points feel stark.

Elementary-school classmates would ask, “Are you American?”—and Choi didn’t know what to say. A friend finally declared that he was born in America, so he must be American, Choi remembers, “which seemed to settle the matter, at least for the moment. Little did I realize how complex the answer to that question would actually be.”

He grappled with that at Stanford, learning about colonialism and imperialism, and gravitated toward social justice. He joined student efforts to increase tenure rates for under-represented female and minority professors, and wrote his senior thesis on the case of the tenured Stanford professor H. Bruce Franklin, who was fired in 1972 on charges of inciting student disruptions.

By then, Choi was feeling relatively radicalized himself. While at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, he interned during summers at community education centers in Los Angeles’s Koreatown and the predominantly Asian neighborhood of Flushing, Queens. After earning his master’s in 2000, he spent a year in Korea, then jumped from that heady experience straight into HLS, “where most of the students were preparing for lucrative careers in corporate law.” His response was to double down on studying civil and workers’ rights, and racial justice—around the same time the September 11 attacks would utterly redefine Americans’ global outlook and attitudes toward “otherness.”

Recalling his student experiences at the HLS legal services center (now the Wiler-Hale Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School), Choi credits the late clinical professor David Grossman ’79, M.T.S. ’83, J.D. ’88, and then clinical supervisor (now managing attorney) Maureen E. McDonagh for providing a crash course in “real lawyering.” He became so engrossed in the case of a Haitian immigrant family facing a tripling of its rent that he spent most of his final summer in Boston preparing for and arguing a housing-court trial, instead of focusing on studying civil and workers’ rights, and racial justice—around the same time the September 11 attacks would utterly redefine Americans’ attitudes toward “otherness.”

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In New York City after graduation, Choi directed the Korean Workers Project (part of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund), serving as lead counsel on more than 25 state and federal lawsuits, and also developed a community-education campaign. In 2008, he became executive director of the MinKwon Center for Community Action, creating a city-wide Asian-American coalition focused on census and redistricting issues, and leading the charge.
by a 68-32 vote margin, with 14 Republicans voting against. Senate passed a comprehensive reform bill, but it faced significant opposition.

Today, Choi leads the intensive, grassroots effort New York Counts 2020. Obstacles to an accurate count remain, he says, despite the Supreme Court's ruling against the Trump administration's effort (which the NYIC helped fight) to add a citizenship question to the census form. Widespread fear is making people reluctant to participate, he continues, especially as "the administration continues to use its tools and lever in the redistricting process—attempting to make sure that only citizens count in drawing political districts, instead of all people as the Constitution requires."

The proposed legal-counsel legislation raises similar questions about fundamental rights. Losing an immigration case can be as dire as a prison sentence, he maintains—and expecting people to navigate the legal and bureaucratic systems on their own "is farcical." As for children "trying to 'represent' themselves in court? It's flat-out unconscionable."

Choi also co-chairs the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), which has spearheaded issues especially relevant to young people caught up in the crisis, like DACA and the Dream Act, and would love to see comprehensive immigration reforms. Ideally, on the federal level, he'd prioritize creating a cogent path to legalization for undocumented immigrants and an expedited method for clearing backlogged family visas. (Waiting so long to reunite, he says, is a major factor driving undocumented immigration.)

Beyond that, and probably most crucial to narrowing the political divisions over immigration policy, is the need for "a radical re-envisioning of what immigration enforcement means," Choi adds. "The fact is that our system is gargantuan, bloated—filled with private prisons operating for huge profits with a force of agents—who see themselves as cops, and immigrants as 'criminals,'" he continues, and "a court system where judges are... politicized instead of being part of the third branch and the separation of powers."

Such fundamental reforms seemed at least possible in 2013, he points out, when the U.S. Senate passed a comprehensive reform bill, by a 68-32 vote margin, with 14 Republicans in favor. Some form of a bipartisan "grand bargain"—a citizenship path in exchange for more effective border and other enforcement—appeared viable. "Were we 100 percent behind the bill? No," he says. "Did we feel it was important to move the comprehensive bill forward and get it passed? Absolutely. In hindsight, the fact that people on either side of the aisle were talking about a path to immigration reform..." he trails off, then continues: "We would have been glad to engage in that dialogue and push that process forward. That was a substantive, and real, conversation."

Now, he says, it's highly unlikely, even with a Democratic president, that anything like those or other reforms discussed during the past two decades could be broached. But the truth is, "whether Donald Trump gets re-elected or not, the issue of how we treat immigrants—our fellow Americans and future citizens—is only going to get more important," Choi argues. "Will we re-affirm that America is indeed a nation of immigrants? Or will we allow the Stephen Millers of the world to erase this from our collective history?"

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Overseer and HAA Director Elections

This spring, alumni can vote for new Harvard Overseers and Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) elected directors, beginning on April 1, by paper ballot or online. Completed ballots must be received by 5 p.m. (EDT) on May 19. All holders of Harvard degrees, except officers of instruction and government at Harvard, and members of the Harvard Corporation, are entitled to vote for Overseer candidates. All Harvard degree-holders may vote for HAA elected directors.

The HAA nominating committee proposed the candidates listed below. Another slate of Overseer candidates was seeking to gain nomination by petition, with signatures due February 1, as this issue went to press. The HAA-nominated and petition slates are covered at harvardmag.com/overseer-slates-20. Updates will appear at harvardmagazine.com.

For Overseer:
Raphael William Bostic '87, Decatur, Georgia. President and CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
Katherine Collins, M.T.S. '01, Boston. Head of sustainable investing, portfolio manager of the Putnam Sustainable Future Fund and the Putnam Sustainable Leaders Fund, Putnam Investments
David H. Eun '89, J.D. '93, New York City. Chief innovation officer, Samsung Electronics, and president, Samsung NEXT
Susan Morris Novick '85, Old Westbury, N.Y. Senior vice president, Merrill Lynch; freelance journalist, The New York Times
Diego A. Rodriguez, M.B.A. '01, Palo Alto. Executive vice president, chief product and design officer, Intuit Inc.

For elected director:
Santiago Creuheras, A.L.M. '00, A.I.M. '01, C.S.S. '01, Mexico City. Senior consultant on sustainable infrastructure and energy, Inter-American Development Bank
Kelsey Troy Leonard '10, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Baning Postdoctoral Fellow, McMaster University
Michael D. Lewis '93, Cambridge. Strategic technology advisor, iCorps Technologies
Mallika J. Marshall '92, Weston, Massachusetts. Medical reporter, CBS Boston; physician, Massachusetts General Hospital
David R. Scherer '93, Chicago. CEO and principal, Origin Investments; co-founder, One Million Degrees
Sajida H. Shroff, Ed.M. '95, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. CEO, Altamont Group
Benjamin D. Wei '08, New York City. CEO, Nova Invite
Joyce Y. Zhang '09, San Francisco. CEO, Alariss Global
Vanessa Zoltan, M.Div. '15, Medford, Massachusetts. Co-founder and CEO, Not Sorry Productions
Giants

“Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by.”

BOSTON BRAHMIN. The towering Adams University Professor emeritus Bernard Bailyn, Ph.D. ’53, LL.D. ’99, concludes his new collection of essays (see Open Book, page 51) with an appendix containing his Memorial Minutes for two fellow towering Harvard historians. Trumbull professor of American history emeritus Samuel Eliot Morison (d. 1976), who lived for most of his life in the same Brimmer Street house where he was born (inherited from his grandfather), could not have been more thoroughly marinated in his surroundings—nor in the University whose tercentenary history he crafted so enduringly. His Boston heritage molded his reserved character, too, as Bailyn notes:

“Professional colleagues…found him an imposing but stiff, unbending, and rather taciturn personage. The story is told that once Morison attended the national historical convention, and to everyone’s surprise, he appeared on the hotel mezzanine crowded with wheeling-dealing, gossiping academics. Into the melee he strode, tall, erect as always, his hands cocked in his jacket pockets, peering myopically ahead into the middle distance. The crowd fell silent and parted before him, and then, as he walked on, it closed behind him at a respectful distance. And so…he paced back and forth through the crowd, passing immaculate on dry land. Finally an old friend… came on the scene, went up to Morison, and said, ‘Sam, what are you doing?’ ‘Doing?’ said Morison with surprise. ‘Doing! What do you think I’m doing? Mixing!’”

This was indeed “a magisterial figure from a distant world”—who could without discomfort lecture “in naval uniform or in riding breeches.” Bailyn continues: “The latter was less surprising to those who recalled that when he started his teaching career…he used to gallop over to Massachusetts Hall from Brimmer Street and pack up his blue books in saddlebags before continuing his ride.”

BROOKLYN BOY. Loeb University Professor emeritus Oscar Handlin (d. 2011), by contrast, grew up “the son of Russian Jewish immigrants who ran a small grocery store,” and unsurprisingly crafted different kinds of studies of the past, including The Uprooted, the textured, landmark book that began as “a history of the immigrants in America” until he “discovered that the immigrants were American history.”

As resonant today was his multivolume history of liberty in the United States, begun with Mary Handlin (they wrote The Dimensions of Liberty) and then, after her death, brought to fruition with his second wife, Lilian Bombach. Liberty in America, Bailyn summarizes, “was not an academic monograph series written in crabbed prose but a series of extended discussions written clearly, at times colloquially, even casually, to make the point for a broad audience that liberty had never been a secure state in America’s history but an unsteady, erratic progress as its citizens struggled, at times bitterly, against obstacles to live freely without the control of external restraints.”

AFRADE. Surpassing pictorial evidence of the spectacular September 6, 1956, fire that destroyed Memorial Hall’s clock tower (The College Pump, September-October 2017), a 64-year-old color video of the blaze has surfaced, acquired by Raymond Traietti, assistant director of Memorial Hall, and posted to YouTube by McKay professor of the practice of computer science David Malan. Feel the burn, twenty-first-century style, at youtube.com/watch?v=ARe_NzhAad8.

Visit harvardmag.com to learn about the video’s mystery history.

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a whole new life... In retrospect, it sounds like common sense: it’s like a good sentence: it seems completely natural, but you have to hew it out of a slab of solid rock.”

From the beginning of graduate school, Brown knew he wanted to combine historical work with his interests in the arts, and to connect with audiences beyond the academy. “There are lots of ways to tell stories,” he says. “There are lots of ways to make arguments. Why do they have to take their final form in a scholarly article or scholarly book manuscript?” So while writing his dissertation, he also began working on a film about twentieth-century anthropologist Melville Herskovits, best known for arguing that black American culture had some of its roots in West African traditions. Herskovits is hardly a household name today, but he helped to establish the fields of African and African-American studies, and to lay the foundation for current ideas about race and inheritance. His work connects with Brown’s interest in how scholars write about the African diaspora, and how this scholarship is refracted through society. Herskovits was also a subject particularly well suited to film, Brown realized, because much of his research had been based on hours of footage he’d taken on travels in Africa. Clips from Herskovits’s fieldwork frame the documentary, conveying the audiovisual evidence that animated his arguments.

Brown was still working on the project when he came to Harvard as a postdoctoral fellow in 2002 (he became an assistant professor a year later). The film finally aired as an hourlong PBS documentary, Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness, in 2010. Combining interviews with historians, anthropologists, and people who had worked closely with Herskovits, it weaves a complex, provocative story of this white, Jewish-American anthropologist’s legacy. Herskovits’s fieldwork footage, combined with images of African-American life, invite viewers to think about the politics of visual representation. Did the ability to define African Americans, the film asks, give Herskovits power over them? How might his central claim, about continuity from Africa to African Americans, be used both to promote black political power (as it was by the Black Panthers), and to advance white supremacy? What does it mean that black writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, A.B. 1890, Ph.D. ’95, had already done work like this before Herskovits, but didn’t get credit because they were considered too political or dangerous? Without compromising the intellectual content of these debates, the film makes them compelling television for audiences that haven’t engaged with them before. “I always like to think of him as kind of the Elvis of African-American studies,” Brown says in the film. “You might think of fundamental challenge: how to represent the ideas, plans, or desires of the enslaved when virtually all documents left behind present the views of their masters? Tacky’s Revolt was plotted in total secrecy, and the existing primary sources were written by whites who perceived only chaos on the ground. In 2011, Brown was awarded a Mellon Foundation fellowship intended for humanists who want to be trained in other fields and learn new research methods. He studied cartography and geography with scholars Tim Stallmann and Pavithra Vasudevan at the University of North Carolina, and became involved with counter-mapping, a practice that uses mapping to disrupt entrenched ideas about history, politics, and space. Brown eventually plotted the events of Tacky’s Revolt, a project that now lives online as an interactive, playable map that tells the story of the rebellion and the strategies that must have sustained it. Other work in the “digital humanities” often focuses on data visualization or quantitative analyses of texts, notes history graduate student Jonathon Booth, J.D. ’19, but Brown “is much more interested in being able to tell a story.”

“Viewed on the map, the insurrection appears to have been the product of genuine strategic intelligence, one that utilized Jamaica’s distinctive geography and aimed toward the creation of alternative enduring societies,” Brown wrote in an essay about the project. The first of the revolt’s three phases, on the north-eastern side of the island, aimed at Port Maria and the surrounding commercial area—providing evidence for the intriguing idea that the rebels wanted to take control of trade and conduct commerce there. Later, on the opposite side of the island, enslaved people revolted on plantations at the base of a mountainous area and formed a fortified encampment there (perhaps intended as the beginnings of a permanent settlement like the villages of the maroons). The site was destroyed by the British in June 1760.

What did these rebels want? “Freedom from enslavement would always be the primary goal,” Brown says. “But then you want to dig a little deeper than that: What does freedom mean to these people? It doesn’t mean the same kind of freedom along the lines of liberal principles that we think of. It can be negative freedom, certainly freedom from being subject to the will of another...
But does it mean forming a maroon community, an independent community, in the mountains? That’s one version of black freedom in a place like Jamaica. Another version of black freedom might be creating a polity that has some outside access to the world, that’s not isolated, that’s not detached from society....Those are things that black people want as well.”

In 2010, while Brown was still a junior faculty member in Cambridge, he left for a tenured position at Duke. “Tenure was so uncertain at Harvard,” he remembers. Creating a documentary as a major scholarly project had defied the traditional path young scholars usually take to build their careers. But it wasn’t long before Harvard convinced him to come back. “Harvard is a much nicer place to be as someone with job security,” he says. “I wanted to contemplate what it would be like to be in this well-resourced institution with all these really great, smart people around to brainstorm with, without having that fear of constantly having to have my eye on the job market all the time, having to constantly think about how my work was going to play to the higher-ups.” Brown now harmonizes his interests in history and media as the founding director of Harvard’s History Design Studio (HDS), created in 2013: a workshop for researchers who want to explore new modes of researching and narrating history.

“Because of Vince, there is a space for me at Harvard,” says Robin McDowell, a Ph.D. student in African and African American studies and fellow at the studio who uses map overlays to conduct her research on slavery and environmental history in Louisiana. When she came to Harvard, she says, “I had this idea that I needed to be classically trained....and that I wasn’t going to be taken seriously because I had an art and design background. And with HDS and with Vince, it was very much like, ‘No, this is something cutting edge, this is something really cool, this is what we need. You’re going to bring insights to this field because of your way of seeing the world.’”

McDowell and other students interviewed consider Brown’s history design work as an extension of his generous advising, and his willingness to push modes of storytelling that may not be embraced by traditional historians. “Across the board, he is beloved as a mentor, as a historian, as a student advocate,” McDowell says. “Everything you have that’s different [in academia] is hard fought for and hard won. Vince, I’m sure, had to work to carve out a space for people like me....It’s because of him doing stuff..."
After Tacky’s revolt was suppressed, hundreds of the insurgents were transported to places like British Honduras, Cuba, and the North American colonies. “Wherever they found themselves, their knowledge of the war against enslavement arrived with them,” Brown writes in his new book. “[T]hey brought news of black struggle and white vulnerability, of the fractures in the slaveholding regime as well as its brutality. They represented the possibility of revolt as both an inspiration and a warning.” In the 1790s, the Haitian revolution overthrew colonialism and slavery, ending with that nation’s winning its independence from France. It’s possible that some of those insurgents came directly from Jamaica, Brown writes—and they were certainly roused by the eruptions of resistance taking place all around them.

More immediately in Jamaica, in the wake of the revolt, life for people of color became harder. Free black and brown people had to prove that they had received their freedom legitimately—that they weren’t runaways in disguise. They had to receive “certificates of freedom” and wear “Badges of Freedom” on their shoulders signifying their status. “Unqualified freedom was coterminous with whiteness,” Brown writes. “All non-whites were politically suspect, and whites maintained a social and legal obligation to police, harass, and contain all black and brown people.” International sentiment against the slave trade was strengthened by the perception of Africans as dangerous: dependence on the slave trade came to be seen as a threat to security. As Brown puts it, “One of the most enduring myths in the corpus of racial fantasy is that white people are underdogs, besieged by hyper-masculine and ultra-violent blacks,” an idea that “would infect the political imagination of whites down to the present day.”

This year, Brown is on leave to begin work on his next project: a book on the history of the African diaspora. How do those descended from enslaved people across the world see themselves as part of a diaspora? How do they respond to racist ideas about their own alleged criminality—ideas that were forged in conditions of war and captivity? “The idea behind that book is going to be thinking about how it is that people have seen the need to cast their history as migrants, as people in a particular place, as being part of a global story,” Brown says. “So I will tell that global story, but hopefully through the eyes of people who have felt the need to tell that story to themselves. What kind of African diaspora is needed during the [early twentieth-century black nationalist] Marcus Garvey movement, for example? What kind of African diaspora history do people tell themselves in the 1990s? What kind of African diaspora history might people tell themselves in the context of slavery? So it’s really about a history of storytelling about the African diaspora.” If slavery is a kind of war, diaspora is its flip side, entangled with how Brown thinks about the history of enslavement, displacement, and resistance. “Warfare provides one initial set of conditions,” he says. Diaspora represents, if not freedom, a kind of survival—an answer to the social death inflicted by slavery.

Associate editor Marina N. Bolotnikova profiled Philip Deloria in “Native Modern” (January-February 2019).
“Cut Missal Up…”

Consequences of book-breaking

When a colleague chanced upon a stray medieval manuscript page in the Harvard Theatre Collection in 2018, then-Houghton Library curator William P. Stoneman knew whom to call: Peter Kidd, a medieval-art expert. Kidd’s detective work identified the page as a leaf from a fifteenth-century illuminated book crafted for the French diocese of Rennes, a volume that had been thought lost.

Book-breaking is not limited to eBay. In the sixteenth century, manuscript pages were sometimes turned into jam-jar covers and book-jackets, or used as gun wadding. In the nineteenth century, a passion for medieval art motivated the English art historian and social critic John Ruskin to remove leaves from volumes to frame for display or give to friends. His journals record at the turn of the year 1854: “Cut out some leaves from large Missal”; “[p]ut two pages of missal in frames”; “[c]ut missal up this evening; hard work.” In the mid twentieth century, American art historian Otto F. Ege cut up 50 volumes in his own collection and reassembled the leaves into boxed sets to sell as an educational venture to universities and libraries. He believed that the “thrill and understanding” of holding a medieval manuscript leaf justified his action.

Peter Kidd identified Houghton’s leaf (MS Lat 470) as a page from a Catholic pontifical, a Latin liturgical book that describes sacraments and rites. The leaf provides instructions for a synod; its decorative initial capital shows a bishop surrounded by acolytes. Sister leaves in public and private collections provide clues to its history. The volume was apparently owned by Michel Guibé, bishop of Rennes (1482-1502), and then by his brother Robert, his successor as bishop (1502-1507), whose variant coat of arms appears on sister leaves. Centuries later, Count Olivier Le Gonidec de Traissan acquired the manuscript and exhibited it in 1876. Sometime before 1947, the pontifical was disbound and individual leaves appeared on the market.

Profit, not passion, motivates today’s book-breakers. The sale of a manuscript’s leaves, one by one, may realize more than a complete codex. Sellers may not admit to book-breaking, but the market demand for single illuminated leaves is strong among individual buyers who cannot afford an entire volume. Whatever the motive, book-breaking is lamentable and, some would say, unforgivable.

Digital technology offers a partial response to this unfortunate practice and facilitates research of a book’s content and history. Libraries like Houghton now upload images of manuscript leaves and fragments to websites like Fragmentarium (http://fragmentarium.ms) to reconstruct the pages of books virtually. This virtual “rebinding,” scholars hope, will encourage the identification of sister leaves scattered throughout the world.

~Diane E. Booton
The philanthropist, businesswoman, and best-selling author Melinda Gates is a powerful advocate for women. Her work at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—which she cofounded two decades ago—has led her to focus on improving the lives of women and girls as a means to accelerate positive change. In 2019, she committed $1 billion through her investment and incubation company to promoting gender equity in the United States.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Radcliffe Institute’s founding; the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote; and an election likely to include a record number of women candidates. In this historic moment and inspired by Gates’s sense of urgency, we will explore how best to increase women’s power and influence in the United States with a program featuring Iris Bohnet, Thasunda Brown Duckett, Drew Gilpin Faust, Amanda Nguyen ’13, David Rubenstein, and others.

On Radcliffe Day 2020, Friday, May 29, we will award the Radcliffe Medal to Melinda Gates.
Is it possible to feel nostalgic the first time you visit a place?

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