Linguistic Mystery • Dutch Art • A Bookish Spy

HARVARD MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025 • $7.99

JUSTICE

John Roberts's legacy might not be the one he intends

LEADERSHIP NEEDED!

TO: FELLOW ALUMNI AND HARVARD LEADERSHIP

As proud members of the Harvard Community who applaud the University's leadership on academic freedom, we now ask: **Where are we on climate and sustainability—and where do we need to be?** Yes, Harvard's Salata Institute and others are doing excellent work. Yet as its founder has warned, "We urgently need to do more." With 400,000 alumni worldwide, Harvard's reach and impact are immense. Together, we can help bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

We are at a historic turning point. For the first time, we must weigh validated scientific projections more heavily than "business as usual" or instinct. As E. O. Wilson called it, climate change is "the mother of all problems"—but also an opportunity. Harvard leadership and alumni should seize it.

> **For Fellow Alumni:** Bring your education, experience, and commitment to bear on this defining issue. Rising temperatures and shrinking biodiversity threaten our shared future. Unsure how to help? THINK BIG. Learn more (yes—even ask ChatGPT). Maximize your leverage in your personal life, workplace, and networks. We can reduce global greenhouse gas emissions—individually and collectively.
>
> **For Harvard Leadership:** Each year, identify, reward, and publicize alumni who demonstrate climate and sustainability leadership. What gets rewarded gets repeated. Expand efforts to bridge the gap between what science demands and what our community understands. Equip undergraduates and alumni alike with the knowledge and the urgency to lead.

Harvard educates leaders to make a positive difference. The difference the world needs now is clear.

READY TO ACT? Take a first step: visit **SalataInstitute.harvard.edu/alumni/**, click "Community," and join one or more of the listed groups—such as Harvard ClassACT HR73's Environment and Climate Change Working Group, Harvard Alumni for Agriculture and Food SIG, Harvard Alumni for Climate and the Environment SIG, or HBS/ Harvard Alumni for Climate Action (sponsor of this message).

The challenge is urgent. The opportunity is historic. Let's lead—together.

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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025, VOLUME 128, NUMBER 2

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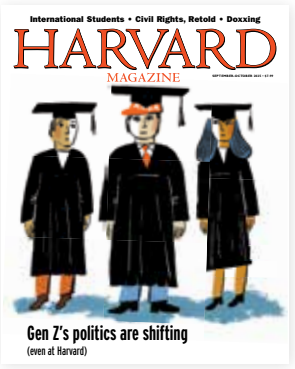
On the cover: *Illustration by Sébastien Thibault*

FROM TOP: NIKO YAITANES/*HARVARD MAGAZINE*; DETAIL OF *FRUIT STILL LIFE WITH STAG BEETLE AND NEST*, 1717 BY RACHEL RUYSCH (FULL IMAGE ON PAGE 35) COURTESY OF STAATLICHE KUNSTHALLE KARLSRUHE AND THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON; COURTESY OF HARVARD'S FINE ARTS LIBRARY/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS/E.G. STILLMAN JAPANESE COLLECTION

Cambridge 02138

Gen Z Politics, Doxxing at Harvard, International Students



MAGA AT HARVARD

In "Gen Z's Right Turn" (September-October, page 20), Harvard Republican Club president Leo Koerner ascribes his conversion to a conservative viewpoint to resentment over early attempts to contain COVID-19 through mask mandates, lockdowns, and school closures, despite a lack of certainty over their effectiveness. It is worth recalling the devastating toll that the disease took and the supposition, later validated, that transmission might be respiratory. A teenager's frustration is an understandable source of resentment but hardly a productive basis for the political organization of society.

Stephen Poppel '65, Ph.D. '73
Ghent, N.Y.

Re: "Gen Z's Right Turn," the adults among us need to take a lesson. Is talking to one another so terrible?

Nancy Dyar, M.A.T. '67
Oakland, Cali.

To talk about MAGA in terms of "liberal" and "conservative" is misleading. MAGA is about authoritarianism versus democracy. I doubt many Harvard students support authoritarianism. See the entry on Wikipedia on anti-democracy philosopher Curtis Yarvin, who has supporters such as Peter Thiel and J.D. Vance, and pay particular attention to Vance's quote about not abiding by Supreme Court decisions. Then please provide an article about that.

Thomas N. Locke '74
Golden, Colo.

I am disappointed that the article's online title, "How MAGA Went Mainstream at Harvard," resorted to hyperbole. The article says a 12 percent minority of students in the Class of 2023 identify as conservative (not even necessarily pro-"MAGA") and cites an Institute of Politics event that only drew a "small" crowd of red hats. This certainly represents a growing cohort and an important evolution within the campus dynamic, but hardly a mainstream ideology. The underlying story is more than interesting enough that it doesn't require such embellishment.

Jacob Trenholm, M.P.H. '24
Ancaster, Ontario
Canada

Your recent letters and essays about Harvard's supposed "existential fight" against MAGA, and your hand-wringing over Gen Z's political drift, were self-congratulatory nonsense. You are not in any existential struggle—stop patting yourselves on the back.

When I attended Harvard nearly 50 years ago, the school leaned left. Today it has crossed into full-blown indoctrination—anti-science, anti-common sense, and hostile to dissent. Conservative students are routinely silenced or penalized, and too many faculty mistake ideology for inquiry. That is not education; it is reeducation.

If you wish to be an ideological seminary, that is your choice. But if you accept billions in taxpayer dollars, you are obliged to uphold the values of a republic: fairness, tolerance, and judging people by character rather than identity. Otherwise, Harvard forfeits its claim to public trust and public money.

Don Andrews, M.T.S. '82
Agoura Hills, Cali.

Thank you for the article describing how Trump et al. are reshaping campus politics ("Gen Z's Right Turn," September-October, page 20). It reminded me of a movement on the part of a small group of us in 1955-56 to do the same thing that resulted in the publication during that school year of a 20-issue newspaper called *The Harvard Times-Republican* that was distributed free of charge to every room in the Harvard/Radcliffe complex.

The fact that we were doing this at Harvard, not then or now known as a Republi-

can stronghold, received a lot of attention. *The Harvard Crimson* wrote a scathing editorial, which criticized some of our activities that resulted in the cancellation of J. Robert Oppenheimer's planned speaking visit to the College.

We learned a lot about life and politics while stirring up some interesting and sometimes worthwhile controversy on campus. As I approach my 90th birthday in November 2025, I am proud to have participated in that long-ago endeavor to increase Republican visibility at Harvard.

Eugene Yeates '57
Lebanon, N.H.

Harvard agrees to diversify its political points of view within the classroom and among faculty? Bravo, as long as academic integrity is maintained. I can't wait until this standard is applied to Brigham Young University, Notre Dame, and Liberty University. Until then, "equal protection" of the laws offers a safe harbor, and we should lay anchor.

Greg Blonder, Ph.D. '82
Brookline, Mass.

I find it laughable that Harvard, pressured by the Trump administration, envisages a center for conservative scholarship. Scholarship worthy of its name mediates the old and the new, the "conservative" and the "progressive." We scholars, personal politics irrespective, *revel* in inconvenient truths, regardless of their origin. So doing increases our chances of finding Truth.

With this in mind, Harvard and its Gen Z 2.0s should ponder two questions:

(1) How have the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, the NIH, and similar research hubs improved by becoming centers for conservative scholarship?

(2) Would you vote for a president who has extorted a major university in order to chastise its collective political character?

Ira Braus, Ph.D. '88
Pembroke, Mass.

THE FACES OF HARVARD'S STUDENT BODY

I was struck by the drawing on the cover of the magazine showing three Harvard students. Three students to represent all of Harvard. Yes, a difficult task, and perhaps one the magazine should have avoided based on a review of the artwork. Indeed, the cover seems to depict only white students. The drawing is also misaligned

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To the Max

A WORKING TITLE for one story in this issue of *Harvard Magazine*—I challenge you to guess which one—was "The Maximalist." In truth, the term applies to several of our features, not to mention the mood on campus this summer and early fall, as Harvard faced maximal pressure from the Trump administration and wrestled with the news that the University might be close to a massive settlement.

On campus this fall, the normal buzz of return has been mixed with a sense of uncertainty.

Maximalism, as outlined in these pages, can be a wonderful thing, spurring invention and discovery, encouraging audacious goals, such as scientist David Liu's quest to speed up evolution within the cells (p. 36). It can bring delight, as in Dutch Golden Age painter Rachel Ruysch's floral still lifes (p. 30)—now at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, in an exhibit co-curated by Harvard professor Charles Davis—with details so luscious that they serve as guides to eighteenth-century biodiversity. (I hope our reproductions offer both an education and a welcome moment of zen.)

Maximalism can also shift the contours of society, which is the focus of our cover story on Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. '76, J.D. '79 (p. 20). With piercing logic, contributing editor Lincoln Caplan examines the Roberts Court's maximalist view of the powers of the executive branch. Then he imagines the consequences, for Roberts's own legacy and for the nation.

Harvard, like many other institutions, feels the effects of those rulings in real time. On campus this fall, the normal buzz of return has been mixed with a sense of uncertainty. Even if a long-discussed settlement comes to fruition, the financial and political ground rules have shifted, and the University will walk away changed: shrunken in some ways, expanded in others, with new structures and rules and guidelines and restrictions. (See "Harvard Faces the Future," page 14.)

Change can be good, but it needs to be managed, and that will be the task ahead. As public opinion about higher education shifts outside Harvard's gates, the University is wrestling with issues at the heart of campus life: identity, belonging, intellectual rigor, the experience in the classroom and in the dining halls, the value of speech, the way to dissent, the obligation to a community. It all does feel like a very big deal.

— Joanna Weiss, *Editor*

with current gender demographics as it presents two males and one female student when Harvard has more women than men undergraduates.

Am I being overly critical? Was the drawing merely intended to be illustrative of students generally? Or, alternatively, a backdrop to best present the shifting political leanings of students? Or was it possibly even predictive (aspirational for some) regarding Harvard's future enrollment? The drawing is problematic because it poorly conveys the composition of Harvard today. Rather, it feels more reflective of a distant past, like Harvard/Radcliffe of the 1950s—a period which seems to be popular for some these days.

PHILIPPE BENOIT, J.D. '84
Washington, D.C.

I'VE BEEN WATCHING Harvard design plans against antisemitism. But what is it doing about anti-Blackism? Both Harvard's awareness and ignorance of that situation are evidenced by the September-October cover that shows a MAGA student flanked by surprised white students. Is it too much to ask for Harvard to promise to handle anti-diversity matters on campus in a holistic way, or is the Harvard community supposed to accept that the experience of one group matters more than the experience of others? POC alums can tell you: MAGA was always at Harvard. The only thing new is the hat.

JANET SAVAGE, J.D. '85
Los Angeles, Cali.

TWO YEARS OF DOXXING

YOUR ARTICLE ON DOXXING is flawed ("Two Years of Doxxing at Harvard," September-October, page 36). The AAUP, which you cite as a credible organization, has supported boycotts of Israeli academics. Also, the assault of the student on the Harvard Business School campus should not be called "alleged." It happened, and the video of the assault is public and uncontested.

Students have the free speech right to protest. Others have the free speech right to disclose the identities of the protesters. Bravo to Canary Mission for saving us all the time to research those whose views are antisemitic.

ROBERT HUEBSCHER, M.B.A. '82
Lexington, Mass.

I DO NOT PITY the Harvard students who faced backlash for signing the October 8 statement blaming Israel for Hamas's genocidal rampage. "Free speech" does not mean speech is costless. The October 8 statement, which condoned terrorism, rape, and murder, was a sickening display of intellectual poverty and moral rot. One cannot expect to take such a position and escape criticism or accountability.

Some tactics used to shame these students were corrosive. That does not excuse hateful or bankrupt views. As Max J. Krupnick shows, there is a long history of exposing those who want to have their cake and eat it too.

This isn't about academic freedom. Within the classroom, students should be encouraged to take intellectual risks, test ideas, and explore alternative viewpoints. In the real world, hateful speech can come with a high price.

MICHAEL SNOW, J.D. '23
Brooklyn, N.Y.

THE AUTHOR compares the revealing of the identities of these students to the Mc-

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Carthy Red Scare. But condoning murder of innocent civilians in an unprovoked terror attack is not equivalent to supporting communism. One condones a crime, the other a form of government.

It is because of articles like this that Harvard is deservedly losing its reputation as one of the world's great universities.

Alisa Rubin Peled, Ph.D. '94
Israel

I was so hopeful that this article would be a comfort and a balanced look at the shocking reaction to the events of October 7. The pro-Palestinians' rapid, virulent, and hateful response to the murder, rape, and kidnapping of Israeli civilians the day after it happened allowed barely a second for grieving, for those who cared. The pro-Hamas camp was clearly prepared for such an event to happen. They went after Jewish American students, not Israel. They used the influence they purchased from Harvard and went to town intimidating and harassing students and creating an environment that encouraged Jew hatred. Your article glosses over all this and is despicable.

Linda Blade, A.L.M. '09
Warren, R.I.

Your article re: doxxing is beyond disturbing. You humanize the man responsible for the doxxing campaign without clearly articulating the dangers your students have faced as a result of the doxxing. You seem to compare the doxxing of students opposing occupation and apartheid to the doxxing of members of the KKK, an interesting choice. You discuss the doxxing campaign without pointing out the power imbalance among the various actors: billionaires vs. students. You fail to explore the point of the doxxing, which is to silence debate and opposition to the war in Gaza.

What professors have been disciplined or fired and what programs have been cancelled as a result of this doxxing campaign? Those are pretty important aspects of this story, which you have left out.

Megan Ault, M.T.S. '11
Springfield, Ill.

SPEAK UP, PLEASE

Harvard Magazine welcomes letters on its contents. Please write to "Letters," *Harvard Magazine,* 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138; send comments by email to yourturn@harvard.edu; use our website, www.harvardmagazine.com; or fax us at 617-495-0324. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Regarding "Why Harvard Needs International Students" (September-October, page 32): the need and the benefit are not distributed evenly across all disciplines. The exposure to variety makes sense in international relations and political science, and it may have some utility in education. In STEM, on the other hand, the goal should be to attract the best and brightest students and instructors, domestic or international.

When international students' full tuition is paid by their governments, that can be both a blessing (money) and a curse (the baleful influence that accompanies an addiction to the money and the allocation of spaces away from deserving U.S. students).

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Conversely, when considerable U.S. government assistance directly or indirectly supports universities, it is fair for our taxpayers and government to exercise oversight on whether expenditures to educate noncitizens are beneficial, insofar as exporting American values in an effective way, or wasteful in the sense of providing net value to inveterate adversaries and opponents.

Robert Kantowitz, J.D. '79
Lawrence, N.Y.

Thank you for your continuing challenge to think about the margins! I was especially impressed with the opinion piece by Mr. Reimers, "Why Harvard Needs International Students."

As a 2000 graduate of the Kennedy School looking back, international students' attendance helped me realize that America is not, by the Creator's design, right about everything.

Tim Mathern, M.P.A. '00
Senator, North Dakota State Senate
Fargo, N.D.

THE WINTHROP HOUSE NAME

I was both surprised and delighted to learn that the Harvard committee tasked with recommending whether to change the name of Winthrop House has recommended against the student-initiated "de-naming" request ("News in Brief," September-October, page 18).

The students who recommended the name change pointed out that John Winthrop—the eighteenth-century Harvard professor after whom Winthrop House is named— was a defender of slavery. However, back then quite a few prominent citizens defended the system of Black subjugation. It is healthy that modern society be reminded of our sometimes sinful and sordid past. As the Spanish philosopher George Santayana has so aptly put it: "Those who have forgotten the past are doomed to repeat it."

Harvey A. Silverglate, LL.B. '67
Cambridge, Mass.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICINE

The recent article on the changes at the Chan School of Public Health stated, "Because corporations aren't driven by an interest in basic science, but instead by avenues of research that could lead to commercially viable products, a substantial challenge of the shift toward corporate- *(please turn to page 68)*

A Note to Readers:
This is the last edition of Harvard Squared. Beginning in our January-February 2026 issue, our coverage of local establishments, events, and cultural sites—along with words from our local advertisers—will move to other sections. We appreciate your readership and look forward to sharing more stories of Cambridge and beyond, in print and at **harvardmagazine.com**.

Harvard²

CAMBRIDGE, BOSTON, AND BEYOND

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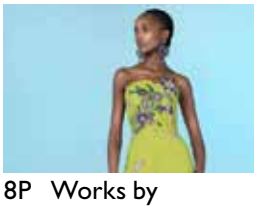
PHOTOGRAPH BY NELL PORTER BROWN/*HARVARD MAGAZINE*



Extracurriculars

Events on and off campus during November and December

COURTESY OF GERALD SALADYGA

***Byzantine Cityscape* (2022), by Connecticut artist Gerald Saladyga, is on display at the Mattatuck Museum, in Waterbury.**

SEASONAL

Harvard Memorial Church
memorialchurch.harvard.edu
The 116th Annual Christmas Carol Service features music by the Harvard University Choir. (December 7 and 9)

Harvard Ceramics Program Winter Show and Sale
https://ofa.fas.harvard.edu/ceramics/show-and-sale
The popular four-day event offers works by more than 100 artists, from sculptures and jewelry to household goods. 224 Western Ave., Allston. (December 11-14)

FILM

Harvard Film Archive
harvardfilmarchive.org
"Columbia 101: The Rarities" celebrates the centennial anniversary (2024) of Columbia Studios through a series of innovative films, both iconic and unheralded, reflecting the company's reigning style. The lineup includes *Women's Prison* (1955), starring noir favorite Ida Lupino as a malicious warden, and *Gunman's Walk* (1958), a Greek tragedy-meets-Western. (November 7-December 14)

THEATER

American Repertory Theater
americanrepertorytheater.org
The new musical *Wonder,* based on the eponymous novel by R.J. Palacio, explores what happens when a boy with facial disfiguration takes off his helmet and enters the wider world after the protected life of homeschooling. (Opens December 9)

MUSIC

Harvard Music Department
music.fas.harvard.edu
The Fromm Players at Harvard present "The Music of Annea Lockwood." The versatile avant-garde composer—who integrated environmental sounds into her work and is a music professor emerita at Vassar College—will also be on hand.
Paine Concert Hall. (November 6)

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Sanders Theatre
boxoffice.harvard.edu
The Boston-based Cantata Singers perform George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* Op. 32, among other works. (November 23)

Inspired by a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, in this year's song and dance concert, *Midwinter Revels: A Scandinavian Story for Christmas*, a boy finds a magic boat and sails to faraway lands. (December 12-28)

Groton Hill Music Center
grotonhill.org
Lúnasa's Irish Solstice Celebration features Irish Voice, "the hottest Irish acoustic band on the planet," playing energizing traditional and contemporary music. (December 19)

DANCE

Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA Boston)
icaboston.org
Anne Plamondon Productions presents *Myokine*, exploring expressive ways for the body to grow strong and heal during turbulent times. (December 13-14)

POETRY

Woodberry Poetry Room
library.harvard.edu
This year's T.S. Eliot Memorial Reading honors the prize-winning poet and novelist Ocean Vuong. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. (December 9)

LECTURES

Harvard Radcliffe Institute
radcliffeharvard.edu
Academy Award-winning director, animator, and filmmaker Domee Shi discusses *Drawing from Life: Storytelling, Heritage, and Turning the Personal into the Universal*. Knafel Center or online via Zoom. (November 17)

EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS

Harvard Art Museums
harvardartmuseums.org
Gather for art, food, prizes, and more at the Harvard Museums at Night event. Galleries will be open, featuring permanent art and the winter exhibits *Edna Andrade: Imagination Is Never Static* and *Sketch, Shade, Smudge: Drawing from Gray to Black*. (December 4)

Harvard Museum of Natural History
hmnh.harvard.edu
Velvet Worms: A Fierce Hunter with a Secret Weapon highlights the little-known creatures, most closely related to arthropods, that have remained virtually unchanged for 300 million years.

Mattatuck Museum
mattmuseum.org
The Universe of Gerald Saladyga. Kaleidoscopic paintings by the Connecticut artist, inspired by Byzantine mosaics, look at how political unrest, natural disasters, and chaos can co-exist with scenes from our daily lives. (Through January 11)

Addison Gallery of American Art
addison.andover.edu
The insightful photographs in *Hayes Prize 2025: Tommy Kha, Other Things Uttered* reflect models for self-portraiture in an age dominated by visual culture and notions of identity. (Through January 25)

Events listings are also found at **harvardmag.com/h2-events**

Made in New England

Shopping regionally for the holidays

BY NELL PORTER BROWN

Clockwise, from top left: ergonomic bags by Anchorpak in Portland, Maine; cast-iron cookware at Nest Home in Providence, Rhode Island; and bottle openers in the form of baby horseshoe crabs at Matthew Hall Originals in Cranston, Rhode Island

'Tis the season to celebrate New England makers. The plethora of products designed and manufactured throughout the region offer something for everyone, and for every budget. "How we spend our money is a reflection of our values," notes Deb Dormody, an alumni and family relations officer at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). "Supporting independent artists and makers is a way of demonstrating what you believe and helps the local economy."

As a gateway, she points to RISDmade, an online site featuring 400 alumni makers from across the globe, many of them based in New England. Artist biographies, along with examples of what they create and how, "help educate the consumer about what really goes into making each piece of art," Dormody says, ranging from ceramics, light fixtures, and cookware to jewelry and scarves.

Among the designers is Colin Sullivan-Stevens, founder of the Portland, Maine, company **Anchorpak.** The stylish line of durable, ergonomic bags features design elements, such as a balanced strap loop and a closed pouch, that mitigate pressure on the wearer's back and shoulders. This makes the bags ideal for bicyclists, hikers, tourists, or parents juggling kids, strollers, and snacks. For high-quality, beautiful cast-iron cookware, check out **Nest Homeware,** owned by Matt Cavallaro. From braising pans and skillets to Dutch ovens, the smooth-surfaced vessels are cast and machined in Indiana and finished and seasoned in Providence—and are crafted to last forever. In nearby Cranston, Rhode Island, **Matthew Hall Originals** sells tasteful metal-based housewares in refined organic shapes: baby horseshoe crab or lobster claw key chains, quahog shell bottle openers, and turtle-shell belt buckles.

In Western Massachusetts, ceramicist Cara Taylor makes minimalist, sculptural porcelain pieces that serve a purpose: vases, candlesticks, salt and pepper shakers. More recently inspired by basketry, she also has a

All photographs courtesy of the artists

line of "woven vessels." "I love flowers and food and interior design," she says. "I've always been fascinated by containers and thinking about what's going to look good on the table." Objects are formed with thinly rolled slabs of clay, a process that also yields scraps. "My favorite part is when I get some weird shapes left over and those become the basis for my one-of-a-kind pieces and I get to play around," she says. "It's almost like there's a puzzle and the answer's in me, somewhere." (Her Easthampton, Mass., studio, **Taylor Ceramics,** is also open to visitors on December 6, 7, and 13 as part of the Cottage Street Open Studios event.)

For unique jewelry, try the **Matthew Feldman Gallery** in Cambridge. He opened the Huron Village storefront in 2000 and sells his own work and that of other artists, including three in New England: Rob

NELL PORTER BROWN/*HARVARD MAGAZINE*

Salt and pepper shakers by Cara Taylor (above), and a glimpse of some other works, including her "woven vessels," at her Easthampton, Mass., studio (located in a former mill building)

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At the Matthew Feldman Gallery in Cambridge, find his intricately crafted bracelet, along with rings by Judith Kaufman and other unique jewelry.

Greene, Judith Kaufman, and Vicki Eisenfeld. Feldman's engineering style, something akin to constructing precision instruments, defies easy description. He often uses titanium, stainless steel, and a DuPont product called Delrin (a high-performance, semicrystalline thermoplastic) that's typically reserved for manufacturing gears and bearings. "Trying to mix up the context for what people are used to seeing in certain objects, I find, is not a bad thing. These materials are industrial," he says, "because they are super functional, right?" One titanium ring on display features tiny ruby balls with "a sphericity within three-millionths of an inch," he adds, that are "mostly used in precision instruments like watches and gauges." Originally a leather artist, Feldman's gallery also displays some of his exquisite fine-grained black handbags (one of these can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts' collection). "It's possible to feature aesthetic value," he says, "without sacrificing function."

Speaking of precision, every knife that leaves the **Lamson Products** factory in Western Massachusetts passes "the paper test," says production manager George Yacoub. That means that after the Vintage-series blades are laser-cut and ground and the handles applied and hand-finished, a master sharpener, like Dan Hale, who has been with the company since the late 1980s, hones the blade. When done, he holds a piece of paper in the air and slices it in half with the new knife. Any catch and the blade is re-sharpened. "As a knife manufacturer," says Yacoub, "the most embarrassing thing you can possibly have is sending out a knife that's dull."

The company is based in Westfield (with a store in Shelburne Falls) and was founded in 1837 as Lamson & Goodnow, banking on the success of American Silas Lamson's invention, the scythe handle. The company

Vintage precision knives from Lamson Products in Westfield, Massachusetts

went on to produce knives, cutlery, and other kitchen tools and now offers seven different lines of knives, including the Vintage series, which is laser-cut from American steel in Shelburne Falls, and the connoisseur-oriented Forged line, made locally from top-quality German steel. "It's not a machine that's making that handle feel good for you, it's the right person, and that's a hard job. They are artists out there," Yacoub says, gesturing across the factory floor. "Every single piece is touched by people right here." Among the most popular gifts are the chef, utility, and paring knives, which come in various handle finishes—the "fire" line is a glittery, marbled red acrylic handle—but the eight-inch forged Chinese santoku cleaver with a walnut handle is also a pleasure to chop with.

In thinking about how communities can support creative cultures, it partly comes down to caring enough to make the effort. Cara Taylor remembers that, during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, people came to the open studio saying they were only buying gifts available within a 10-mile radius of their homes. In Western Massachusetts, that "pro-local" ethic has always been strong. "In the next two months around here, there will be an artists' open studios event almost every weekend," she says, and many local boutiques sell regional artists' wares. People here know that if you don't buy things from artists and in downtown stores, she adds, "then they won't be there anymore. And everyone wants to support this community that they love."

CURIOSITIES

Gorey and Pets at Houghton Library

The outré book designer and illustrator Edward Gorey '50 spent a long career meticulously crafting works in a style that could be deemed charmingly sinister. His artistry, already evident while he was at Harvard, focused primarily on pen-and-ink drawings for hundreds of books, many favoring Victorian and Edwardian settings with narratives featuring off-kilter people and animals, oddly humorous deaths, and all manners of bad behavior. He was also a writer and crafter. He produced his own plays at his Cape Cod home, sewed puppets and stuffed animals, and expressed himself through stylish outfits, jewelry, and furs (although, as a lover of animals and especially cats, he stopped wearing animals later in life and ultimately bequeathed his estate to animal welfare organizations).

Gorey's *Halfway House*, based on the Signet Society building

Houghton Library celebrates these signature talents and the centennial of his birth in *Edward Gorey: The Gloomy Gallery,* through January 12. Some 100 items are on display—books, theater posters, and toys, along with some never-before-seen drawings, like the *Halfway House*, inspired by the Signet Society building (recently acquired through a bequest by the estate of Gorey's Eliot House roommate Anthony N. Smith '37). "Many of our exhibits are intellectually driven, but this is more joy-driven," allows Molly Schwartzburg, the library's Hofer curator of printing and graphic arts. "We're just giving people, especially our younger visitors, the experience of encountering Gorey and his half-creepy, half-cozy environment in our wonderfully antiquarian-feeling gallery."

IMAGES COURTESY OF HOUGHTON LIBRARY/HARVARD UNIVERSITY
USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE EDWARD GOREY CHARITABLE TRUST

Objects are loosely grouped under Gorey's own titles. *Mercurial Bear* looks at self-recreation through costumes, clothing, and performance, while *The Curious Sofa* offers dynamic "swooning, tilting, and reclining," says Schwartzburg, as so many of his characters do. Gorey doesn't fit into the horror genre "because he's too neat and clean about it, but his subjects *are* horrifying," she notes. *The Loathsome Couple* is based on English serial killers who kidnapped children and killed them in the 1960s, while *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* teaches the alphabet through children dying in 26 cleverly rhymed scenarios, which are darkly funny in a Roald Dahl way. "He was queer in the fundamental meaning of the word," she adds. "Vague about his sexuality, he did not want to be pigeonholed; he was so comfortable not fitting into a comfortable category." None of his books were made for children, yet many starred in them. Similarly, his rhymes and texts were poetic, but not poetry, and his stories visually driven, yet not comics or graphic novels. "What he did falls outside of all the boundaries but somehow appeals to a huge variety of people," Schwartzburg says. "We hope visitors will feel like being in the gallery is a bit like hanging out in Gorey's mind."

Meanwhile, a second exhibit, *Creature Comforts: 175 Years of Dogs and Cats at Home,* features actual children's books—and the rich relationships between humans and their pets. See the beguiling books *The Tale of Tom Kitten* and *The Story of Miss Moppet,* by Beatrix Potter, along with *The Cat That Went to College,* Frances Frost's 1951 tale of a stray cat taken in by Harvard students. The

From *Mister Dog: The Dog Who Belonged to Himself,* by Margaret Wise Brown

1952 *Mister Dog: The Dog Who Belonged to Himself* (on the right), written by Margaret Wise Brown and illustrated by Garth Williams, features an anthropomorphized dog who adopts a boy. He teaches him how to enjoy free will and be self-reliant—but also how to thrive in a daily routine and keep things tidy. The underlying message seems to be that people can be themselves *but* there are important universal rules governing civility and self-possession. In a sense, both exhibits look at reverberating themes of how best to tame our animal instincts and fit ourselves productively into society while embracing individual freedom.

—N.P.B.

JOSH JAMISON

TASTE & TABLES

Seasonal Drinks and Snacks

Greater Boston bars that charm, warm, and delight us this winter

by NELL PORTER BROWN

THIS WINTER SEASON, *Harvard Magazine* sought out some of Greater Boston's fun, cozy, stylish, or idiosyncratic lounges. Whether shopping for the holidays, meeting up with friends and family to celebrate, or simply wanting a warm place with friendly faces, you can stop by these bars for a congenial respite from the cold and raging winds outside.

Although the North End isn't known for its bar scene, **The Red Fox**, with its sultry, retro vibe, could change that. The velvety interior in all shades of red is anchored by curvy banquettes and cushy bar stools amid dark walls and café lamps. Old-style Italian American food reigns (lasagna and spaghetti with meatballs), matching classic cocktails, martinis, and negronis, often made with a twist: the "Bananavardier" blends bourbon, banana, Campari, and vermouth.

For an even more theatrical evening, duck through the hidden door to **Yvonne's** in Downtown Crossing. The former beloved Locke-Ober space was transformed into this chandelier-laden, richly upholstered rococo dreamscape that's so over-the-top you just have to give in and smile. Drinks pair with the supper-club-inspired menu (bavette steak, baked Alaska), starting with the suave Naga Rumba, a vodka and whiskey concoction with hints of mango, coconut, cacao, and basil.

Yvonne's glamorous bar (top), and embracing winter and drinks with friends at Bow Market in Somerville

CARLIE FEBO

NELL PORTER BROWN/HARVARD MAGAZINE

The airy upstairs room at the Longfellow Bar

Festive, and more classically stylish, the **Dark Bar** at the Boston Harbor Hotel on Rowes Wharf is a mainstay. Single malts and cognacs abound, and all the cocktails are carefully crafted in a place where hospitality is paramount. Another favorite hotel spot, the **OAK Long Bar + Kitchen** at Fairmont Copley Plaza, in Back Bay, sports polished wood and mirrors and leather upholstered bar stools. That comfortable glamour contributes to the feel-good ambience that makes people want to stay for just one more round.

Amid the retail hubs of Newbury Street and Copley Place is a bookish hideout: the **Map Room Lounge** at the landmark Boston Public Library. Take a break to read or check your holiday to-do list while sipping a pumpkin spice espresso martini (which goes perfectly with the decadent maple-braised short rib panini).

Tucked away from the chaotic tangle of Somerville's Union Square, the **Bow Market** complex is a funky place to gather for food, drinks, and boutiques. **Remnant Brewing** offers craft beers on tap—the malty Fest Lager and the fruitier Hang Time IPA, among others—along with mixed drinks. Stop into **Rebel Rebel** for natural wine chosen by award-winning sommelier Lauren Friel (who also runs Dear Annie in Cambridge) or linger at **Nook** where the bartenders can get fancy: "The Substance" has a Cambodian-Mexican kick (tequila, dry curaçao, green tomato, ancho verde, pandan, and lime) while the bourbon-based "No Country" sparkles with hints of oranges and cardamom.

Closer to Harvard, in Cambridge's Central Square, **Brick & Mortar** has a raw, dimly lit interior with, yes, brick walls, and scattered wrought iron. Sit at the marvelous V-shaped copper bar and peruse the one big room (entered by way of a nondescript stairway from the street, next door to a cannabis shop). Liquor bottles are stacked in a corner, as they might be at home. The bar's soundtrack offers smooth, sophisticated jazz and hypnotic electronic beats, and the mixologists, all smiles, seriously cater to diverse tastes. "What's New Pussycat?" features lychee liqueur, and the four-shot "Daquiri Time Out" helps counter what the bar calls "whatever craziness is going on."

By contrast, Harvard Square's **Wusong Road** is packed with fake stuff, but feels very much alive. Faux flowers and vines spring from every corner amid tiki hut decor. At the bar, patrons can order from the pan-Asian menu and pick out kitschy glassware—cobras and kitty cats share space with skulls—for their fruity tropical drinks. Share Scorpion Bowls and Singapore Slings or try the rarer "Breath of the Drag-

on," made with tequila, mezcal, and dragon fruit and strawberry-infused Campari. The whole South Pacific/Asian/tropical vibe and exuberant decor make this a prime escape from worldly woes.

The nearby **Longfellow Bar** (at the Alden & Harlow restaurant) is a relative straight-shooter. Choose to hang out upstairs or down—both have a handsome modern feel with marble tables, all warmly lit. All drinks reflect attention to detail, as with the layered "Ocean Eyes," made with gin, bergamot, lemon, eucalyptus, spirulina, sake, and falernum, a spicy, nutty syrup popular in the Caribbean. Such care is evident, too, at **Harvest**'s gem-like bar. Facing a quiet pedestrian walkway, it's perfect for solo visits or tête-à-têtes far from holiday pressures.

STAFF PICK

Concerts and Carols at Boston's Gardner Museum

Catch the Sunday afternoon concert series at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum this fall. Held in the 300-seat, tiered Calderwood Hall—among the "best chamber music spaces in the city," says curator of music George Steel—the lineup offers a range of musical styles. On November 16, globally celebrated mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke sings American songs in honor of the 250th anniversary of the country's founding. Pianist Michelle Cann, who won two Grammy Awards for her recordings of music by Florence Price, the first African American woman to have her compositions performed by a major symphony orchestra, performs on November 23. As a curator, Steel plans for existing compositions, along with newly commissioned works, and keeps "two goals in mind: enlightenment and pleasure." Isabella Stewart Gardner's first love was music, he adds, and she hosted concerts in her home before opening the museum in 1903 and establishing the oldest museum music series in the country.

Furthering that tradition, Steel has or-

Lastly, here are two especially creative ventures. The tiny **Barlette** in Brookline's Coolidge Corner serves seasonal drinks like they are precious gifts. A spiced cider float blends vanilla ice cream, angostura, seltzer, and salted caramel with bourbon or rum, and the "Peru Plunder" offers smoked chili, rosemary syrup, and poached pear with a choice of spirits. Further afield, the **Baldwin Bar** in Woburn occupies a mansion, but is so not pretentious. Showrunner Ran Duan, who transformed his parents' Chinese restaurant, operates the award-winning venue that's particularly praised for its edgy drinks—"Alvarado's Initiation" includes chamomile oil, rhubarb, gin, and golden beet flavors—all served with a magician's flair.

NIC LEHOUX/COURTESY OF THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

ganized the third annual Holiday Music in the Courtyard concert (December 3) featuring the American Brass Quintet and the Vox Vocal Ensemble (which he founded and directs). Music from the Renaissance through today "will penetrate every space in the museum," he says, along with carols "for everyone to sing together." The galleries are open for both the holiday concert and weekend series. On Sundays, patrons often come early, take in the art, and eat at the café before heading into performance—or do that in reverse. In any case, the outing offers a time of rich cultural immersion sure to lighten the inevitably darker days of winter. —N.P.B.

ALL IN A DAY

Fashionable Crossroads

A chartreuse jumpsuit featuring irises, butterflies, and an embroidered bustier. A slinky emerald-green sequined gown with crystal trim and a rhinestone belt. A fitted cobalt blue coat with a black fur collar and decorative closures known as "froggings." See these glamorous ensembles, and many more, on display in *Andrew Gn: Fashioning the World,* at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Nearly a hundred items—the outfits, along with accessories, illustrations, and biographical notes—shed light on the creative process and careful craftsmanship of this renowned artist. "He drew from art, history, pop culture, and cross-cultural influences," building an eclectic line of clothing, says chief curator Petra Slinkard. Although worn by royalty and celebrities around the world, his outfits offer an ease unusual in haute couture, she adds, "so women can step in, zip up, and go."

Born to immigrant parents in Singapore in 1966, Gn (pronounced "gin" with a hard "g") was encouraged to travel and ultimately studied in Paris, New York City, and Milan before founding his Paris atelier, The House of Andrew Gn, in 1995. What "began simply in his apartment with an assistant and a sewing machine," Slinkard says, grew into a 28-year business that produced 80 collections and some 10,000 ensembles. One of the few independent fashion houses to succeed financially, the atelier (which closed in 2023) is known for rich ornamentation, impeccable materials, and the artist's disparate global aesthetic. Gn integrates aspects of his own "Singaporean lived experience," says Slinkard, along with "the colors, textures, and patterns from Southeast Asia." Thus, a chinoiserie silk caftan with ostrich feathers was inspired by motifs in traditional Chinese lacquered screens and the chartreuse jumpsuit echoes a nineteenth-century kimono owned by his mother. Slinkard hopes visitors to the show "experience something they were not expecting," she says, "and walk away having learned something about another culture, time period, and form of creation." —N.P.B.

Top: iris print jumpsuit
Below, from left to right: coromandel print satin silk caftan with embroidered trim and ostrich feathers; springy belted flowered dress; green dress in flower garden brocade

COURTESY OF ANDREW GN

Right Now

THE EXPANDING HARVARD UNIVERSE

ON THE NOSE

Flu Vaccines That Work

by LINDSAY BROWNELL

Despite annual reminders, fewer than half of Americans get a flu shot each year. While their reasons vary, many feel that the vaccines just don't work very well. And they're not entirely wrong: in a given year, the flu vaccine's effectiveness can range from 10 to 60 percent, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's not great compared to other vaccines, such as measles (97 percent effective), chicken pox (98 percent effective), or polio (100 percent effective).

Flu is tricky to vaccinate against because the virus mutates extremely quickly. Vaccine manufacturers try to overcome this problem by predicting how the virus will evolve and redesigning the shot every year based on that prediction. But it's not perfect.

Another reason for existing flu vaccines' limited efficacy: they don't generate immunity where it's needed—namely, the nose. Castle professor of medicine Dan Barouch, his former graduate student Catherine Jacob-Dolan, and colleagues recently described the problem in *Science Translational Medicine* and detailed their proposed solution: new vaccines that stop infection where it starts, laying the groundwork for a new generation of better flu shots.

"There's a lot of room for improvement," said Barouch, who directs the Center for Virology and Vaccine Research at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. "Many of us have [had] the experience of getting the flu vaccine and then getting infected with the flu, and I think poorly effective vaccines [are] one of many reasons why we have vaccine hesitancy."

Barouch has been on a decades-long quest to develop better vaccines for a number of diseases, including HIV, Zika, tuberculosis, and COVID-19 (his technology was commercialized by Johnson & Johnson as the vaccine Jcovden). Recently, he turned his attention to influenza.

Like most respiratory viruses, flu enters the body through the mucous membranes (or mucosae) that line the inside of the nasal passages, mouth, throat, and windpipe. These tissues secrete mucus to lubricate and clean surfaces that are in contact with outside air and harbor immune cells that can trigger an immune response against viral invaders. This response is what causes classic flu symptoms, including congestion, runny nose, and sneezing. As the virus migrates down into the lungs, it can cause more severe symptoms, including shortness of breath and body aches.

Illustration by Beth Goody

It makes intuitive sense that the best way to stop a virus that enters through the mucosae is to generate immunity in the very tissues that get infected, so the virus can't spread. But that hasn't been a priority for vaccine developers, Barouch said: "The vaccine field is really accustomed to giving intramuscular shots for pretty much everything."

Most flu vaccines are therefore injected via a shot in the upper arm muscle that introduces dead virus particles to trigger an immune response. There is also a nasal spray that releases a live, weakened virus into the nose, but it's far less commonly used—in part because it's no more effective than the shot, despite being delivered to the right tissues.

Barouch has been on a decades-long quest to develop better vaccines.

Barouch and his colleagues set out to study exactly how effective the existing vaccines are at generating immunity in the mucosae and to compare them to two newer vaccine types based on technologies used in COVID-19 vaccines. One is an mRNA-based flu shot, similar to the Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines. The other is an adenovirus-based vaccine, similar to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine that Barouch helped develop. Because adenoviruses are naturally stable enough to survive in the nasal passages, the researchers were able to administer that vaccine both as a shot and directly as a liquid to the nose and throat using a pipette.

They performed their experiments in 40 macaques, primates whose immune systems are similar to humans'. After administering a standard flu shot to mimic the exposure that virtually all humans receive, they boosted different groups of macaques with each of the four vaccine types. Then they exposed them to a strain of the H1N1 (swine) flu to see what would happen.

The animals that had been given the clinically available flu shot or nasal spray showed almost no immune response in the mucosae and had nearly the same amount of flu virus in their lungs as animals that had received no booster. This was especially surprising for the nasal spray, which the researchers had expected to work better because it targets the mucosae directly.

The best-performing type was the adenovirus vaccine administered directly to the nose and throat, which—in addition to generating the strongest and longest-lasting mucosal immunity—cleared the virus from the animals' bodies in as few as two days. Animals that received the currently available vaccines took a week or more to clear the virus.

The mRNA vaccine shots generated moderate amounts of mucosal immunity: they were not quite as strong as the adenovirus vaccines, but significantly better than both commercially available flu vaccines.

The results supported the approach that Barouch has been advocating for years. "If you want to make a better vaccine to protect against infection," he said, "you're going to need to have a vaccine that generates mucosal immunity."

Based on this new flu study, Barouch's team engaged in early discussions with researchers at the National Institutes of Health's Vaccine Research Center about testing their promising new vaccines in humans. Those talks have now been suspended due to uncertainty surrounding the proposed cut of nearly 40 percent to the agency's budget. Barouch's lab is currently exploring the use of adenovirus and mRNA vaccines against H5N1, a highly contagious strain of bird flu that can be lethal in humans.

Other virology researchers are working to create mRNA vaccines stable enough for delivery via a nasal spray, which could offer another, more effective vaccination option (in addition to the adenovirus-based vaccine). But those studies are also in jeopardy following the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s decision to cancel $500 million in grants supporting mRNA vaccine development.

While the answer to a better flu vaccine might be right under our noses, new shots won't be available any time soon. Barouch's recommendation: keep getting your annual flu shot, and stock up on some extra tissues.

LINGUISTIC ENIGMA

Europe's Mystery Languages

by NINA PASQUINI

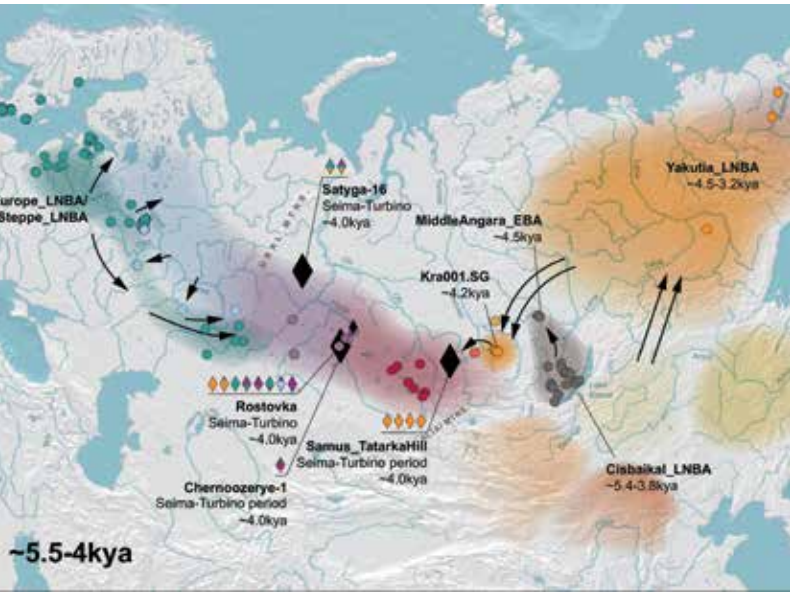
Most European languages share a common ancestry: you can hear it in the echoes between the English *mother*, Spanish *madre*, Russian *mat'*, German *mütter*. But then there are *äiti*, *anya*, *ema*—the words for "mother" in Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian.

These are the Uralic languages, whose roots, grammar, and rhythm are nothing like those of their Indo-European neighbors. Stranger still, they bear striking similarities to languages spoken not in Europe, but far to the east, in Siberia, Central Asia, and Mongolia. Where did the speakers of these enigmatic languages, scattered in isolated pockets throughout Europe, come from?

For centuries, linguists have tried to solve this mystery. One dominant theory placed their homeland near Russia's Ural Mountains, the language family's namesake. But new research from Harvard scientists points somewhere even further east: Yakutia, a region in northeastern Siberia on the same longitude as eastern China, Japan, and Korea.

By analyzing over 1,000 ancient DNA samples, the team discovered a unique "genetic signature"—a distinctive set of DNA variations—shared exclusively by Uralic-speaking populations. This genetic pattern first appears, in unmixed form, in 4,500-year-old samples from Yakutia. From there, the DNA record shows, those populations spread westward into modern Europe.

Tracing language spread through DNA isn't new. Earlier this year, professor of genetics and human evolutionary biology David Reich—who also co-authored the work on Uralic languages—used this method to map the origins of Indo-European languages, spoken today by more than 40 percent of the world population. But because Uralic languages are far less common, they are also harder to trace: there is just less DNA to work with.



Maps used by Reich and his co-authors to trace the migration of Uralic language speakers

Co-lead author Alexander Mee-Woong Kim '13, M.A. '22, has helped to change that. Beginning in 2015, he journeyed to Siberia to collect DNA samples from ancient human skeletal remains. With 180 new samples gathered during his fieldwork, researchers were finally able to piece together the ancient history of the Uralic language family.

"For many people in the U.S.," Kim says, "Siberia feels like a distant, remote place with small populations, far away from everything." But these findings tell a different story, showing the region is "a nexus out of which things emerge... a region where world-transformative processes originated."

The DNA evidence also sheds light on how Uralic languages spread—and why they now survive only in scattered pockets. The first westward movement of Uralic-speaking hunter-gatherers was around 4,000 years ago, during the Seima-Turbino phenomenon: a Bronze Age network of trade, travel, and metalworking that co-lead author Tian Chen (T.C.) Zeng, Ph.D. '25, likens to a "proto-United Nations." Through this vast cultural exchange, diverse populations, including early Uralic language speakers, came into contact.

After Seima-Turbino, Uralic language speakers moved west in larger numbers. "The Uralic genetic signature pushed westwards, all the way to the Baltic Sea," says Zeng, who studies human evolutionary biology.

But over time, much of that ancestry faded. Today, Estonians carry about 1 to 2 percent of Yakutia-related ancestry in their autosomal DNA (which includes all chromosomes except sex chromosomes). Finns have a higher proportion, around 10 percent.

But when scientists examine these populations' sex chromosomes, they find that roughly 50 percent of Finnish and Estonian men have a Y chromosome that traces back to early Uralic language speakers. This suggests a pattern called "sex-biased migration," says Zeng. Men were likely the primary drivers of migration and had children with women from other populations. Over generations, this diluted the Yakutia ancestry in the overall DNA inherited from both parents, but the populations' Y chromosomes—passed only from father to son—remained largely Yakutian in origin.

Hungary, where the population has almost no Yakutia ancestry, presents a more dramatic case. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Uralic-speaking Magyar conquerors arrived in the region and imposed their language, but didn't intermix with the indigenous population and therefore left little genetic trace. This is an example of "an elite replacement event," says Reich: small groups imposing their language through "political power." Such an event was rare in ancient history, he says, but far more common today: many Americans, for instance, speak English as a first language without having English ancestry.

The scattered presence of Uralic languages today hints at both a broader and more connected reach across northern Eurasia. Over time, however, Indo-European-speaking peoples gradually redrew the linguistic map. "The pattern you see with Uralic languages—little islands surrounded by a sea of Indo-European languages," Reich explains, "is usually what happens when there's a subsequent language expansion."

Beyond genetics and archaeology, the story of the Uralic language speakers is also one of resilience and adaptability, says Kim. Though they began as a relatively small group, their cultural and linguistic legacy remains. "I have the strong sense that early Uralic speakers were not merely in a fortuitous place geographically and ecologically," Kim says, "but they had a remarkable ability to flourish amidst dramatic collisions of political forms, social structures, and worldviews."

Translation of "mother"

European languages

ENGLISH: mother
SPANISH: madre
RUSSIAN: mat'
GERMAN: mütter

Uralic languages

FINNISH: äiti
HUNGARIAN: anya
ESTONIAN: ema

Maps courtesy of David Reich Lab and Natural Earth: naturalearthdata.com/downloads/10m-raster-data/10m-gray-earth/

STORIES THAT STICK

The Two-Parent Black Family Myth

by SAIMA SIDIK

A SEDUCTIVE STORY can stick in the public's consciousness like a too-catchy tune. Harvard sociologist Christina Cross has spent nearly a decade trying to dispel the power of one tall tale that grips American society: the notion that an easy remedy for racial inequality is to reduce the number of Black children raised in single-parent households.

This idea has its roots in a report that sociologist—and later U.S. senator—Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote in 1965, the same year he joined the Harvard faculty. U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson had asked Moynihan to investigate why nearly 50 percent of African American families lived at or below the poverty line. After analyzing government documents, such as census records, and consulting the existing sociological literature, Moynihan concluded that when Black children are raised by single mothers, they "flounder—and fail."

That simple explanation for racial inequality was so compelling to Americans that even today, three of the four ways in which the U.S. welfare program aims to lift families out of poverty involve promoting the two-parent structure. Every year, the U.S. government spends billions of dollars to advance this goal.

The truth, Cross argues in *Inherited Inequality,* her new book, is that American society gives Black kids "a perverse two-for-one discount." Even when they do grow up with two parents, the outcome is too often the same as when white children grow up with one.

Cross reached this conclusion using data from three household surveys administered by academic researchers that, collectively, examined the lives of tens of thousands of Gen X and millennial youths. While two of those surveys follow kids from birth through young adulthood, the third took an in-depth look at the lives of American families during two years in the early 2000s. In contrast to Moynihan's findings from the 1960s, these newer data show that cohabiting Black parents convey only a modest benefit to their children.

"If we think about family structure as being a great equalizer—as being the thing that's going to make the difference and close gaps between groups," Cross says, "then unfortunately we're not going to witness that reduction in inequality that we're expecting."

To some people, this shift in evidence-based understanding may come as a surprise. After all, it makes intuitive sense that when two parents live together, they have twice as many opportunities to provide their children with financial, logistical, and emotional support as a parent who's doing it all alone. And in fact, white children growing up in two-parent households *do* fare better academically than white children living with a single parent, in terms of high school academic success, the chance of finishing college, and income level in early adulthood.

But in Black families, the story is more complicated. Although Black children do tend to perform better in school when they live with both parents, their accomplishments are, on average, similar to what could be expected of a white child living with only one parent. On the flip side, living in a single-parent home doesn't seem to lower Black children's academic performance as much as it does their white peers'.

To investigate why, Cross asked whether the benefits of two-parent white families—more plentiful financial resources, adult supervision, and psychological well-being—extended fully to Black children in similar arrangements. "And the answer to that, unfortunately, is no," she says. Systemic and cultural racism pervades America, she explains, from discrimination in

*Illustration by Jennifer Carling/*Harvard Magazine, *with images from iStock*

the housing market to bias in the justice system. Consequently, even Black children who live with two parents are likely to face challenges, such as insufficient money and chronically depressed parents. These burdens are heavy enough to dwarf any benefit that comes with adding a second parent to the equation.

Inherited Inequality "beautifully exposes the man behind the curtain," says Boston University sociologist Anthony Abraham Jack, Ph.D. '16, who thinks the book could move American society past the two-parent myth. "Because the image of that may be good for postcards, but it's not good for policy," he says.

Cross began challenging the two-parent narrative publicly in 2019, when she published a *New York Times* opinion piece, "The Myth of the Two-Parent Family." She hoped it would lead to social policy that could reduce racial inequality but says, instead, "I've seen policy changes in the opposite direction." Upcoming cuts to social programs such as SNAP and Medicaid, she says, will likely increase the barriers Black children face and widen racial gaps in the United States. Likewise, the recent Supreme Court decision to end affirmative action in college admissions already seems to be reducing enrollment of Black students at some elite schools.

Cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, Cross fears, will increase the barriers Black children face.

Jack says he wouldn't be surprised to see the achievement gap between Black and white kids widen in response to recent policy changes. "When you remove what protects us from the full weight of America's history of racism and exclusion," he explains, "we're going to see this inequality only grow."

Cross hopes her research can give policymakers the information they need to start changing that. Sixty years after the Moynihan report, Cross says she wants to tell a different story—"a much more sobering and complex one, but one that I think will help us to move in a more fruitful direction."

JOHN HARVARD'S
Journal
NEWS ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

Harvard Faces the Future

As the school year begins, students enter a changed campus.

At the start of the fall semester, President Alan M. Garber exited Massachusetts Hall for a traditional stroll around the Yard. Decked in a red Harvard sweatshirt, he chatted genially with first-year students moving into their dorms, his sanguine demeanor masking a summer that couldn't have been easy.

With settlement talks with the federal government reportedly stalled—and some loud voices in the Harvard community urging against a deal— the University continued its rollercoaster ride into September. There were federal court victories, further financial attacks, rumors, and recriminations (see page 17). At the end of the month, U.S. President Donald Trump, speaking off the cuff at an unrelated White House event, suggested that a deal was all but inked, involving a $500 million dollar payout and a commitment to building trade schools. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon seemed to agree.

University officials were notably silent. Days went by with no news, in the midst of a federal shutdown.

But even if an agreement comes soon—allowing research funding to flow, ensuring that international students will get their visas, easing the white-hot pressure—Harvard will emerge from the drama significantly changed.

Photograph by Niko Yaitanes/Harvard Magazine

For one, the financial pressures aren't likely to disappear. Even with past grants restored, researchers are facing down the likelihood that future opportunities will shrink, under an administration that is hostile to higher education and has taken steps to cut funding overall for science and medical research. In July, Congress passed a tax hike on university endowment income that could, according to economists, bump the tax on Harvard's income from 1.5 to 8 percent in January, costing a reported $200 million per year. Trump's executive proclamation in September, placing a $100,000 fee on every H-1B visa, puts a hefty surcharge on a major mechanism Harvard uses to hire international scholars and researchers.

Driven partly by changes in the law, partly by self-reflection, and partly by the Trump administration's antipathy toward identity politics, students returned this year to find new structures, rules, and guidelines.

So austerity continues: a hiring freeze, rumors of further layoffs, a smaller pool of graduate students, a pause on the planned renovations to Widener, Houghton, Lamont, and Pusey libraries. (Other construction projects continue: the renovation of Eliot House; the continued work, in Allston, on the Enterprise Research Campus and the new home of the American Repertory Theater. And Adams House reopened this fall after a six-year, three-stage renovation.)

In addition to the money, there's the mood. Driven partly by changes in the law, partly by self-reflection after the past two years of turmoil, and partly by the Trump administration's antipathy toward identity politics, Harvard students returned to campus this year to find new structures, rules, and guidelines.

Photograph by Jim Harrison

HARVARD PORTRAIT

Wolfram Schlenker

Agricultural economics is rife with trade-offs. Pesticides increase crop yields (lowering the price of produce for consumers) but damage the environment and human health. Global food trade reduces insecurities yet can lead to dire geopolitical conflicts. And the continuing effects of climate change worsen all these scenarios. "Extreme heat is the main driver of agricultural yields," notes Wolfram Schlenker, Goldberg professor of the global food system at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). In the short run, that "might not be that bad for farmers—given that once you restrict supply, you drive up prices," he says, "but [it] *is* bad for consumers, especially the poor." Schlenker chose this field because he likes to grapple with crucial unresolved questions, such as: Can the world continue to feed its growing population? Born and raised in Germany, he spent a year abroad at Duke University as an undergraduate and stayed, ultimately earning a master's degree in engineering and management science. He completed a doctorate in agricultural and resource economics at the University of California, Berkeley in 2003, then taught at Columbia University before joining Harvard in 2024. At HKS, Schlenker's work explores important challenges, including: Should we use irrigation water to insulate against drought, even as aquifers are being drained at unsustainable rates? What are the pros and cons of Russia, with its fertile soil still frozen over, becoming a big future breadbasket? When he's not working, Schlenker likes to bike. The car-free, rails-to-trails routes are antidotal, enabling his mind to wander freely amid natural beauty and to appreciate nature's complexity. "As a kid, you think nature is an equilibrium," he says, but "there have always been fights for dominance between different species. Most landscapes have evolved over time." —NELL PORTER BROWN

Yesterday's News

From the pages of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* and *Harvard Magazine*

1915 Professor Theodore Richards becomes the first American to receive a Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

1925 The Harvard Fund is officially established—to provide a means for alumni to support the University through annual contributions, as distinct from special gifts to a particular drive or campaign.

1940 "A decade ago," note the editors, "any Harvard man who rode a bicycle was thought at least eccentric." But "since the universal recognition of carbon monoxide," bicycles have made a comeback in Cambridge, with more than 250 counted in daily use around the Yard and the Houses.

1955 The Corporation orders the replacement on the Memorial Hall tower of the rooftop railing and other metal ornamentation removed early in 1945 because of deterioration—and unwittingly sets the stage for the conflagration that destroyed all but the base of the tower in 1956.

1970 Surprising students and faculty alike, administrative vice president L. Gard Wiggins announces that the University will buy only lettuce picked by members of the United Farm Workers—a change from its earlier policy of buying solely on the basis of quality, value, and supplies available. The decision ends a sustained effort by a small group of Harvardians to convince the University to boycott lettuce altogether.

1990 Julia Child donates 2,000 cookbooks from her collection to Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library, with a promise of more to come. The "French chef" hopes the gift will promote cooking as a respected profession and academic field of study.

2000 Moore professor of biological anthropology Irven DeVore delivers his final lecture in Science B-29, "Human Behavioral Biology" (popularly known as "Sex"), which he has co-taught since 1970, attracting close to a third of all undergraduates during that time span with his showmanship and devotion to teaching.

2020 Having lost the first round of its lawsuit against Harvard, Students for Fair Admissions sues the University of North Carolina. The pair of cases ultimately resulted in the 2023 Supreme Court ruling that outlawed consideration of race in admissions.

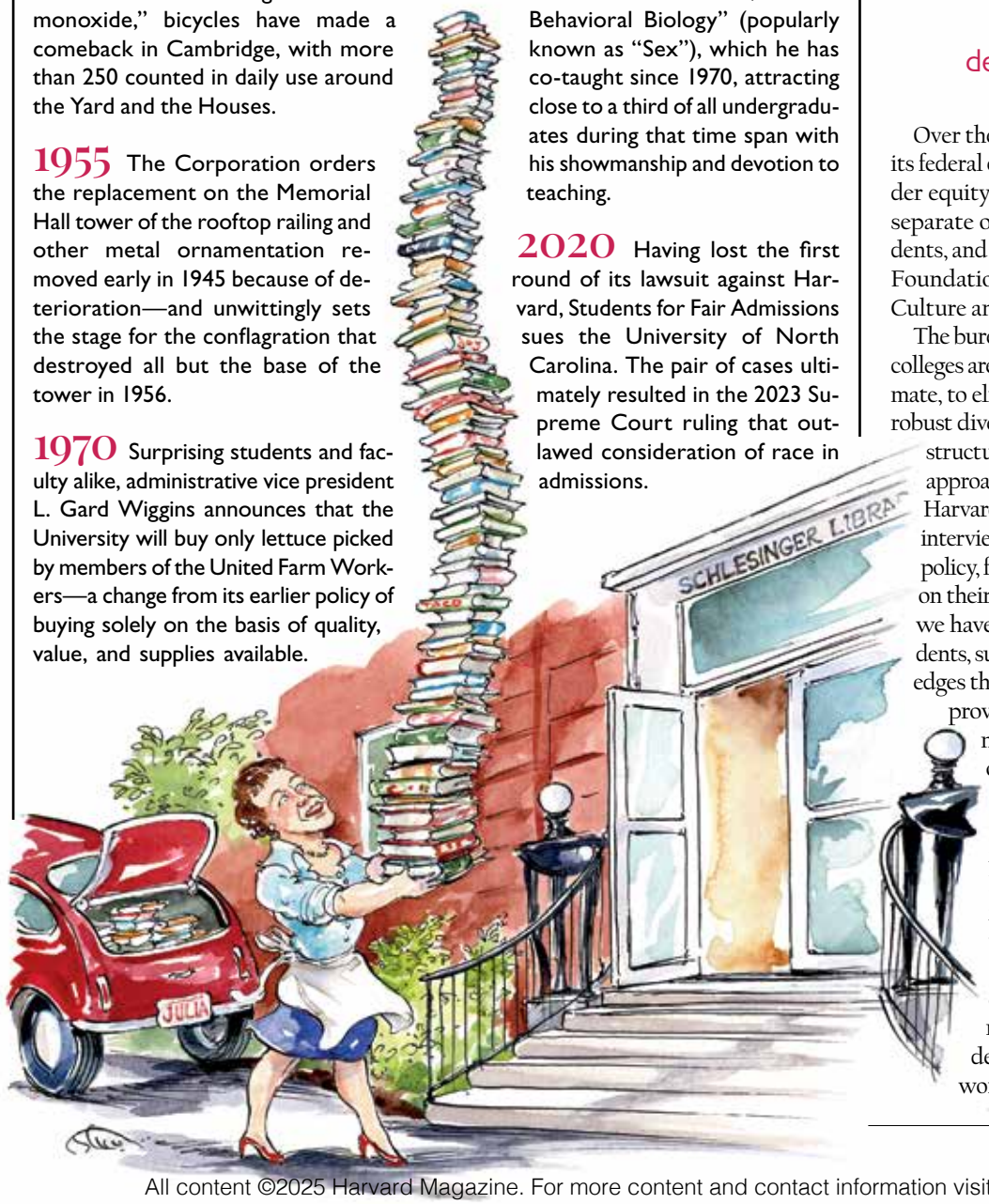


Illustration by Mark Steele

A new initiative to promote religious literacy and dialogue was announced over the summer, complete with a new position: director of interfaith engagement. University-wide harassment training modules added detailed language about antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias, including long lists of terms that could be considered discriminatory.

> "We are no longer, as a matter of policy, funneling students to offices based on their identity group."
>
> —David Deming, dean of Harvard College

Over the summer, the College reshuffled its federal compliance offices related to gender equity and nondiscrimination, folding separate offices for women, minority students, and LGBTQ students into a "Harvard Foundation," housed within the Office of Culture and Community.

The bureaucratic shifts mirror what many colleges are doing, in the current political climate, to eliminate traces of what were once robust diversity, equity, and inclusion infrastructures. At Harvard, they reflect a new approach toward identity, Danoff dean of Harvard College David Deming said in an interview. "We are no longer, as a matter of policy, funneling students to offices based on their identity group," he said. "Rather, we have an office that welcomes all students, supports all students, and acknowledges their intersectional identities—and provides programming for them that makes them feel like they are part of a larger community."

If many of these changes reflect political realities outside Harvard's gates, others stem from introspection. Last winter, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) released a report from its classroom social compact committee, which found that students were de-emphasizing classwork in favor of extracurriculars and

other pursuits. The report also acknowledged widespread grade inflation and the pressures on faculty that lead to the practice, and found that students and instructors often feel uncomfortable expressing their views during class discussions.

A concerted effort has followed to "recenter" academics. Over the summer, incoming first-year students participated in a 90-minute online orientation program about Harvard's academic offerings, developed by dean of undergraduate education Amanda Claybaugh. A segment on "how college is different from high school" told students they should expect to spend many hours on their classwork; a module on "challenging conversations" stressed the importance of diverse viewpoints in the classroom.

Instructors were given explicit guidance about how to treat students whose political views differ from their own. And, following a vote by the FAS last spring, classes now use the Chatham House Rule: participants may share the contents of a classroom discussion outside of class, but not the identity of the speakers.

Much of the work falls under the umbrella of "productive disagreement," a watchword across campus since the national scrutiny began. At Convocation exercises, Garber laid out expectations clearly: "We trust that you—of many points of origin and many more types of backgrounds—will greet differences with genuine curiosity and sincere interest. This, of course, does not mean that you will agree with everyone."

That disagreement will surely spill out in public, though compared to recent years, the fall on campus has been strikingly quiet so far. At Convocation, the only hint of past unrest was a handful of protestors off to one side, silently holding up a pro-Palestinian sign. Deming, who began his role this summer after years as faculty dean of Kirkland House, said he trusts that students will navigate the line between heightened scrutiny on conduct and the urge for self-expression.

"We want to have a culture on campus that recognizes freedom and engages seriously with different perspectives," he said. "And we want all of our students to feel like they can speak their mind. And if they don't feel that way, I'd like to know."

—JOANNA WEISS

News in Brief

Harvard—and Its Faculty—Win in Federal Court

In two separate rulings in September, federal district judges called out the Trump administration for violating the First Amendment. District Judge Allison Burroughs restored more than $2.2 million in cancelled grants to Harvard after ruling that the administration's freeze order—in response, federal officials said, to antisemitism and political imbalance on campus—violated Harvard's free speech rights. While Burroughs acknowledged that Harvard "could (and should) have done a better job" of dealing with harassment, she accused the government of using antisemitism "as a smokescreen for a targeted, ideologically-motivated assault on this country's premier universities."

Weeks later, District Judge William Young issued a scathing 161-page ruling in a lawsuit brought by Harvard's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, among other parties. The plaintiffs charged that, in its efforts to deport noncitizens engaged in pro-Palestinian speech, the Trump administration was chilling free expression and creating a climate of fear and repression. Young, calling the case "perhaps the most important ever to fall within the jurisdiction of this district court," declared that First Amendment protections apply to noncitizens. He said he would determine what the consequences for the government should be for violating the Constitution.

Absent a Settlement, a Squeeze

In the absence of a settlement, the Trump administration continued to pressure Harvard over the summer and early fall. In September, citing "growing concerns" about the University's financial stability, the government placed Harvard on heightened cash monitoring status, a designation that requires the University to use its own funds to pay out federal aid to students before requesting reimbursement from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The DOE also said it was requiring Harvard to provide a $36 million letter of credit, guaranteeing that it would fulfill its financial obligations to students and the government, and threatened to cut off all access to federal student aid over what it said was the University's "continued refusal" to turn over admissions data.

Later in the month, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that it was referring the University for "debarment," laying the path for the administration to block Harvard from

Outdoor Dining on Bow Street

The block of lower Bow Street between Plympton and DeWolfe Streets could be closed to vehicle traffic, paving the way for outdoor dining at Daedalus, Sea Hag, and the Blue Bottle coffee shop. The Cambridge City Council is pursuing plans for closing a portion of Bow Street to car traffic in the spring of 2026, working with the University and the Harvard Square Business Association. According to local news reports, city officials envision a European-style pedestrian plaza—and note that the street was closed for construction for two years with no significant impact on surrounding traffic.

Photograph by Niko Yaitanes/Harvard Magazine

receiving any future federal grants or contracts. The move was based on a charge, from the department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), that Harvard violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by "acting with deliberate indifference towards antisemitic student-on-student harassment" following the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks in Israel.

The New York Times reported that earlier in September, Harvard had sent a caustic 163-page letter to the Trump administration, charging that the OCR's determination was based on flimsy evidence and ignored actions Harvard has taken over the past two years to address campus antisemitism.

Trump Outlines Goals for Colleges

In early october, the Trump administration sent a group of nine universities a "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education," outlining a list of requirements that would grant them preference for federal funds. Harvard was not on the list of recipients. Still, the document, condemned by some as an assault on academic freedom, serves as a kind of blueprint for the administration's goals and hints at some of the demands Harvard might face in settlement negotiations: requiring standardized test scores in admissions; maintaining institutional neutrality; requiring the preservation of same-sex spaces, such as women's locker rooms; and limiting foreign students to 15 percent of the undergraduate population, with no more than 5 percent from a single country. The document also demands that a university with an endowment exceeding $2 million per undergraduate student—a description that fits Harvard—not charge tuition for admitted students pursuing hard science programs.

Orchestra Suspended for Hazing

A greater nationwide scrutiny on collegiate hazing fell swiftly on the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, which was banned from operating as a club for the semester following a complaint about a retreat that, according to *The Crimson*, involved vodka, hand sanitizer, a blindfolded nighttime march, and a conga line.

Dean David Deming said the College has tightened its hazing enforcement in response to the Stop Campus Hazing Act, which passed Congress in 2024 and requires colleges that receive federal financial aid to report hazing incidents and develop hazing prevention programs and policies. "Our hazing policy at Harvard College has not changed," says Deming. "What changed was the law, and we're committed to following the law."

A Satellite Goes Dark

A climate satellite built with contributions from Harvard researchers unexpectedly went dark in June, after a little more than a year in

In Harvard's face-off with Brown, Crimson defensive back Austin-Jake Guillory runs back a first-quarter interception to set up a touchdown.

Delivering the Goods

Crimson football starts the season strong.

The media who cover the Ivy League tabbed Harvard as the preseason title favorite, with good reason. The Crimson have arguably the league's best quarterback in senior Jaden Craig, who in conference games last season threw 23 touchdown passes and a mere three interceptions. They have inarguably the league's most accomplished defender in senior safety and captain Ty Bartrum.

In the first three games of the season, the Crimson fulfilled those expectations, whomping Stetson 59-7 in the season opener in Florida, avenging last year's loss to Brown with a 41-7 rout at Soldiers Field, and trouncing Holy Cross 59-24 at an away game in Worcester. Craig is a marvel to watch and, for sheer arm talent (as the football expression goes), he might be the best Harvard has ever had. His passes have zing and touch. He can whip a ball into a tight window, he can float it deep to hit a receiver in stride, he can fire it to a tight end who has gotten open at the first-down marker. He can also run if needed.

It's a promising start for Stephenson Family coach for Harvard football Andrew Aurich, now in his second season with the Crimson, who has a lot to look forward to if the wins continue. For the first time since it began competition in 1956, the Ivy League will permit its football champion to advance to the postseason—specifically, to the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs. The Crimson haven't played a postseason football game since the 1920 Rose Bowl (Harvard 7, Oregon 6). This year's FCS playoffs begin on November 29 and could mean five more games if Harvard goes the distance. —DICK FRIEDMAN

Photograph courtesy of Harvard Athletics

Gay Critiques Donor Pressure, Harvard Response

During a September address to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Amsterdam, former Harvard president Claudine Gay criticized the University's response to Trump administration attacks. "The posture of the institution seems to be one of compliance," she said, in remarks that were reported by *The Crimson* and *The New York Times*. Gay also sharply condemned donors whose increasingly common public ultimatums, she said, "force institutions to choose between donor preferences and public integrity." (Gay's exit from Harvard's presidency in 2024 was hastened by donor outcry.) Gay drew a distinction between supporting higher education and steering its direction, and she advised universities "to say no to gifts with inappropriate conditions and donors with inappropriate demands."

JONATHAN SHAW / HARVARD MAGAZINE

space. Launched with great fanfare and tech-giant funding in March 2024, MethaneSAT was designed to detect plumes of invisible methane emissions from space, and it was meant to collect data for five years.

In September, Harvard scientists who worked on the project told *The Crimson* that even during its brief lifespan, the satellite amassed a vast trove of "beautiful" data that will take a year to process and may pave the way to new discoveries—perhaps even a MethaneSAT 2, though it may not be based at Harvard.

Women and Gender Studies Professor Denied Tenure

Some faculty expressed surprise that Durba Mitra, the Wolf associate professor of women and gender studies, was denied tenure this summer. When she was hired as an assistant professor in 2017, Mitra, who studies sexuality in South Asian history, was the first full-time faculty member hired by the committee on degrees in studies of women, gender, and sexuality. (The department had previously relied on interdisciplinary joint appointments.)

In the 2022-23 academic year, Mitra was the acting faculty director of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Last January, *Campus News*, a conservative website that highlights left-wing courses and activities on college campuses, wrote an article about her course, "The Sexual Life of Colonialism," which focused on "the role of colonialism and neocolonialism in racial imaginations of gender and sexuality." Mitra will have to leave the University within a year.

The Kingmaker?

With one momentous opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts may have cemented his legacy. It's unlikely to be the one he wants.

by Lincoln Caplan

John G. Roberts Jr. '76, J.D. '79, has written hundreds of Supreme Court opinions in his 20 years as chief justice of the United States. The most important, to the nation and to his legacy, may be his opinion in *Trump v. United States*, which changed the balance of power among the branches of government—and rewrote the meaning of the Constitution.

A federal grand jury had indicted former President Donald Trump for his actions after the November 2020 election, charging him with, among other lawbreaking, using "dishonesty, fraud, and deceit" to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. Trump moved to dismiss the charges, arguing that he should have absolute immunity from criminal prosecution for actions he had performed while carrying out his official duties.

In July 2024, by a 6-3 vote, the Supreme Court overruled federal trial and appeals courts to decide in Trump's favor. The Roberts opinion broadly expanded the authority of the presidency by saying that a former president is immune from prosecution, even after his tenure, for official acts he took under his exclusive authority as president. And he is likely immune, the Court ruled, for all other official acts he took while in office—as the opinion put it, even in "the outer perimeter" of his responsibilities. The opinion's foundational idea is that "unlike anyone else, the president is a branch of government, and the Constitution vests in him sweeping powers and duties."

Over 41 pages, Roberts made his reasoning clear: the "pall of potential prosecution" poses a danger to the presidency and the nation if it prompts a president to hesitate to execute his duties "fearlessly and fairly." Roberts emphasized that he was separating Trump's actions from the privileges of the office. "We must not confuse 'the issue of a power's validity with the cause it is invoked to promote,'" he wrote, "but must instead focus on the 'enduring consequences upon the balanced power structure of our Republic.'"

The decision was about the prerogatives of the presidency, rather than an absolution of Trump's conduct during his first term as president or an endorsement of his cause. But it was the fullest expression the Court has ever made of a maximalist view of that power, narrowly checked by the Court and Congress.

Its legal consequences are extreme. The Constitution sets out a deliberate order in its articles establishing the branches of power: I for Congress, II for the executive. The Court's ruling all but reverses the importance of those branches and retracts a critical power of the judiciary that limited wrongdoing by a president.

In her dissent in the case, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by Justices Elena Kagan, J.D. '86, and Ketanji Brown Jackson '92, J.D. '96, warned about the consequences of such a broad expansion of presidential power. "The Court effectively creates a law-free zone around the President," upsetting the status quo that had existed since the nation's founding and giving blanket permission for wrongdoing, Sotomayor wrote. "Let the President violate the law, let him exploit the trappings of his office for personal gain, let him use his official power for evil ends," she summarized. "In every use of official power, the President is now a king above the law."

Roberts remarked in his opinion that the "tone of chilling doom" in her dissent was "wholly disproportionate" to what the ruling

Portrait by Sam Kerr

In 2023, Roberts received the Henry J. Friendly Medal, named after the federal judge for whom he clerked in 1979-1980.

meant. But Sotomayor's words proved prescient: the breadth of power that President Trump and his administration have asserted in the months since he was sworn in for his second term has made plain how boundlessly they interpret the reach of the presidency.

As the legal scholar Peter Shane '74 wrote in *The Atlantic* in July, Roberts's opinion didn't anticipate Trump acting in any of those ways—even though Trump, running again for the presidency at the time of the ruling, was making promises to his supporters of precisely what he would do with barely limited power. But Shane's criticism was also much graver. "No one on the Supreme Court has gone further to enable Trump's extreme exercise of presidential power than the chief justice of the United States, John Roberts," he declared. "What America is witnessing is a remaking of the American presidency into something closer to a dictatorship."

He went on: "Trump's use of executive power is not a distortion of the Roberts Court's theory of the presidency; it is the Court's theory of the presidency, come to life."

The *Trump* opinion underscores the sometimes-contradictory nature of Roberts's record as chief. At 70, he is an exceptionally capable and strong-willed justice who takes pride in the independence of his judgment and in his tie to the eminent, nonpartisan tradition of seeking "the right result for the right reasons." Yet he is also the product of a long-building, now-dominant conservative legal movement whose triumphs are widespread, with effects that are still unfolding.

Roberts, often described as an institutionalist, has enabled the most hostile anti-institutionalist ever elected president.

In some corners of public opinion and judicial analysis, the *Trump* ruling cemented Roberts's reputation as a Republican and conservative partisan. It also cemented a view of the Court as a tool for carrying out Trump's anti-democracy agenda—the opposite of what Roberts sought in his opinion.

Now, the *Trump* ruling looms over cases that are likely to, or scheduled to, come before the Court in coming months, including at least two involving the government's attempts to punish Harvard for perceived political excesses—which Harvard argues are a direct violation of its First Amendment rights. Other cases seem similarly fateful, about the authority of Congress, the independence of federal agencies, the use of the military in policing civilian life, and the nature of American citizenship.

Their outcomes, along with the Court's actions in the last few years, carry the seeds of American tragedy. Roberts, often described as an institutionalist, has enabled the most hostile anti-institutionalist ever elected president. The leader of the nation's judicial system has empowered the president who is the most disdainful in history of the decrees of judges, the provisos of the Constitution, and the workings of American democracy. The chief justice, attempting to thread the needle between principle and practicality, has opened the door to the possibility of the ultimate constitutional crisis: a president's outright defiance of the Supreme Court.

In 2023, a year before the Court issued the *Trump* decision, Roberts received the Henry J. Friendly Medal, a prestigious award honoring his achievement in law, from a research organization of the bar's elite called the American Law Institute. The award is named for Judge Henry Friendly, A.B. 1923, LL.B. '27, LL.D. '71, who served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit for 27 years and is considered one of America's great twentieth-century judges.

Roberts was a Friendly law clerk for a year starting in 1979, when Roberts was 24 and Friendly was 75. He was a favorite of Friendly's among his many clerks over the years, and the feeling was mutual. Ac-

Photograph by Sarah L. Voisin/The Washington Post via Getty Images

cepting the award, Roberts explained how important the judge remained as a model for him in many ways—even disclosing that the robe Friendly wore on the Second Circuit hangs in his closet in the Supreme Court robing room. As Friendly did, Roberts writes his judicial opinions by hand.

Roberts recounted that, when he finished Harvard Law School, he questioned his choice of career, concerned that "the law was a rather cynical profession." But, he went on, "a year with Henry Friendly changed everything. I saw, on a day-to-day basis, an eye-to-eye basis, that a good and full life could be led in the law."

> **"I saw, on a day-to-day basis, an eye-to-eye basis, that a good and full life could be led in the law."**
>
> *— John Roberts at the Friendly Medal award ceremony in 2023*

Roberts cited "three significant aspects" of Friendly's approach to judging as the touchstones of his own. The first is an open mind, not beholden to any school of legal thought ("He delighted in fitting a particular case in the context of the law as a whole"). The second is a belief in the power of reason, with the steps of legal logic laid out ("There's no hiding the ball"). The third is a pragmatic concern about human, social, and legal consequences. That was how the chief justice saw his own work. That was how he wanted it to be seen. That was also how some of his colleagues on the Court hoped he would craft his opinions.

At the Friendly Medal award ceremony, Justice Kagan, who served as dean of Harvard Law School from 2003 to 2009, introduced the chief justice before he spoke. While noting, and joking, that their votes in many cases have been for clashing sides, she validated Roberts's dedication to the law and his good faith in carrying out his duties on the Court. An acclaimed writer herself, she called his prose "the best writing in law."

Roberts's opinions, Kagan said, are transparent about their reasoning and clear enough to be a useful guide for future conduct. And, pointedly, she noted that his opinions "encourage, even if they don't guarantee, law that in its substance is careful and restrained and principled"—respectful, she implied, of precedent and of laws passed by elected bodies such as Congress; reluctant to reject settled rules and norms; and moderate as a matter of conviction, because that contributes to law's stability and to maintaining the people's trust.

She seemed to be working the ref—encouraging Roberts to follow the model of the moderate, legal process-oriented Friendly rather than the very conservative, states' rights-oriented, sometimes anti-civil-rights William Rehnquist, for whom Roberts went on to clerk at the Supreme Court.

Roberts's record shows the influence of both philosophies—as well as tenacity and intense ambition. From his youth, Roberts stood out as an achiever, a teenage National Merit Scholar and the first person from his private, Catholic Indiana high school to attend Harvard. He graduated *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard College in three years. An essay he wrote about the lawyer, senator, and orator Daniel Webster, called "The Utopian Conservative," won a Bowdoin Prize for literary merit.

Roberts was the managing editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, chosen by its liberal president for his talent, diligence, and integrity. He graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard Law School. In *The Chief*, her 2019 biography of Roberts, the legal journalist Joan Biskupic describes him as an introvert who worked himself to exhaustion through college and law school and learned how to present himself with charm and humility, grace and polish.

After excelling for Friendly, Roberts did a stellar job at the Supreme Court for then-Justice, later Chief Justice Rehnquist—who was known in that period as the Lone Ranger because he sometimes wrote hardline conservative dissents that no other justice joined. Then, when President Ronald Reagan gave his inaugural address in January 1981—declaring that "it is time for us to realize that we're too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams"—Roberts heard a "call to action" (his words), Biskupic reported, "to join the ideological battle" (hers).

At 26, Roberts became a special assistant to the attorney general in the Reagan administration—and soon became known in the Department of Justice as one of the New Right's steeliest and most combative and effective members. He was recruited to the White House counsel's office where, for four years, he carried out the movement's work targeting the liberalism of the Supreme Court, and especially its decisions fulfilling the purposes of the post-Civil War constitutional amendments.

A conservative legacy

Each of Chief Justice Roberts's landmark conservative opinions has been countered by a liberal dissent, resting on a competing understanding of the Constitution. In the cases highlighted on these pages, the dissenting justice took the rare step of reading a summary from the bench when the decision was announced.

Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo, 2024

Result: The Court overturned a foundational 40-year-old precedent known as the Chevron deference doctrine, to rule that judges may no longer defer to a government agency's interpretation of an ambiguous statute.

Roberts, for the majority: The Chevron deference doctrine had "become an impediment, rather than an aid, to accomplishing the basic judicial task of 'say[ing] what the law is.'"

Justice Elena Kagan, dissenting: "Today, the Court flips the script: It is now 'the courts (rather than the agency)' that will wield power when Congress has left an area of interpretive discretion. A rule of judicial humility gives way to a rule of judicial hubris."

Roberts was sworn in as the 17th chief justice of the United States on September 29, 2005.

Where liberals on the Court saw a drive to include all people, especially of color, in the full sweep of American opportunity and the law's protection—by upholding civil rights laws and improving fairness in law enforcement and other legal areas—conservatives saw judicial activism that strayed from the Constitution's original intent. In 1985, in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute, Reagan's second attorney general, Edwin Meese III, decried an "aggressively secular liberalism often driven by an expansively egalitarian impulse." He went on, "The result has been nothing less than an abandonment of many of the traditional political and social values the great majority of Americans embrace."

The movement sought to create a new conservative regime in law: elevating the power of the Republican presidency; reducing deference to laws made by the Democrat-dominated Congress; and packing the federal courts with conservative judges who would reach conservative results. The most prized combatants were lawyers with superb credentials, like Roberts, whose lawyerly personalities helped them thrive and succeed in the politics of the movement and more widely.

In 1986, Roberts went to work for the Washington, D.C., law firm of Hogan & Hartson (now Hogan Lovells) and was named a partner after a year. In 1992, when Roberts was 37, President George H.W. Bush nominated him to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, but the Democratic majority in the Senate blocked his confirmation vote. President George W. Bush nominated him a second time to the D.C. Circuit: he joined that court in 2003. Two years later, to Roberts's surprise, the president nominated him to replace Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Roberts had expected a woman would be nominated to replace the first woman ever to serve on the Supreme Court, so he felt relaxed during his interview with Bush—which might explain a surprising observation of the president about a man known for being, among other things, steely and combative. In his memoir, Bush wrote: "Behind the sparkling resume was a genuine man with a gentle soul."

Chief Justice Rehnquist died six and a half weeks after Bush nominated Roberts for the O'Connor seat. Two days after Rehnquist's death, the president nominated him to be chief. (Bush chose Samuel A. Alito Jr. to fill O'Connor's seat.)

Roberts was confirmed by the Senate 78-22. He was 50 years old: the youngest chief justice since his hero and role model of two centuries before, John Marshall. In his confirmation hearings, the most memorable speech came from Illinois Senator Barack Obama, J.D. '91, a former president of the *Harvard Law Review*, three years before he was elected president of the United States. It expressed standard partisan opposition to a judicial nominee—Supreme Court confirmation votes after that largely split along party lines—but it also contained a more cutting legal and political critique.

"There is absolutely no doubt in my mind Judge Roberts is qualified to sit on the highest court in the land," Obama made clear. "The problem I had is that when I examined Judge Roberts's record and history of public service, it is my personal estimation that he has far more often used his formidable skills on behalf of the strong in opposition to the weak." He concluded,

Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2023

Paired with a case involving the University of North Carolina, this case ended affirmative action in higher education admissions—establishing a principle of colorblindness Roberts had advocated for since he was a young lawyer in the Reagan administration.

Roberts, for the majority: "The 'core purpose of the Equal Protection Clause'" of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment is "do[ing] away with all governmentally imposed discrimination based on race."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, dissenting: "The Court subverts the constitutional guarantee of equal protection by further entrenching racial inequality in education, the very foundation of our democratic government and pluralistic society."

Photograph related to the George W. Bush administration as part of the records of the White House photo office collection

"The bottom line is this: I will be voting against John Roberts's nomination. I do so with considerable reticence. I hope that I am wrong."

The journalist Matthew Continetti, writing in *The Weekly Standard* in 2005, noted about Roberts's prize-winning essay on Daniel Webster that, as a college student, Roberts was drawn to Webster's "ability to engage in politics while behaving as if he were above politics." As chief, Roberts has done something strikingly similar. The centerpiece of his Senate confirmation testimony was about his view that the work of the Court is not political:

> Judges are not politicians who can promise to do certain things in exchange for votes... I will decide every case based on the record, according to the rule of law, without fear or favor, to the best of my ability, and I will remember that it's my job to call balls and strikes, and not to pitch or bat.

But as the legal scholar Neil Siegel told me, "Whether it's John Marshall or John Roberts, when justices say, 'We do law, not politics,' they are acting politically, not legally." In an article scheduled to come out next spring in the *Harvard Law Review*, Siegel and the legal scholar Curtis Bradley, J.D. '88, call that type of move "judicial self-protection." They say that Supreme Court justices have engaged in it to maintain influence in the political world when they have faced political threats from the executive, the states, or Congress. The Court must persuade powerful politicians to abide by its decisions and, in the case of the president, enforce them. "In short," they write, "the Court has two central tasks, especially when it is under threat: preserving the Constitution and the rule of law; and protecting itself."

Roberts has angered conservatives and surprised liberals with occasional opinions and votes that were forms of judicial self-protection. The best-known came in 2012, with the Court's long-anticipated ruling on the Affordable Care Act, a prime achievement of the Obama administration that had narrowly passed Congress with no Republican support. Roberts voted with four liberals on the Court to uphold the law, on the grounds that its "individual mandate," compelling people to purchase health insurance, could be characterized as a tax. But he also joined the Court's four other conservative justices in striking down the use of the Commerce Clause to justify such mandates—an outcome liberals condemned as a needless curtailment of congressional authority.

Linda Greenhouse '68, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her *New York Times* reporting on the Court, wrote then that she couldn't "remem-

Above: A sign-holder is among the marchers who gathered to protest the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in front of the U.S. Supreme Court on March 26, 2012, in Washington, D.C.

Below: Anti-abortion protestors are met by counter-protestors in front of the Supreme Court on June 21, 2024, as citizens await a ruling on high-profile abortion rights cases.

From top: photographs by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images and Mark Wilson/Getty Images

Front row (left to right): Associate Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Clarence Thomas, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., Associate Justices Samuel A. Alito Jr. and Elena Kagan. Back row: Associate Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil M. Gorsuch, Brett M. Kavanaugh, and Ketanji Brown Jackson.

ber a time when [followers of the Court were] so fixated on a single justice's single vote"—or described it with such contradictory narratives. From the right, she wrote, Roberts was blasted as "a traitorous turncoat and a weakling to boot, unable to withstand liberal 'bullying'"; from the left, as "a cynical manipulator who 'wanted to maintain the Supreme Court as a playpen for anti-government sophistry.'"

But others praised Roberts's courage for embodying the "virtue of compromise" through a Solomonic approach that he has used in other prominent cases, such as the Court's historic 2022 ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which ended the nationwide right to abortion. In that case, Roberts joined the Court's five other conservatives in upholding a Mississippi statute that banned most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, yet he did not vote with them to overturn the right. His divided vote separated him from the unprecedented decision of the other conservatives—and from the extraordinary, jointly signed dissent of the liberal justices—in a move of judicial self-protection that did nothing to protect the Court from a cascade of criticism.

Roberts's efforts at judicial self-protection—usually called institutionalism—have often simply delayed conservative outcomes and haven't altered the overall picture of his time as chief. From his arrival on the Court until now, his leadership, votes, and opinions have mainly helped move the law and the nation far to the right. In an analysis prepared for *The New York Times* and available in the Supreme Court Database, the political scientists Lee Epstein, Andrew Martin, and Kevin Quinn found that in major cases, the Roberts Court's record is the most conservative of any Supreme Court in roughly a century.

A year after the abortion ruling, Greenhouse wrote: "To appreciate that transformation's full dimension, consider the robust conservative wish list that greeted the new chief justice 18 years ago. Overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Reinterpret the Second Amendment to make private gun ownership a constitutional right. Eliminate race-based affirmative action in university admissions. Elevate the place of religion across the legal landscape. Curb the regulatory power of federal agencies." She underscored that "every goal on the conservative wish list had been achieved. All of it. To miss that remarkable fact is to miss the story of the Roberts court."

Ten months into his tenure as chief justice, Roberts had expressed his concern about the consequences of a Court seen as doing politics, not law, in a 2006 *Atlantic* interview with Jeffrey Rosen '82, a George Washington University law professor and the president and CEO of the National Constitution Center. (The chief justice declined to comment for *Harvard Magazine* about that interview or about his tenure on the Court.)

Roberts spoke about the Supreme Court's "credibility and legitimacy as an institution" and gave a straightforward definition of legitimacy: when people see the justices as Republicans and Democrats, they view the Court as political and polarized and they don't respect or trust it. The chief justice said he was especially concerned about "the personalization of judicial politics" on the Court through the proliferation of concurring and dissenting opinions. "Instead of nine justices moving in nine separate directions," Roberts told Rosen, "it would be good to have a commitment on the part of the Court to act as a Court, rather than being more concerned about the consistency and coherency of an individual judicial record."

In the years Roberts has been chief, he has continued to present himself much as he did in that interview, though legal conservatism has changed in ways that don't always align with views he has ex-

pressed in Court opinions and at public events. The legal scholar David Strauss '73, J.D. '78, commented to me, "He thinks, 'Look, we built up these institutions over the centuries, including the Supreme Court, and there's a lot in them that's really worth protecting.'" But, Strauss went on, "Unlike conservatives of previous generations, today's conservatives are uninterested in, and even dismissive of, judicial precedents and traditional ideas about the roles of courts and the executive branch."

That could be part of the reason other justices have not always heeded Roberts's desire for coherency. In decisions on the merits handed down by this summer in the most recent term, the justices voted unanimously in only 42 percent of the cases. In other cases, the extent of ideological and partisan differences was often sharp and extreme.

Opinion polls show that the public views the Court as partisan—and approves of it, as an institution, far less than in the past. Defenders of the Roberts Court emphasize that the judiciary is the most admired of the three branches, but while opinion about Congress has bounced up and down over the past half-century and opinion about the presidency has risen, then fallen, in that period, opinion about the Court has almost steadily descended.

Opinion polls show that the public views the Court as partisan—and approves of it, as an institution, far less than in the past.

Recent polls are especially eye-catching. In July 2025, a Gallup poll found that, for the first time in the past quarter-century, fewer than 40 percent of Americans overall approved of the Supreme Court's performance: 11 percent of Democrats, compared to 75 percent of Republicans.

In June 2024, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reported that most of the public lacks confidence in the Court's rulings on abortion, voting and election rights, gun policy, and especially presidential power and immunity—hallmarks of the Roberts Court. In that poll, only 16 percent of Americans reported "a great deal of confidence" in the Court—29 percent of Republicans, 10 percent of Independents, and 7 percent of Democrats. Overall, 40 percent of Americans had "hardly any confidence at all."

Most striking, considering Roberts's desire to be a consensus-builder, is the way the public sees the individual justices as avatars of ideology. Seventy percent of Americans in that 2024 poll said justices are "more likely to try to shape the law to fit their own ideologies"—50 percent of Republicans, 74 percent of Independents, and 84 percent of Democrats. The numbers reflect the public grasp of the ambition of the Court's conservative super-majority. As the legal historian Robert Post '69, Ph.D. '80, wrote, "The contemporary Court plainly and publicly aspires to reshape the landscape of American constitutional law."

Regardless of the reasoning Roberts laid out in his opinion in *Trump v. United States*, the public was likely to view it through a partisan lens. That's been even more true after the first eight months of the second Trump administration.

Relying on the Roberts Court's broad interpretation of presidential power, Trump and his appointees have transformed the Justice Department into a protector of the president's interests. They have used it to investigate, prosecute, and otherwise pressure individuals and institutions that have challenged Trump or his administration, in what is meant to be—and is widely seen as—a campaign of retribution.

In widespread roundups, they have used U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement against immigrants whom, without proof, they have deemed enemies of America. They have attempted to return immigrant children to dangerous home countries without due process, in the shadow of night, in efforts to circumvent federal courts. They have turned the FBI and the military into aggressive police forces based on declarations of public safety emergencies that lower courts have ruled don't exist.

They have disparaged federal courts and defied a multitude of federal court rulings. *The Washington Post* reported in July that of 337 lawsuits filed by that date against the current Trump administration, federal judges ruled against the government 165 times, and "the administration is accused of defying or frustrating court oversight in 57 of those cases—almost 35 percent—"unprecedented for any presidential administration." (A whistleblower last spring charged that, in one high-profile deportation case, leaders in Trump's Justice Department advised attorneys that they might need to ignore court orders or mislead judges to achieve their aims—"telling the courts f*** you," as one official allegedly said.)

Rewriting the nation's story, Trump and his appointees have moved to alter the contents of displays in Smithsonian museums and national parks. They have used their power to make multifront attacks on a wide range of American institutions that hold the government accountable and provide safeguards against tyranny: accomplished private law firms; major media outlets; large foundations; and leading universities, Harvard most prominently.

Shelby County v. Holder, 2013

Result: The Court diluted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by striking down "preclearance": the law's requirement that states or parts of them with egregious histories of discrimination against minority voters had to prove that any proposed changes in election laws were not discriminatory before they took effect.

Roberts, for the majority: "The question is whether the Act's extraordinary measures, including its disparate treatment of the States, continue to satisfy constitutional requirements…the Act imposes current burdens and must be justified by current needs."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, dissenting: "Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."

They have disrupted some of them to the point of upheaval and exerted unprecedented government influence over how they operate.

In late September, District Judge William Young '62, LL.B. '67, had scathing words for the Trump administration in a case about efforts to deport noncitizens who had engaged in pro-Palestinian speech. (One of the plaintiffs was Harvard's chapter of the American Association of University Professors.) Young, 85, a Reagan appointee and a onetime chief counsel to a Massachusetts Republican governor, called the freedom of speech case "perhaps the most important ever to fall within the jurisdiction of this district court."

Young acknowledged "the rapidly changing nature of the Executive Branch under Article II of our Constitution and, while he is properly not now a defendant in these proceedings, the nature of our President himself." He stated, unequivocally, that the Trump administration had misused the government's "sweeping powers" to violate a First Amendment right that extends to noncitizens. And he said, in a footnote, that "this gambit has been accompanied by the Trump administration's full-throated assault on the First Amendment across the board."

Almost a century ago, a Supreme Court opinion by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., A.B. 1861, LL.B. 1866, LL.D. 1895, defined "the principle of free thought" at the heart of American democracy, which is the foundation of American law protecting free speech and the free press from government suppression: "not free thought for those who agree with us, but freedom for the thought that we hate." Trump and his administration seem to be taking dead aim at obliterating that principle and to be embracing its opposite.

Emergency cases have come to preoccupy the justices—and have reoriented how the Court shapes American law and life.

When the court hands down its final "merits" decisions each year—after considering legal briefs and listening to oral arguments, and after a lot of deliberation—that's widely considered to be the end of the annual term, even though the official end is not until the start of the next term on the first Monday in October. An exclamation point invariably comes in the form of a summer blockbuster ruling, such as *Trump v. United States* in 2024.

This past June, the exclamation point was *Trump v. CASA*, an "emergency" case that arose from judicial injunctions against the executive order that Trump issued the day he was sworn in as president against the time-honored understanding of birthright citizenship.

A decision about an emergency case comes from the part of the Court's work sometimes called "the shadow docket," because it is much less transparent than the merits docket. Generally, those cases get decided quickly—without much briefing, without oral argument, and without an opinion explaining the decision. The orders are ostensibly provisional but, in many instances, they prove final.

Emergency cases until recently were rare in civil matters, used chiefly in criminal cases involving death sentences and imminent executions. The administration in office seldom brought them: the George W. Bush and Obama administrations together brought a total of eight in 16 years. The first Trump administration changed that norm, bringing 41, and the Biden administration brought 19. In its first 20 weeks, the second Trump administration brought 20. (By late September, it had brought 28.) Emergency cases have come to preoccupy the justices and take a lot of their attention. They have reoriented how the Court shapes American law and life.

CASA was only the fourth emergency case in more than half a century that the Court considered in oral argument. The case addressed the legality of the nationwide, or universal, injunction, which a trial judge in a single federal district court had the option of imposing throughout the United States against an executive order or other form of law.

Over the years, nationwide injunctions have been frustrating to administrations of both parties, which tend to argue they are imposed with partisanship. But while the Court had previous opportunities to address their lawfulness, it had declined to rule—until now, in a case that cut to the heart of American identity and rested on a legal precedent that went back more than a century and a quarter.

Section 1 of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment says, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." In 1898, the Court affirmed birthright citizenship as "the ancient and fundamental rule of citizenship by birth within the territory": if you're born in America, unless you're the child of a foreign diplomat, you're an American.

Trump's executive order—the opening salvo of the administration's anti-immigrant campaign—says the 1898 ruling was mistaken for allowing citizenship in certain situations involving a parent who was not legally permitted to be present in the U.S.

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 2010

Result: The Court unleashed dark money in politics when it ruled that corporations should not be treated differently from "natural persons" under the First Amendment. Roberts had laid the groundwork for the ruling in a previous opinion where he equated campaign finance regulation with suppression of speech.

Roberts, in a concurring opinion in *Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.*: "We give the benefit of the doubt to speech, not censorship."

Justice John Paul Stevens, dissenting in *Citizens United*: "The Court today rejects a century of history when it treats the distinction between corporate and individual campaign spending as an invidious novelty."

***Trump v. CASA*, the subject of an emergency ruling this summer, arose from Trump's efforts to change the time-honored understanding of birthright citizenship.**

In its *CASA* decision, by a 6-3 vote along ideological and partisan lines, the Court severely limited the use of nationwide injunctions. The majority opinion by Justice Amy Coney Barrett did not grapple with the merits of the Trump administration's argument about birthright citizenship; instead, it said this was a likely improper form of relief for anyone beyond the parties in that single lawsuit, and that a collective case should generally be handled through a class action suit.

In a concurring opinion, Justice Brett Kavanaugh encouraged the government and other parties to continue to file cases on the emergency docket and asserted that, in the sometimes-years-long interim between when an emergency case is filed and the Court rules on its constitutionality, the nation needs a unified answer on enforcement—and the Court should provide that answer.

Injunctions issued in lower courts after the *CASA* ruling have kept the anti-birthright citizenship order from going into effect, because a patchwork approach to birthright citizenship—some states having it, others not—would cause confusion and burdens in states not allowing it. The administration's slow response to those injunctions suggests it expects its attack on birthright citizenship to fail.

Still, like the *Trump* decision before it, the *CASA* decision affected the balance of power among the three branches—severely limiting a tool of lower federal court judges to block even blatantly unconstitutional policies of the government. It was built on the Roberts Court's maximalist view of presidential power.

Other decisions the Court has recently made from the emergency docket show how much the Roberts Court has enabled Trump's swift expansion of power. The decisions, often overturning lower court rulings, have had enormous, sometimes catastrophic, consequences: removing noncitizens to countries to which they had no ties; disqualifying transgender service members; firing probationary federal workers; firing members of the National Labor Relations and the Merit Systems Protection Boards; firing more than 1,000 workers at the Department of Education and dismantling the department; releasing reams of personal data to the Department of Government Efficiency, a White House initiative; allowing immigration raids in California, based on racial and ethnic profiling.

In September, the Court granted a Trump emergency request to withhold $4 billion in foreign aid that Congress had appropriated. The order, while noting it reflected a preliminary view, said the president's power to conduct foreign affairs outweighs the potential harm to those designated to receive the aid.

Kagan, in a dissent supported by the other liberal justices, emphasized that the Trump emergency application raised novel issues about the relationship between the president and Congress. The Court should have waited to address them on the merits docket, she said, with the guidance of opinions from lower courts, full briefing, and oral arguments.

Like the *Trump* decision, the *CASA* decision affected the balance of power among the three branches.

In July, in a panel discussion at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, the legal scholar Stephen Vladeck, who in 2023 published *The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic*, had explained the logic behind the Roberts Court's decisions: Emergency relief is based on the view that the party requesting it is likely to win on the merits. Until that victory, it will suffer irreparable harm without the relief. The government suffers irreparable harm whenever one of its laws, including an executive order, is blocked.

But, Kagan pointed out in her dissent about the refusal to pay foreign aid, the administration had not shown it was likely to win on the merits. It had not shown it would suffer irreparable harm without the relief granted in the order. It had not "met our standard for emergency relief."

In each recent emergency decision for the Trump administration, the order in question, once in effect, did irreparable harm to some or all of its targets. Those rulings, Lawrence Hurley reported on NBC News in September, have left *(please turn to page 70)*

Photograph by Jim Watson/AFP via Getty Images

The Scientist in Ceaseless *Motion*

David Liu found a way to speed up science, one cell at a time.

by VERONIQUE GREENWOOD

As a young professor of chemistry at Harvard in the 2000s, David Liu was trying to accelerate evolution.

This quest took place on the cellular level. Inside every cell in the body, molecules known as proteins act like tiny machines, carrying out biological functions—their efficiency honed by eons of natural selection. And scientists had discovered ways to engineer proteins that were even more efficient, or were built to fix specific problems.

But the work of changing the makeup of a protein was slow: a graduate student would chivvy evolution along by hand, painstakingly altering the experimental conditions once a week or so, and it would be a year before they'd know whether the whole thing had failed or succeeded.

Now, Liu turned a thought over in his mind: could a clever researcher press fast-forward on the process so dozens of new forms rose and fell in the space of a day?

Liu and his graduate student Kevin Esvelt envisioned a way to do this by using a phage—a type of virus that infects bacteria, whose life cycle, crucially, can be as short as 10 minutes. By giving a phage instructions to create a specific protein, then rewarding subsequent generations that successfully produced that protein, they were able to replicate the natural selection process with surprising speed.

In 2011, when the team announced their results in *Nature*, they could run 200 generations in about eight days. In less than one week, they evolved three new enzymes, their purposes custom-designed by Liu and his colleagues. This process, called phage-assisted continuous evolution, or PACE, has since become a powerful tool for scientists working to advance research and cure diseases. "[It] really reminds me of some of the real classics in the field," says Jennifer Doudna, Ph.D. '89, S.D. '23, a professor of biochemistry at the University of California, Berkeley and a recipient of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Since then, Liu—now Cabot professor of the natural sciences—has become a leading pioneer of inventive processes that operate on the molecular level in living organisms. He has also become renowned, in his lab and beyond, as a scientist who seems to be in perpetual motion: existing on little sleep, spinning off on side pursuits, and developing companies to springboard his laboratory insights into real-world use.

During the past 18 months alone, two treatments based on his research—one for a genetic lung disease, the other for a lethal metabolic disorder—have made headlines, as did advanced mouse studies focused on curing progeria, a disease that makes children age prematurely. And there's more to come.

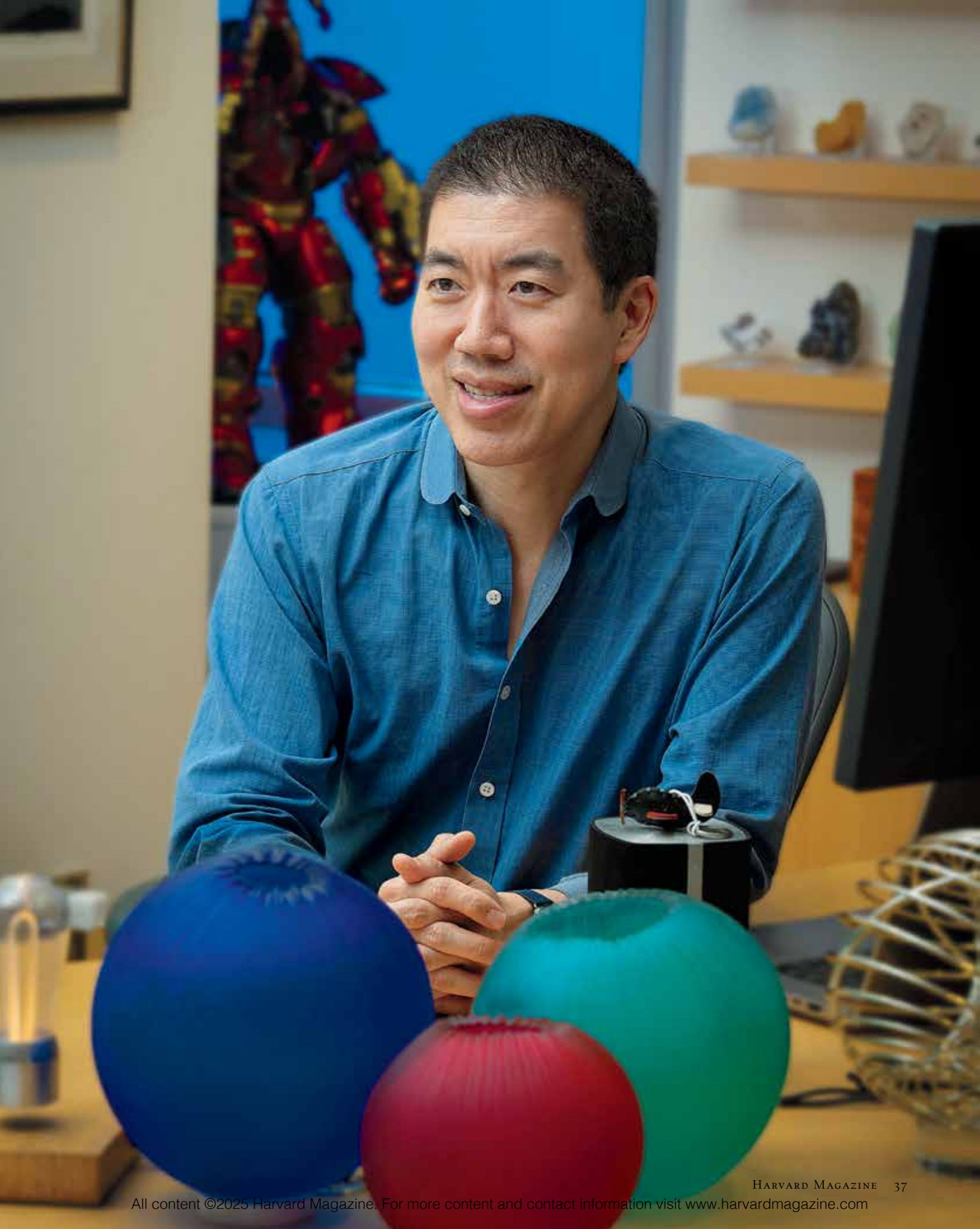
Today, Liu's office at Harvard is decorated with things that move and toys and oddities that spin in the air. (Liu is also the Merkin professor at the Broad Institute and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator.) Their persistent energy matches that of the man himself—the same energy that was evident from his youth. Liu grew up in Riverside, California, where orange groves and desert stand side by side. He remembers his father, an aerospace engineer, leaving at 4 a.m. for a two-hour commute to El Segundo, the aerospace hub where his company was located. Liu's mother, a physics professor, held down the fort at home with Liu and his sister and became one of the first female tenured faculty members in her department at the University of California, Riverside.

Liu's parents didn't exert pressure on their son to be a scientist. It was his childhood spent outdoors, watching the natural world, that set him on that path. All day at school he looked forward to going out into his backyard, a wilderness of weeds and insects. He was particularly fascinated by ants and their ability to somehow leave trails, invisible to humans, for each other to follow. Was it possible, he wondered, to remove whatever chemical it was they sensed and lay a new path to somewhere else? "I wanted to ask and answer my own questions," he says. "I was curious about how things worked."

At 18, Liu participated in the Junior Sciences and Humanities Symposium and won a trip to the 1990 Nobel Prize award ceremony in Stockholm. There, he watched Harvard chemist E.J. Corey give his Nobel lecture. Corey is a mastermind of organic synthesis—the branch of chemistry that uses complex cascades of reactions to build molecules. Afterwards, Liu, then a freshman at Harvard, approached the Nobelist.

"I asked him a question about insect juvenile hormone," Liu recalls. How could one part of this molecule change, while other parts, appar-

Photograph by Stu Rosner



ently identical, stayed untouched? Corey explained that he knew how the molecule would fold up, protecting some areas, exposing others to change.

"It was pretty awesome, which just made him seem even more like some kind of chemistry god to me," Liu recalls. He exhales, a little self-consciously, and continues, "Then I asked him, while we were at this Nobel Prize lecture, if I could work in his lab." Corey gently suggested that Liu take some organic chemistry classes first, then check in with him later.

> "I wanted to ask and answer my own questions. I was curious about how things worked."
>
> —David Liu

With the help of his organic chemistry professor, Joseph Grabowski, Liu made Corey's acquaintance again at Harvard, eventually joining his research group. With the elder scientist's blessing, he decided that the place for him was where chemistry met biology. As a graduate student, he studied at the University of California, Berkeley with chemistry professor Peter Schultz, who had been tinkering with the genetic code to build proteins in a test tube that did not occur in nature.

Liu started working on getting such a system up and running in living cells, developing a process—which penalized cells with enzymes that functioned normally and rewarded cells with those that acted unusually—that would reshape protein evolution in the laboratory. Other scientists noticed: after earning his Ph.D. in 1999, he was hired at Harvard as an assistant professor.

"It was an interesting time. I had no idea what I was doing, which may have been the biggest source of awkwardness," Liu recalls. "But also now, only five years after leaving Harvard as an undergrad, I was suddenly a colleague of all of these professors."

He didn't want to presume, so he defaulted to extreme deference. "I would say, 'Oh, thank you, Professor Schreiber, for that comment. Thank you, Professor Corey.' And I remember, after one of the faculty meetings in my first fall, one of the professors pulled me aside and said, 'David, we think you should just call us by our first names.'"

As he got his research group off the ground, Liu wanted to continue evolving proteins. He was particularly inspired by a paper from Martin Wright and Gerald Joyce at the Scripps Institute, which focused on the molecules of RNA. Lab evolution of both custom proteins and custom RNAs had always taken a long time. But Wright and Joyce, remarkably, set up a system where all day and night, the RNA continuously evolved, spinning through about 300 generations in 52 hours. "I just thought the idea was so amazing," Liu says, "and it remains one of the most beautiful papers I've ever read."

He showed it to Esvelt as they brainstormed a way to evolve proteins with similar speed. Esvelt had the idea to start with a virus called the filamentous bacteriophage, which infects the bacterium *E. coli*. First, he put a gene for a protein he wanted to evolve into the virus. Then he took some of the machinery the virus needed to live and put it in *E. coli*. Finally, he engineered the *E. coli* so that it would only hand over what the virus needed if that targeted protein was produced at high levels.

The virus faced enormous pressure to make this protein. At the same time, each generation provided a new chance for interesting new mutations in the gene to creep in. By speeding up or slowing down the flow of fresh host cells into a vessel called the lagoon, Esvelt controlled the pace of the evolution.

It was an intense period in Esvelt's life—Liu, he says, seems to need only about four hours of sleep a night, and they were often trading emails and ideas at unusual times, racing to generate new data in order to apply for funding for the next phase of the PACE project.

"We never lost hope at the same time," Esvelt says. "I persisted in the times when he had lost it, and he kept me going through the more frequent times when I was frustrated."

With PACE, Liu had a way to evolve enzymes with custom purposes. Having done this, Liu set his sights on another ambitious target: editing the code of life itself. It was around this time that CRISPR-Cas9, a system for cutting the genome, was first being described—Doudna, one of its developers, recalls talking with Liu about it early on. CRISPR tools allow scientists to bind and snip DNA and introduce other genetic material.

CRISPR on its own is not a medicine, however. "I quickly realized that most of the genetic diseases that one might want to treat with genome editing could not be treated [only] by cutting DNA, because cutting DNA disrupts the gene," says Liu. "Instead, they needed to be treated by correcting a mutation back to a healthy sequence." What if, he wondered, we could make enzymes that would actually reverse a mutation chemically?

DNA can be pictured as two long ribbons of letters, running parallel to each other. Each letter stands for a particular type of nucleic acid base, and each base has its own partner on the matching ribbon: adenine (A) binds to thymine (T), and cytosine (C) binds to guanine (G). Many dangerous mutations are the result of a simple alteration of one pair of bases. Sickle cell anemia, for instance, is the result of an A turned to a T.

With postdoctoral fellow Alexis Komor, Liu discussed ways to alter a mutated base pair back to the healthy version. Komor brought three elements together: an enzyme that could alter a single C, a targeting system from CRISPR-Cas9 to aim it at the right part of the genome, and another protein that solidified the change. In 2016, she and Liu described using this setup to cleanly convert a C:G pair to an A:T pair in living cells, without the organism missing a beat; the double helix was never sliced.

A flurry of innovation filled the next few years. In 2017, Liu and graduate student Nicole Gaudelli described a technique for going the other way: making an A:T pair into a C:G pair, an effort Liu attributes to "heroic" work by Gaudelli. And in 2019, Andrew Anzalone and Liu published another method for tackling yet more mutations. Anzalone, also a graduate student, completed his complex project in a year and eight days.

The response from scientists exploring gene editing to correct diseases was immediate. "It's a great tool for the field to be able to make targeted changes in one step," Doudna reflected. There have

been at least 23 clinical trials using the techniques, focusing on illnesses ranging from lung cancer to metabolic diseases.

Targeted editing could help with more than just genetic diseases. Because Liu's techniques provide very precise, clean ways to alter DNA, they can improve existing treatments where DNA is edited, such as CAR-T-cell immunotherapy for cancer. In this treatment, a patient's own immune cells are removed from the body and given genes that allow them to make antibodies against their specific type of cancer cells. When the immune cells are reintroduced into the patient's body, they hunt down the cancer, often curing the disease altogether.

In 2021, Alyssa Tapley, a 12-year-old in England, was diagnosed with leukemia. Chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant failed. In 2022, she had a few weeks left to live when her hospital arranged for her to join a trial using Liu's techniques. Her immune cells were altered so they could target the cancer cells, and Tapley lived. She is still alive and cancer-free. In April 2025, when Liu was awarded the Breakthrough Prize, a major international science award, Tapley attended the ceremony.

Liu brings the same kind of intensity he displays in his research to other aspects of life. His office is lined with geological specimens, labeled with information about where they were collected, which he gives away to his students as, one by one, they graduate. "When I first joined," Esvelt recalls, "he had taken up painting and become quite good at that. Then he took up woodworking and installed a giant lathe system in his basement and made some really amazing wooden bowls out of various pieces of wood that he found while hiking or walking along the beach."

Next came an exploration of photography and optics. "You can sort of sense," Esvelt says, "he wants to be able to do everything." ("Ask him about his skills in poker," Doudna suggests.)

That ceaseless energy shapes the environment of his lab, where he long ago stopped hiring people for specific achievements but instead focused on bringing in researchers he thought would work well with others. Although the goal was never publishing for publishing's sake, on average, he estimates, the lab publishes a paper nearly every 17 days and has maintained this pace for about five years.

"What made it so fruitful is that he just really allowed me and others to be who we are," says Gaudelli. "There was a sense of freedom." She felt that there was a current of quiet confidence running through the lab; if you could imagine something, you could build it.

"He has this internal locomotive," Anzalone adds, "that really pushes him to get the most." He laughs, remembering the time when he and Liu were preparing to submit their gene editing paper. Liu would wake up at 4 a.m. and edit Anzalone's draft. During the day, Anzalone would perform more experiments, chasing down final details. At night, Anzalone would add to the draft, working until about 2 a.m. Two hours later, Liu would be up to work on it again.

In March, news broke that one of Liu's editing techniques had helped do something remarkable: researchers had used it to cure a baby boy's lethal metabolic disorder. It was an astounding achievement that demonstrated the potential that stems from basic science.

At the same time, the Trump administration was beginning its campaign against science funding. Billions of research dollars have since been frozen or canceled nationwide; a federal judge recently ordered the administration to reinstate more than $2 billion in funding to Harvard, though the White House said it plans to appeal the ruling. Now, Liu is very worried about how to protect the next generation of scientists from the storm. Students and postdoctoral researchers need time and freedom to think, he says, to live without fear that their institutional support will just evaporate.

Even before federal funding for research was suddenly stripped from labs across the country, the frailty of the support system for young scientists concerned him. In 2020, after fruitlessly exploring other avenues for securing better pay for his lab members, Liu quietly decided to start dividing his salary among them every year.

Liu has co-founded many companies, three of which are publicly traded. Anzalone, after finishing his doctorate, went on to help lead Prime Medicine, a new start-up co-founded by Liu to commercialize the gene editing technique they'd developed together. Along with CRISPR pioneers Doudna and Feng Zhang, Liu also helped found Editas Medicine, which explores ways to use this technology to treat serious diseases. Gaudelli joined Beam Therapeutics, where she spent the past few years advancing a gene editor that may be used to treat sickle cell anemia. (She has since moved on to become an entrepreneur in residence at Google Ventures.)

On average, Liu's lab publishes a paper nearly every 17 days and has maintained this pace for about five years.

"Accumulating wealth is not anywhere in the top 100 things I want to do," Liu says. "My students and the work that we do, and the patients who reach out, and the families like Alyssa [Tapley]'s—these are all so much more meaningful than how many digits are in a bank account."

And while Prime, Beam, and Editas are vehicles that aim to produce treatments and medicines that change lives, he notes, they draw their strength from the academic science that was their inspiration. Their vigor is linked to the freedom scientists have to imagine things that have yet to exist.

"Science matters," Liu says. "Universities matter." Enormous dividends are paid over decades by the funding of young scientists just getting underway, just beginning to imagine what comes next, Liu says, "who will go on to make their own discoveries, or to teach, or to work in industry to help develop the next great drug."

Gaudelli thinks back to the way the Liu lab seemed to encourage transformative thinking, such as the idea that a letter of genetic code could be changed almost as easily as a light switch can be flipped. "I was allowed to imagine something that seemed impossible," she says. "And then, one day, it was not."

Science journalist Veronique Greenwood wrote "Teaching T-Cells to Kill Cancer" in the January-February 2025 issue of Harvard Magazine.

Lush Life

A Dutch painter's art is a treasure trove for scientists.

by Lydialyle Gibson

Opposite: *Forest Floor with a Classical Façade Beyond*, about 1687.

On this page: *Rachel Ruysch*, 1692, by Michiel van Musscher (left). Right, from top: *Forest Floor* details show a lizard and a red admiral butterfly; red admiral and painted lady butterfly specimens from Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology; and painted lady detail in the artwork.

The exhibition of floral still lifes by painter Rachel Ruysch, on view through December 7 at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), is billed as a rediscovery. A contemporary of the Dutch Masters, Ruysch was an international star in her lifetime, and her paintings—lush, moody, humming with exquisite detail—sometimes outsold Rembrandt's. But after she died, her fame faded. And so, *Rachel Ruysch: Artist, Naturalist, and Pioneer*, which brings together 35 of her works, is the first-ever major retrospective since her death in 1750.

But the exhibit is also a genuine new discovery, because Ruysch's paintings, it turns out, are more than simply beautiful—they are scientifically significant. "They're vital, overlooked archives of biodiversity and botanical history," says professor of organis-

Images on the right and details courtesy of a private collection, Connecticut / courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; portrait courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; specimen images courtesy of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University






mic and evolutionary biology Charles Davis, one of the exhibit's co-curators and its scientific lead. The daughter of a renowned botanist and anatomist, Ruysch grew up in Amsterdam during the Dutch colonial era, and her still lifes incorporated flowers and plants far more exotic than the tulips and roses that Europeans were used to seeing: Brazilian blue passionflowers, Mexican devil's trumpets, South African carrion flowers, Asian glory lilies, Middle Eastern oleanders, cacti from the tropics. Her *Still Life of Exotic Flowers on a Marble Ledge*, painted around 1735, depicts a staggering 36 species from around the world, whose native origins line up with Dutch colonial outposts. In the exhibit, dried plant specimens from the Harvard University Herbaria, where Davis is a curator, are displayed alongside the paintings. (There are also display cases containing preserved insects and reptiles from Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology—Ruysch's still lifes often include exotic butterflies, beetles, and lizards, all meticulously rendered.)

The far-flung plants she painted were species that Ruysch, with close ties to Dutch horticulturalists, would have been able to examine firsthand in gardens and greenhouses. The 1700s, Davis says, were a period of intense botanical exploration, and the species in Ruysch's paintings "reflect stories of human ecology: how the plants were sourced abroad, transported to Europe, and kept alive for study."

All this has opened a new avenue for Davis's research: searching within artworks for botanical and ecological data. Earlier this year, he and MFA art historians Anna Knaap and Christopher D.M. Atkins collaborated on a comprehensive inventory of

Opposite: *Still Life of Exotic Flowers on a Marble Ledge*, about 1735. On this page: details from the painting alongside corresponding specimens from the Harvard University Herbaria. Clockwise from top left, the pairs depict: coral honeysuckle from the United States; blue passionflower from South America; and prickly pear cactus from the Americas.

"An art heroine who shines as the largest orb in the heaven of art and occupies the central pearl in Holland's crown."

—Dutch painter Johan van Gool, 1750

Images on the left and details courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, gift of James and Virginia Moffett; specimen images courtesy of the Harvard University Herbaria and Libraries






16 Ruysch artworks, identifying species using high-resolution images and tracing their geographical origins. In some cases, they found, her still lifes serve as records for when certain plants were introduced to Europe. "Art," Davis says, "represents a vastly underexplored resource for biodiversity science."

It's easy to imagine that this turn in Davis's research would have pleased Ruysch, whose artwork was partly inspired by scientific curiosity. She sometimes used real moss to apply paint. In one still life, museum conservators found butterfly scales on her painted wings, indicating that Ruysch had pressed real butterfly wings into the wet paint to achieve an accurate pattern. She lived at a time when scientific discovery relied on faithful artistic illustration—and sometimes, apparently, it still does.

Opposite: *Fruit Still Life with Stag Beetle and Nest*, 1717. On this page, clockwise from top left: *A Still Life of Flowers in a Glass Vase on a Marble Table before a Niche*, 1742, painted when Ruysch was 79 (her later works were smaller and less dark); a stag beetle specimen from the Museum of Comparative Zoology and stag beetle detail from *Fruit Still Life with Stag Beetle and Nest*; a compound microscope like the one Ruysch would have used to study natural specimens; details of a blue lizard and grapes.

Images on the right and details courtesy of Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe / courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the painting at top left was purchased with funds donated by Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo, in support of the Center for Netherlandish Art / Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; specimen image courtesy of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University; photograph of microscope courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

HOLIDAY READING LIST

A *Harvard Magazine* advertising supplement featuring books by Harvard alumni, faculty, and staff

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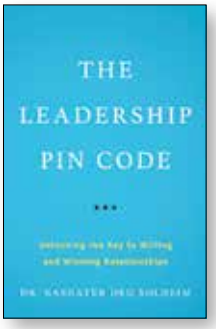

The Leadership PIN Code
Dr. Nashater Deu Solheim, HNI '16
A unique and proven framework for negotiating and influencing in daily work. With 3 simple keys, you get what you need while also maintaining positive relationships.

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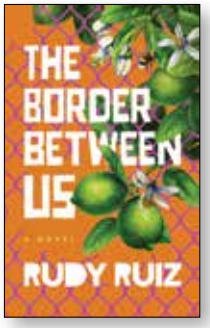
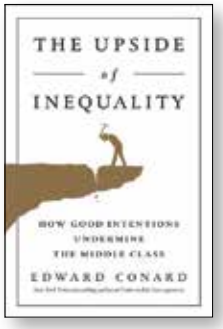
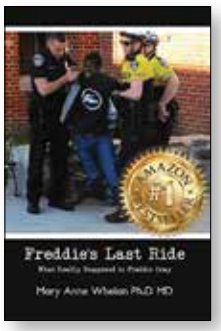


The Border Between Us
Rudy Ruiz '90, M.P.P. '93
"Ruiz has written a poignant tale about an endearing underdog's pursuit of the American Dream."—*Booklist.* "A moving story of one family's toil amid a cultural struggle, told with precision and authenticity."—*Kirkus.* RudyRuiz.com.



The Upside of Inequality: How Good Intentions Undermine the Middle Class
Edward Conard, M.B.A. '82
Top Ten *NY Times* best-selling author Larry Summers: "A valuable contribution."www.EdwardConard.com. Available on Amazon, at local bookstores.



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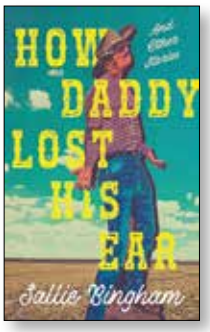

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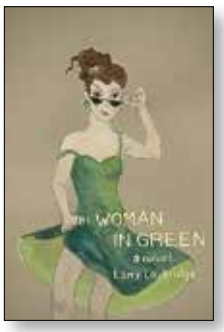

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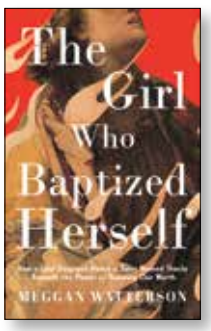

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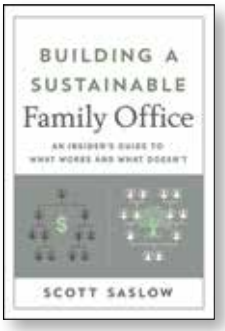

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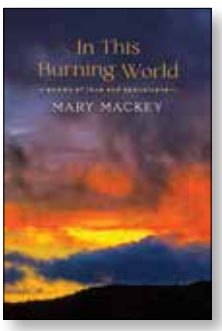

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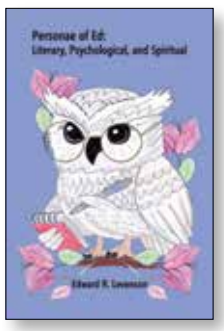

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Edward R. Levenson '63, Ph.D.
Descriptions, with humor, of 120 +1 of the identities of the MSSM (Multiple Self States Model) of Edward/Ed/Eddie. Available on Amazon Kindle at: https://amzn.to/3MXv0i6

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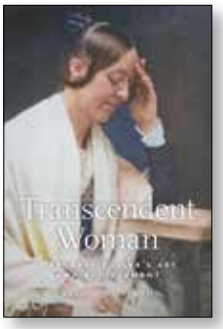

Transcendent Woman: Margaret Fuller's Art and Achievement
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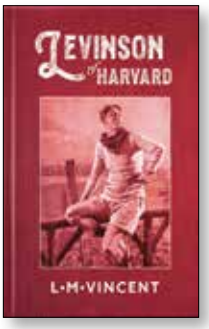
Drawing extensively on primary sources, the author charts Fuller's evolution and achievement as an original thinker and fearless advocate of democracy.



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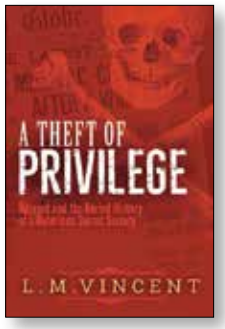
A secret family legacy. Decades apart, two Harvard men share loss of innocence, antisemitism, assimilation, and betrayal. "A compulsively readable university tale of identity and acceptance." [*Kirkus*] Available on Amazon.



A Theft of Privilege: Harvard and the Buried History of a Notorious Secret Society
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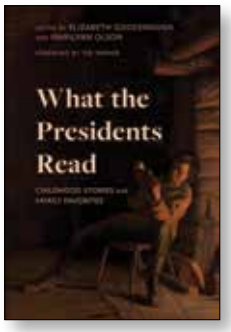

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A childhood book is more than just a story—for the presidents it may represent a turn in the course of history. Includes commentary from eyewitnesses, historians, journalists, curators.

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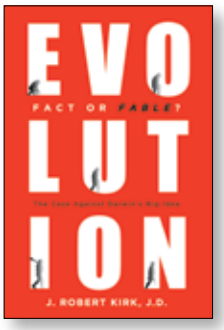

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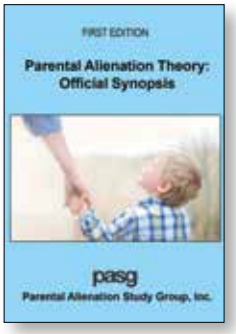

Parental Alienation Theory: Official Synopsis
William Bernet, M.D. '67, and Parental Alienation Study Group
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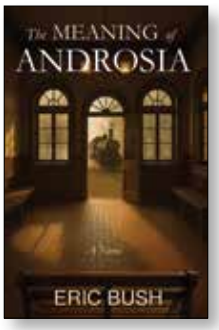

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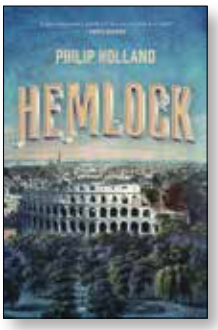

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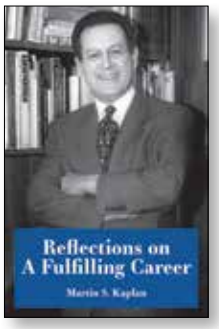

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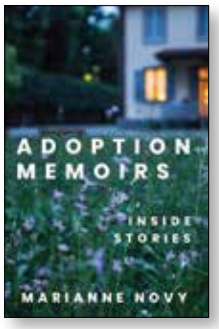

Adoption Memoirs: Inside Stories
Marianne Novy, A.M. '67
First book to compare perspectives of adoptees, adoptive parents, and birthmothers, in 45 memoirs. "An insightful glimpse into the many realities and narratives of adoption"—Dr. Joyce Maguire Pavao, Harvard Medical School.

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Dionne Koller, LL.M. '22
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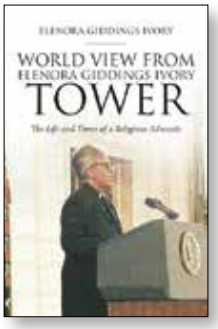

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Elenora Giddings Ivory, M.D.V. '76
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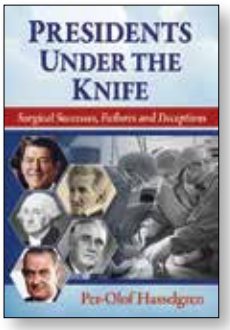
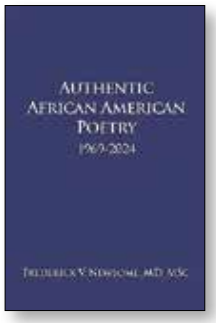
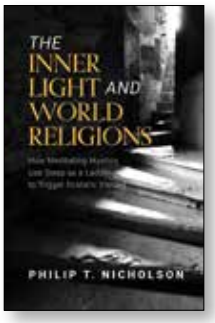
Cologne No. 10 for Men, a Novel
Richard Morris, M.B.A. '70
Now on Audible.com, including original songs written by the author while a rifle platoon leader during the Vietnam War. Powerful: how war changes men; realism that only someone who was there can appreciate; dinky dau wacky.



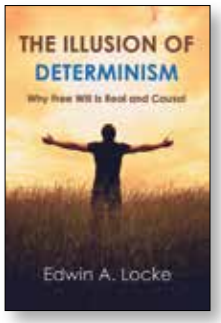
Presidents Under the Knife
Per-Olof Hasselgren, Professor of Surgery, H.M.S.
Presidents who underwent surgery while in office, providing not only a surgeon's perspective on the operations but also many of the political ramifications of the procedures. On Amazon.



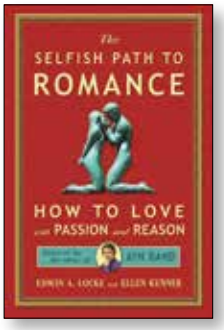
Authentic African American Poetry 1969-2024
Frederick Newsome '68, M.D.
Autobiography in poetic form. The author was born and raised in Charleston, W.V. He practiced and taught academic medicine for more than 50 years in Harlem, N.Y. and Nigeria, West Africa.



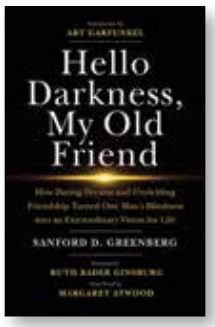
The Inner Light and World Religions
Philip T. Nicholson, S.M. '74
Visions of inner light seen by religious mystics, including the founders of world religions, have predictable characteristics and a universal distribution. theinnerlightandworldreligions.com.



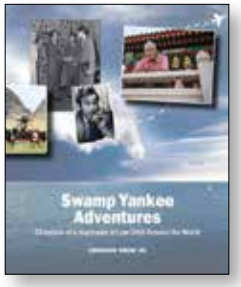
The Illusion of Determinism: Why Free Will Is Real and Causal
Edwin A. Locke '60
The doctrine of determinism is self-refuting, and free will is a form of causality involving the capacity to choose to focus one's mind at the conceptual level or to evade the effort.



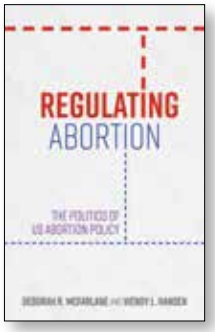
The Selfish Path to Romance
Edwin A. Locke '60 and Ellen Kenner
Most people believe that altruism is the key to romantic happiness, with the woman sacrificing to the man (who may be a narcissist). This book shows that mutual support works better.



Hello Darkness, My Old Friend
Sanford D. Greenberg, Ph.D. '65
Blinded at 19, the author triumphed over adversity with the help of his wife, Sue, and best friend, Art Garfunkel. Foreword by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. An inspiring memoir, soon to be a feature film from Wayfarer Studios.



Swamp Yankee Adventures
Crocker Snow Jr. '61
Richly illustrated memoir with reporting from Russia, Japan, India, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Vietnam, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Available from Mitchell's in Nantucket or author. Email: crockersnowjr@earthlink.net.



Regulating Abortion
Deborah R. McFarlane, M.P.A. '81 and Wendy L. Hansen, Ph.D.
Comprehensive analysis of the current politics of abortion in the U.S. "Provides a crucial context for understanding how different states have responded to the *Dobbs* decision"—*The Lancet.*

Eternity's Blade
William Collis, M.B.A. '11
A fantasy debut packed with heart-stopping action, complex characters, and a world that is as breathtaking as it is dangerous, chronicling an assassin's rise to power in a world of immortals. Available wherever books are sold.

Montage

ART, BOOKS, DIVERSE CREATIONS

Built on the site of a former firehouse, Core City Park in Detroit incorporates debris the team dug up, including a cornerstone from 1893.

Groundbreaking

Julie Bargmann reimagines forgotten industrial sites.

by CLAIRE ZULKEY

While she was in Italy last summer as an architect-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome, landscape architect Julie Bargmann, M.L.A. '87, skipped the international Biennale Architettura exhibition in Venice (despite being part of the United States pavilion's design team) and instead visited her nephew's farm, where she helped with a bit of land grading. "I do these tiny things on the side while I'm working on the giant monsters," she explains.

Many of those "giant monsters" are disused industrial sites or abandoned urban spaces, which she reimagines as parks, gardens, residences, and offices. Bargmann heads the Virginia-based D.I.R.T. Studio (short for Dump It Right Here), which has won numerous awards since she founded it in 1992. Her design ethos relies on resourcefulness, incorporating demolition materials into the construction, as in the 2005 redevelopment of Philadelphia's historic Navy Yard, which saw its last ship built in 1970 and closed in the 1990s.

Under Bargmann's eye, workers re-laid debris from demolition into patterns on the ground, using reclaimed steel walls to hem in native trees and grasses. The green space they created complements old rail lines that were left intact in the paths that led between the repurposed offices and studios.

Bargmann's affinity for a particular kind of industrial space began early. Growing up in New Jersey, she was fascinated by the behemoth New York refineries she and her family would drive past on the New Jersey Turnpike. Bargmann eventually studied landscape ar-

All images courtesy of Julie Bargmann and D.I.R.T. Studio

The Philadelphia Navy Yard project repurposed broken concrete slabs and placed footpaths along old rail lines.

Julie Bargmann

MARK SHAW

chitecture at Harvard after getting her bachelor's degree in sculpture from Carnegie Mellon University. After graduating, she took a teaching job in Minnesota, where, intrigued by the state's famed Iron Range, she took a road trip to tour a mining site.

The experience galvanized her. Bargmann spent several months investigating different kinds of mines around the country, some defunct, others still working. She was piqued by the sites but also by the engineers, who seemed to be viewed as machinery themselves. "That's when I started to be angry about how the mines and the people who worked there—past, present—were being treated," she said in a 2021 interview with the Cultural Landscape Foundation, after the organization awarded her a major prize for her work.

One of Bargmann's current monster projects is a minor league baseball park in Chattanooga, Tennessee, opening next spring as the home of the Lookouts, a Cincinnati Reds AA farm team. "It's fascinating," Bargmann says of the site. "It was an old pipe factory right on the river. The owner of the property luckily didn't completely wipe it out, which usually is what happens. I usually only have the ground to work with."

But with the Tennessee ballpark, she's working with four abandoned structures from a former foundry site, "so the whole scheme revolves around this presence of time, and the cool juxtaposition of this new time melding with [the past]" she explains. The artist says the Chattanooga project has been a happy collaboration with the developers. At one of their first meetings, she recalls, she told them, "This is a pact that we're making—not just a contract, but a pact about the site." She dared them to reuse 100 percent of the material that they excavated for the new stadium. The developers agreed and achieved the goal.

For Bargmann, the difference between a contract and a pact involves mutual understanding about what she calls the story of the site, which she assembles by researching its cultural, historical, social, natural, and industrial aspects and by talking with people who have a stake in the place. That's her process, whether she's revitalizing a 1,200-acre Ford plant in Michigan or working on a landscape project with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in Colorado. "I think there's a story in every single thing, in every single place," she says.

Not every contractor she engages with wants to think about the project on that level. Sometimes when Bargmann shows them her renderings, aiming to start a conversation about the story of a site and what's possible, she says, "They'll just say, 'Lady, we're going to just build it the way you drew it.'"

A Detroit project called Core City Park exemplified the kind of collaboration she seeks, one that doesn't necessarily work linearly. The 2019 mission was to build a park on an abandoned parking lot where a fire station had once stood.

The team dug into the ground and discovered the firehouse's cornerstone. They kept digging and bringing up debris. "With every piece, it was like, 'Okay, I see you,'" Bargmann says. "I need to learn about you, you crazy-ass thing that just came out the ground. What do you want to be? Where should you be?"

With that project, Bargmann had to walk the line between authenticity and contrivance, which she says can sometimes tip into "ruin porn"—especially in a city like Detroit, which experienced decades of decay.

Instead, she designs with a form of restraint that she calls modesty. In Detroit, the team initially proposed a pedestal for the discovered cornerstone. Bargmann pointed to the ground instead: "I said, 'I want it right there. I want people to step on it.'" And so, the red 1893 marker was laid in the park ground, which is mostly made up of crushed black slag, industrial runoff that is often mistakenly assumed to be toxic.

Through holes punched through the hard ground, honey locust and flowering dogwood trees blossom. In some places, excavated slabs of sandstone and brick are patchworked together to create terraces that invite guests to sit and have a coffee. But there are no obvious paths, and the concrete, slag, sandstone, and brick coexist but are not choreographed.

"'Design' is there: just find it," Bargmann notes, a directive that feels both challenging and liberating. "I'm often trying to do this thing of: If there's a new layer, how can it feel like it's hugging the ground, just saying, 'I like you'?" she says. "Some folks could be in the present and future, and then they look down and they're in the past."

A (Truly) Naked Take on Second-Wave Feminism

Bess Wohl on the Broadway play inspired by her mother's 1970s youth

by STUART MILLER


Bess Wohl

In *Liberation*, playwright Bess Wohl '96 looks back at the second-wave feminism of the 1970s to examine both progress and backsliding in achieving equality for women in American society. But that sounds like a summary of a thesis paper, while Wohl's play is entertainment. It is funny, angry, and bittersweet as it explores how women are treated and viewed—literally, in a second-act scene where the entire cast is naked, turning vulnerability into a powerful expression of humanity. The play collapses the distance between past and present by shifting time periods and repeatedly breaking the fourth wall, as the protagonist inhabits her mother's experiences in the 1970s before becoming a parent herself.

After earning acclaim and buzz off Broadway last season, the play opens on Broadway on October 28. The plot was inspired by Wohl's own mother, a onetime activist who worked at *Ms.* magazine when Wohl was young. The playwright also interviewed numerous women who were part of the 1970s feminist movement. The narrator is not her, Wohl has noted, but creating that stand-in character proved crucial to bringing the show to life. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

The play is grounded in reality but is also filled with meta moments, and it breaks the fourth wall from the opening scene. Why use those techniques?

I wanted to disrupt the normal way a play unfolds. I wanted it to be messy and show its seams, like this narrator is trying to solve something; maybe she can and maybe she can't. Things will fall apart and won't come out exactly the way she wanted. She'll lose control of the narrative— because that's my experience of making art, and that mirrors some of the difficulties of activism itself.

The narrator creates a bond with the audience and allows us to see the connections and gaps between generations. Did writing that character help you find the play?

All of my plays have a pretty long gestation period. But this one took longer than most, maybe 15 years of thinking about it. I wrote other versions. One was fully set in the 1970s, about women starting a newsletter together. I did workshops and thought it was going into production but then totally scratched it.

Having a character from the present day was what cracked it open for me. I talked to women from the movement, which was incredibly inspiring, but I also knew not to be overly devoted to creating something like a documentary. It's a patchwork quilt of fiction, fact, reality, fantasy, and time-jumping.

A narrator taking the audience on this journey helped me figure out how to write so these two time periods crash into each other, asking, "What is different and what's the same? How did we get here?" And, all caps, "WHAT HAPPENED? What happened to all of that activism and optimism and solidarity and community?" It's a woman asking both on a macro-political scale and in her own life.

A funny, bittersweet look at second-wave feminism, *Liberation* follows six members of a women's lib group in 1970s Ohio.

Photographs courtesy of Bess Wohl; performance photograph ©Joan Marus

Actresses Susannah Flood (left) and Betsy Aidem (right) as a daughter and her mother; the play is partly based on Wohl's relationship with her own mother.

Do you have any concerns about losing the conversational and physical intimacy when the play moves to the larger Broadway stage?

The intimacy is important to the heart of the play, but there's also this huge canvas in terms of ideas and political movements and seismic shifts in the culture. I hope we can preserve that intimacy but lift everything to embrace the size of the questions being asked: What does it mean to be in community? What does freedom mean both on a personal and a political level?

"She kept saying to me, 'Just go for it. Don't hold anything back.' That really set me free."

Do you worry that colleges or regional theaters will feel intimidated about staging this play in this political climate—because of the topics and the nudity?

With my other plays, people have often done a version of it that works for their community and the comfort level of their actors. So I'm hopeful that this play has a long life and can speak to a lot of different people who come from a lot of different backgrounds. If you want to do my work, I'm excited to find a way to make it possible for you.

You're writing about your mother as a feminist but also about becoming a parent. How did your mom react when she saw the play?

This play is so much about my own mother and my relationship with her. She's in her mid-eighties and she's so precious to me. I wanted to be honest about our relationship and the difficulties that she faced and to honor her journey and how proud I am of her.

While I was writing, I'd say, "I don't know if you're going to like this play." And she kept saying to me, "Just go for it. Don't hold anything back." That really set me free.

From Leslie Knope to Grief and Hope

An Emmy-winning TV writer's debut novel

by STUART MILLER

Aisha Muharrar

AISHA MUHARRAR '06 spent six years living inside Leslie Knope's brain.

Muharrar was three years out of college when she joined the staff of *Parks and Recreation*, NBC's sitcom about an offbeat group of employees at a municipal department. The show—centered on Knope, a relentlessly upbeat do-gooder played by actress Amy Poehler—had just finished an uncertain rookie season that nearly got it canceled. *Parks and Rec* had shown flashes of potential yet still felt ill-defined.

When Muharrar, who this year published her debut novel, *Loved One*, first interviewed for *Parks*, what struck the show's co-creator Mike Schur '97 was, he says, her "joyous positivity."

Like Knope, Muharrar loves waffles and being a good student. Schur said she quickly formed a "mind meld" with the character, locking into Knope's voice, which proved crucial in sharpening the show's humanity and comic tone. Schur adds that Muharrar learned quickly and became a force "with dialogue, stories, and structure."

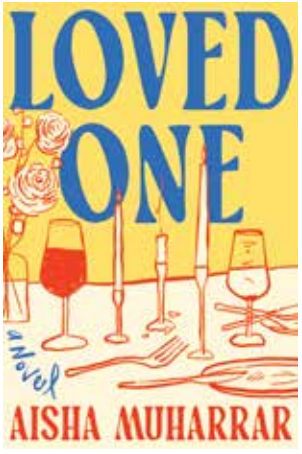
Muharrar had been a professional writer since her teenage years, when she learned that a publisher called Free Spirit Publishing, which specializes in educational books for and about young people, had a book out by a kid her age.

The Columbine shooting had happened recently, and Muharrar was interested in

Photographs courtesy of Aisha Muharrar

understanding why some teenagers fit in while others become outcasts. She pitched a book about how teens label and divide themselves, which became a collection of reported essays titled *More Than a Label: Why What You Wear or Who You're With Doesn't Define Who You Are* (2002).

Published her senior year of high school, the book helped her get into Harvard, she believes, where she studied English and American literature and language. When her mother, who'd been an English major herself, asked what she was going to do with the degree, Muharrar's answer, she confesses, was a bit quixotic. "I really liked Dorothy Parker," she says, "and thought I could live off of writing a humorous short story once a year for *The New Yorker* or something."



She became the vice president of *The Harvard Lampoon*. Among the pieces she wrote was a satire of nineteenth-century etiquette guides, a reflection of a course she was taking on the nineteenth-century novel. "For that piece and pretty much everything I wrote, I liked writing pieces that had a female narrator," she notes, since most *Lampoon* pieces had a male perspective.

But Harvard also inadvertently steered her to more practical work. She tried a screenwriting class her senior year with playwright Brighde Mullins, then a Briggs-Copeland lecturer at the University, who told Muharrar she had "an ear for dialogue" and introduced her to films by director and screenwriter Nicole Holofcener and other women.

Inspired, Muharrar attended graduate school at the University of Southern California to study screenwriting, then took some time off and began writing for a short-lived animated show called *Sit Down, Shut Up*. That led to an interview, and then a job, with *Parks and Rec*.

Muharrar credits Schur and the show's co-creator Greg Daniels '85 with infusing a collaborative spirit into the writers' room that matched the onscreen vibe. That enabled her to both find her voice quickly and gain crucial experience. During her first week, she found herself on set, working with Poehler to fix a joke that wasn't landing. "I can't overstate the importance of having the opportunity to see how it all comes together, from what we wrote in the script to how the actors interpret it," Muharrar says.

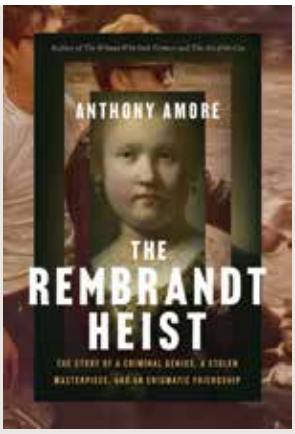
She also loved how collaboration extended to every department—set design, costumes, props, lighting. "It was exciting to see it more as a collage where I was doing one part of it and then everything else came together," she says.

And yet, Muharrar decided to (metaphorically) lock herself in a room to write a novel. She first started thinking about

During her first week, she found herself on set, working with Poehler to fix a joke that wasn't landing.

Off the Shelf

A dose of reality, delivered many ways



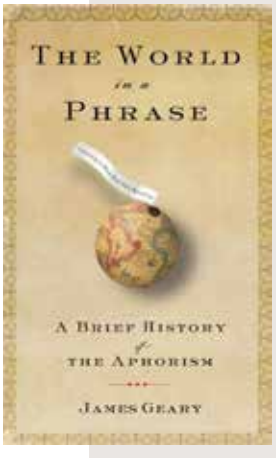
History or fiction? The line dividing these disciplines is not as impervious as one might think. Both pursue truths but make divergent claims about the stories they tell and the methods used to tell them. Like novels, histories are narratives—with a beginning and an end, and a lot left out in between. And by showing what may have been, or what could be, fiction can reveal truths that reality obscures.

From psychological mysteries and a history of medical imaging to studies of language and a guidebook on estate planning, the following titles challenge us to rethink our versions of the past, present, and future. They pursue reality by different means: some revisit tradition while others blur the confines of genre or resist the pitfalls of dichotomy.

Should you listen to them? It depends. How well each of the following authors convinces us of their truth has less to do with elevating tastes than with expanding perspectives. Whether or not these titles transform long-held beliefs or inspire empathy ultimately resides in the realm of imagination. —GABRIELLA GAGE

The World in a Phrase: A Brief History of the Aphorism, second edition, by James Geary, NF '12 (University of Chicago, $22.50 paperback).

Aphorisms, ancient and inspiring, are alive and well in the digital age, where our ever-shrinking attention spans reward the short and sweet. Two decades after its first publication, the updated *World in a Phrase* includes 26 new aphorists from throughout history and brings social media into the conversation through viral posts, like those of the popular internet nihilist Eric Jarosinski: "Peace: what everybody's fighting for." Not every meme or hot take qualifies as an aphorism, warns Geary, a lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School. The difference lies in the depth of the bite-sized lesson: "Aphorisms deliver the short sharp shock of an old forgotten truth."

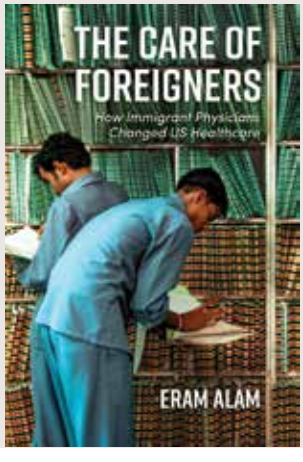


The Future of Seeing: How Imaging Is Changing Our World, by Daniel K. Sodickson, M.D. '96 (Columbia, $35).

Do images hold the key to the future of medicine, and will access to this technology be democratized? What role will AI and deep learning play in monitoring health? Before skipping to the answers, Sodickson—a medical-imaging pioneer and former Harvard Medical School faculty member—takes us back, way back, to the evolution of eyes and the history of medicine. From his walk through the development of microscopes and telescopes to X-rays and the medical imaging industry, Sodickson instills an appreciation for the "millennia of innovation" in our quest for new ways of seeing.

The Care of Foreigners: How Immigrant Physicians Changed US Healthcare, by Eram Alam (Johns Hopkins, $64.95 paperback).

From the Cold War's Hart-Celler Act in 1965 to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. has relied on foreign-born physicians, many from South Asia, to fill the gaps in its medical labor force. Eram Alam, assistant professor of the history of science, analyzes the country's dependency on foreign medical labor and reframes the conversation about physician migration, exposing the global implications and ethical dilemmas of labor moving from resource-poor to resource-rich countries. Using data and firsthand accounts from foreign-born physicians, Alam reveals discriminatory labor abuses and barriers to licensure, while examining this group's economic and social mobility.



The Rembrandt Heist: The Story of a Criminal Genius, a Stolen Masterpiece, and an Enigmatic Friendship, by Anthony M. Amore, M.P.A. '00 (Pegasus Crime, $29.95).

Amore has spent his career chasing down prized artworks stolen by criminal masterminds—as head of security for Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, he leads ongoing efforts to retrieve 13 paintings stolen from the museum in a famed 1990 heist. Here, Amore shares a redeeming sketch of his unlikely friend Myles Connor, a notorious art thief who absconded with a Rembrandt from Boston's Museum of Fine Arts in 1975 and afterward led a life of unexpected nuance.

The Limiting Principle: How Privacy Became a Public Issue, by Martin Eiermann '10 (Columbia, $37 paperback).

Privacy is elusive, not just as a commodity but also as a concept. Yet, it's constantly invoked in debates ranging from Big Tech and government overreach to reproductive rights and digital-age childhoods. Eiermann examines privacy's rise to prominence and how it shifted from a concept concerning the home and societal norms to "a public issue and a limiting principle of modern American society" with implications in government, law, and beyond.

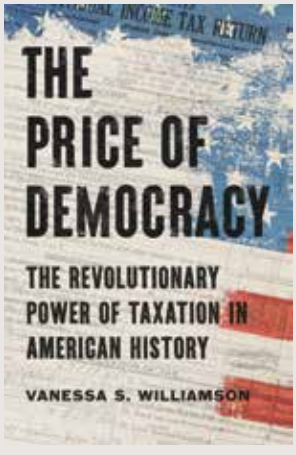
The Other Rooms, by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, translated by William Tamplin, Ph.D. '20 (Darf, $18.99).

A nameless protagonist is abducted from the streets of an unnamed city. For reasons unknown, he is moved from room to room of an obscure compound where captors wear many disguises and senses betray. Though shrouded in mystery, the nightmares of this beautiful, psychological novel by Palestinian-Iraqi modernist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (who completed a Harvard fellowship in literary criticism in 1952-54) feel

urgent in their portrayal of oppression as both isolating and collective: it is happening all around us if we care to look. This is the second Jabra book that Tamplin, a communications officer in the U.S. Marine Corps with a doctorate in comparative literature, has translated. May there be more to come.

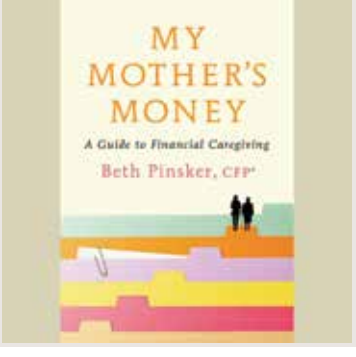
The Price of Democracy: The Revolutionary Power of Taxation in American History, by Vanessa S. Williamson, Ph.D. '15 (Basic, $32).

How much does democracy hinge on the ability of a government to tax citizens? It turns out, a whole lot. "When it comes to contestation over democracy, taxes are both the battleground and the war," writes Williamson. With clarity and concision, she unpacks the history and power dynamics of this enduring obligation, tracing three prevailing arcs of this war: taxation for a republic, taxation for Black liberation, and taxation for the general welfare.



My Mother's Money: A Guide to Financial Caregiving, by Beth Pinsker '93 (Crown Currency, $21 paperback).

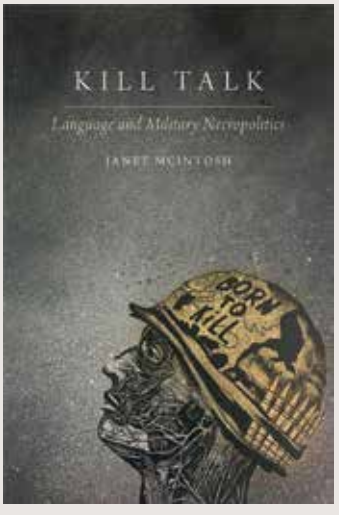
Sometimes hard truths are the most essential to face head-on, as we learn from *MarketWatch* columnist Pinsker's new playbook for financial caregiving. Practical and personal—Pinsker opens up about her own mother's care—this guide is filled with advice from experts and in-the-trenches caretakers. It covers misconceptions about Medicare, the importance of power of attorney, and facets of estate planning. How do we protect our agency as we age? How can caregivers navigate burnout and advocate without infantilizing? To help, Pinsker includes conversation prompts for tricky topics, to-do lists in every chapter, and templates for essential care-planning documents.



The Award, by Matthew Pearl '97 (Harper, $30).

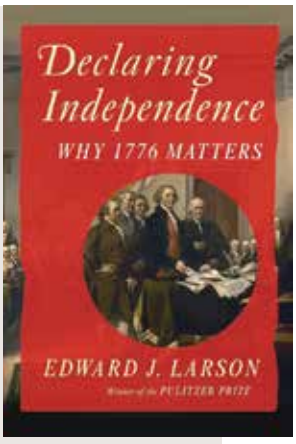
The novel opens with an intriguing note from its author: "*Some of this happened.*" What follows is a thriller where catharsis and darkness go hand in hand in the rat race that is literary ambition. Set in Cambridge, the story finds its protagonist in a struggling writer navigating the pitfalls and pretenses of Boston's writing scene circa 2010 (think "Bad Art Friend" infamy). More than one exchange between characters will leave you wondering where exactly the lines between fact and fiction are blurred. And Pearl, known for both narrative nonfiction and historical fiction, seems a natural choice to do the blurring.

Kill Talk: Language and Military Necropolitics, by Janet McIntosh '91 (Oxford, $19.99 paperback).



Euphemisms of battle and brutal bootcamp commands form "kill talk," a linguistic infrastructure of military violence examined here by McIntosh, an anthropologist. Kill chants (literal shouts of "Kill!" during training) and popular nicknames like "maggot" dehumanize enemies and soldiers alike; others like "buttercup" and routinely used homophobic slurs feminize to show weakness as much as they isolate to "strengthen." A warning: the often offensive and profane language remains unfiltered and intact in this ethnographic study to both capture reality and honor the requests of interviewees. The result is a viscerally dark yet necessary confrontation of kill-or-be-killed military culture that McIntosh argues helps normalize violence in American culture and facilitate war.

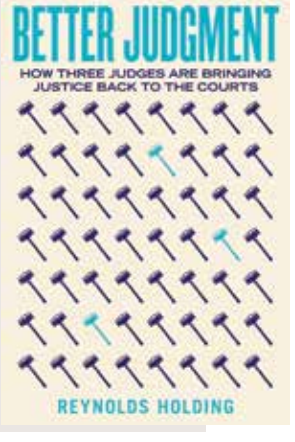
Declaring Independence: Why 1776 Matters, by Edward J. Larson, J.D. '79 (W.W. Norton, $29.99).



This book begins with a question: How, in seemingly one year, did the 13 colonies go from a population of generally content British subjects to a hotbed of rebellion in which a majority of colonists favored independence? Ahead of next year's 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Larson delivers a user-friendly distillation of the major events and ideas in that pivotal year. While less immersive than Larson's narrative histories, *Declaring Independence* is no less focused on the key details of a historical moment while signposting its enduring legacy in American culture.

Better Judgment: How Three Judges Are Bringing Justice Back to the Courts, by Reynolds Holding '77 (University of California, $29.95).

Unlike those of politicians, the names and lives of U.S. federal judges—meant to be the last line of defense against unchecked power and injustice—often remain obscure unless they end up on the Supreme Court. Their decisions, however, impact generations. Here, Holding, a journalist, goes behind the bench into the lives of Jed Rakoff, Martha Vázquez, and Carlton Reeves, three dynamic federal judges who embody his case for a strong, intact judicial branch that keeps oligarchies at bay while protecting the constitutional rights of individuals. Along the way, Holding traces how their ability to do each of these jobs has been eroded by both the left and the right in recent decades and the dangers that result.



Loved One after *Parks and Rec* ended in 2015, although it took years to evolve, with the first words appearing on the page in 2018 and the book going out to publishers in 2022. "I met Ann Patchett in a bookstore, and I said to her, 'I work in TV but I'm working on this silly thing,'" Muharrar recalls. "And she said, 'Writing a novel is not silly.' And so I realized I had to take it seriously." By then, she'd also written for Schur's *The Good Place* and *Hacks*; her work for the latter won an Emmy.

Loved One, which was released in August, is about a woman named Julia, whose best friend, Gabe, an indie rock star, has just died tragically young. Julia and Gabe dated briefly at 17 but only recently considered the idea that they belonged together—even though Gabe had been living with another woman, Elizabeth. The book takes readers backward through Julia and Gabe's relationship even as it moves forward through her grief and her denial of her true feelings while she develops a hesitant friendship of sorts with Elizabeth.

Muharrar wrote the book in the aftermath of two peers' deaths: *Parks and Rec* writer Harris Wittels and young adult novelist Ned Vizzini. Both died in their early 30s. "I had experienced a lot of grief, but I also did a lot of research," Muharrar says. "And one thing I learned is that people just respond in the strangest ways to grief and that it can be all-consuming." She kept an Elisabeth Kübler-Ross quote in mind—"There is a grace in denial"—because, as Muharrar says, "you can't really grasp it all."

Loved One is funny in parts, but Muharrar believed she was writing a novel about grief until an editor told her, "I think it's about love." At first, she got defensive, viewing that suggestion as "sappy," but then she realized the book is about both. "You can't feel grief unless you've felt love," she says, "so they're completely intertwined." It's only natural that a person filled with joyous positivity would, in a novel about grief, make her way toward love.

Aisha Muharrar with Amy Poehler on the *Parks and Rec* set (top), and with fellow *Hacks* writers and producers after winning a 2024 Emmy

University People

IN THE CRIMSON COMMUNITY

From top left: A Shamiri Institute program underway at the Igikiro Boys High School; an institute fellow with Kenyan students; cofounder Tom Osborn

ALUMNI

A New Prescription for Youth Mental Health

Kenyan entrepreneur Tom Osborn '20 reimagines care for a global crisis.

by NINA PASQUINI

Since the pandemic, youth mental health has deteriorated. Today, nearly one in seven adolescents across the globe lives with a mental health disorder. Suicide ranks as the third-leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds. Survey after survey reveals a generation increasingly weighed down by anxiety, sadness, and despair.

One popular intervention is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), in which a licensed professional treats one patient at a time, often in a private clinic or hospital setting. But for many young people across the world, that model is inaccessible, with long waitlists and a shortage of trained providers. It's also not always the right fit, says Tom Osborn '20, a Kenyan social entrepreneur. CBT, which gives patients the tools to change thoughts and behaviors, is well-suited for treating acute symptoms, Osborn says. But many young people's mental health issues center around diffuse, existential concerns: belonging, identity, the future.

In 2018, Osborn co-founded the Shamiri Institute, a Kenyan nonprofit named after the Swahili word for "thrive," to reimagine how mental health care is delivered to young people in his home country, and beyond. In

All photographs courtesy of the Shamiri Institute

this model, young adults aged 18 to 22—who have received 10 hours of training but are not licensed professionals—spend four weeks leading weekly one-hour sessions integrated into the school day, focused on building skills such as gratitude, growth mindset, and problem-solving.

The peer-led group format is designed to be approachable and relatable. Everyone participates; there's no sign-up sheet, no diagnosis, no label, and therefore no stigma. Students with more complex or acute needs are referred to licensed professionals.

The program has reached over 180,000 students, between 12 and 19 years old, in Kenya. Peer-reviewed studies show that more than 80 percent of students who have participated in the workshops experienced improved well-being—and it costs about 15 dollars per individual.

The idea for Shamiri was planted at Harvard, but Osborn's journey to social entrepreneurship began far from the gates of the Yard. He grew up in a small rural village of about 400 families in Migori County, in western Kenya. He spent his childhood helping on his parents' sugarcane farm and attending the local public school, where he quickly stood out. By the time he reached middle school, his uncle worried that he might be limited by the resources at the school.

So, when Osborn was 10, his uncle organized a *harambee*—a community fundraiser, named after the Swahili phrase meaning "all pull together." Neighbors, relatives, and friends pooled their savings to help send Osborn to a better school in a nearby town. Their investment paid off.

Harvard Alumni Association Honorands

Six alumni have been recognized for their outstanding service to the University.

Alice Abarbanel '66, of Berkeley, California, is the founder and volunteer project director of the Radcliffe College Alumnae Oral History Project, which collects transcripts and audio and video recordings that capture the voices of alumnae from the 1940s through 1979 (the final class to be admitted by a separate Radcliffe admissions committee). Abarbanel also received the Harvard Alumni Association's Clubs and Shared Interest Groups (SIGs) Outstanding Volunteer Leadership Award in 2024 for volunteer work with the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco, where she continues to serve on the board.

Siri Chilazi '10, M.B.A.-M.P.P. '16, of Boston, a senior researcher at the Women and Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School, is a reunion leadership chair for the Class of 2010 gift committee and has chaired all of her Harvard Business School class reunions. A longtime Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) director and secretary, she has served on the recent graduate leadership committee of the Harvard College Fund and was a founder of onBOARD (a yearlong initiative for first-year HAA directors to help them become acclimated to the board) and springBOARD (a program designed for third-year HAA directors to help them chart the next stage of their Harvard volunteer engagement).

Joyce Putnam Curll '65, of Keene, New Hampshire, is a former dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard Law School and a longtime participant in the Harvard College Host Family Program. She and her late husband, Dan Curll '64, remained active in the lives of the 16 students they hosted through the years. (In honor of the couple, Max Chen '04, M.B.A. '08, J.D. '10 and his wife, Maggie, established the Dan and Joyce Curll Harvard College Host Family Program Fund.) Curll also co-chaired HAA initiatives to build community among older alumni, such as the Crimson Society, and served on the boards of the HAA, her class reunion committee, and the Radcliffe Choral Society Foundation.

Vanessa W. Liu '96, J.D. '03, of New York City, served as HAA alumni president in 2021-2022 and, in 2023, was elected by alumni to serve a six-year term on the University's Board of Overseers. She is the cofounder of the New York chapter of Harvard Alumni Entrepreneurs, a member of the Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance, and an alumni interviewer for the College. Prior to her term as HAA president, she served as an elected director and held several other roles on the board. During the pandemic, she co-organized a virtual event for the HAA Alumni Allyship series that was sponsored by more than 65 alumni clubs.

Michael Clarence Payne '77, M.D '81, M.P.H. '82, of Malden, Massachusetts, is a former elected director on the HAA board. He has contributed to his College and Medical School reunion committees as well as HAA initiatives focused on broadening engagement. He is also a member of the Medical School's alumni mentoring program on aging and of the happy observance of Commencement committee, which helps ensure that Commencement and Harvard Alumni Day run smoothly.

Regina Ryan, M.P.A. '04, of Boston, is an expert at building Shared Interest Groups from the ground up and strengthening the alumni community. She has served as the HAA board's club and SIG director and led several SIG organizations. As president of Harvard Alumni Entrepreneurs, Ryan transformed the organization into a vibrant global community of 22,000 members across 22 chapters and expanded the group's offerings, notably launching the Harvard Alumni Entrepreneurs Accelerator, which has supported more than 48 alumni startup founders.

In the eighth grade national exam, which determines high school placement, Osborn ranked first in his district. He secured a coveted spot at Alliance National High School, a prestigious boarding school on the outskirts of Nairobi. It was the first time he had ever left his village.

In high school, Osborn imagined he might become a lawyer. He liked reading and writing, and law seemed like a direct way to help others. But during his junior year, while home on a break, he found his mother sick with a respiratory tract infection—an illness linked to the smoke from open-fire cooking, which she and many women in the community relied on.

"I felt like I needed to do something about it," Osborn says. Back at school, he began researching alternative cooking fuels and discovered a paper by a group of MIT researchers studying how to convert agricultural waste into cleaner-burning briquettes. Osborn took the idea and turned it into a project for Science Congress, a kind of national fair for student-led research and invention.

Not long after, Alliance was visited by David Sengeh '10 (then a recent Harvard graduate, now the chief minister of Sierra Leone), who was scouting promising student projects for an initiative to support youth innovation in Kenya. Osborn applied and was selected for a weeklong boot camp designed to help students refine and scale their ideas.

Shortly after that, Osborn co-founded GreenChar, a social enterprise that gained international recognition for providing low-cost, smokeless cooking briquettes to families, schools, and households across Kenya. The experience taught him that, with a bit of support, a young person from a small village could address problems long overlooked by institutions and experts. "It shifted my mindset—from wanting to become a lawyer or pursue a traditional career path," he says, "to seeing myself as an innovator and entrepreneur."

Osborn put off college to focus on growing GreenChar. But by 2015, Sengeh encouraged him to consider another leap: applying to college in the United States. Osborn got into Harvard, receiving a full financial aid package and becoming the first in his family to attend university.

At Harvard, Osborn sampled widely, taking classes in writing, computer science, and economics. Then, during his sophomore year, he enrolled in SLS 20, Harvard's introductory psychology course, taught by Pierce professor of psychology Daniel Gilbert (author of the bestselling book *Stumbling on Happiness*). "It seems over the top," Osborn says, "but that class changed my life."

It was the first time he had encountered mental health as a serious academic pursuit—something one could study, test, and improve through research. And it reinforced what he had learned during his time at GreenChar: that small, well-designed interventions could have large-scale impact.

He was struck by scholar and psychologist Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset, which showed how a subtle shift in how students understand their own intelligence could measurably improve motivation, resilience, and academic performance. If a simple psychological insight could change how young people thought about themselves, Osborn thought, then maybe mental health care didn't have to begin in a clinic. Maybe it could start in a classroom.

He concentrated in psychology and worked in the lab of Henry Ford II research professor John R. Weisz, where he connected with then-graduate student Jessica Schleider (who earned her doctorate in 2018). Schleider was developing simple, single-session mental health interventions focused on skills like growth mindset and values affirmation.

Unlike traditional CBT, these sessions were short, scalable, and easy to integrate into students' daily lives. Osborn saw that

If a simple psychological insight could change how young people thought about themselves, Osborn thought, then maybe mental health care didn't have to begin in a clinic.

HAA Clubs and SIGs Awards

The Clubs and Shared Interest Groups Awards recognize individuals, clubs, and Shared Interest Groups (SIGs) for exceptional contributions to their Harvard communities.

The recipients of this year's Outstanding Alumni Leadership Awards are **Lydia Rossman, A.L.M. '24**, and **Marcus DeFlorimonte, PMD '95**.

Dedicated to Harvard's military community, Rossman has rallied support and created meaningful experiences for Harvard's veteran community—including mentoring Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization members at the Extension School, leading the redesign of the alumni veterans' website, and organizing a successful annual barbecue for alumni veterans and military-affiliated students, faculty, and staff.

As president of the Harvard Club of Boston, DeFlorimonte led the creation of new partnerships, programming, and a modernized clubhouse. He has fostered partnerships with other clubs and SIGs, invited deans from each Harvard school to speak at the club, and hosted events with Harvard College sports teams, paving the way for a dynamic gathering point for alumni connections.

The Outstanding Alumni Community Award honored the **Harvard Club of Long Island** and the **Harvard Club of Bengaluru**.

The Harvard Club of Long Island recently revitalized its structure and leadership team while continuing to foster connections among undergraduates, alumni, and middle- and high-school educators. The club's longstanding Distinguished Teacher Awards celebrate local teachers nominated by Harvard undergraduates for their exceptional impact on students' intellectual and emotional development.

The Harvard Club of Bengaluru has cultivated a vibrant community in southern India, uniting alumni from across Harvard's schools. The club organized 28 gatherings over the last two years—including fireside chats, panel discussions, workshops, and youth development initiatives—and has more than doubled its active membership, in addition to building a thriving online community via the WhatsApp messaging platform.

Students at the Kimuka Girls Secondary School engaged in a Shamiri Institute session

these qualities could make them particularly effective in Kenya, where mental health stigma and insufficient resources can limit access to care. And he had an idea for how to adapt the approach: what if it became a group endeavor, rather than an individual one?

He drew on that work for a pilot study in Kenya. With Weisz's support, and with grant funding from Harvard's Center for African Studies and the Office of Career Services, Osborn returned to Kenya for the summer of 2019 with a few fellow Harvard students to test a four-week intervention.

The pilot yielded promising results, showing reductions in students' feelings of depression and anxiety, as well as better academic performance. After reviewing the data, Weisz encouraged Osborn to apply for a $210,000 grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation to scale the work. Osborn's team was awarded the funding in January 2020, his senior year, and Osborn moved to Nairobi after graduation to pursue the project full-time.

The early days of building Shamiri were intense and exhausting. "It felt like we were working Wall Street hours," he recalls, "just without the lifestyle." Only four people on the team, including Osborn, were handling everything—from coordinating school schedules and transportation to managing operations and logistics.

They realized that if they wanted to grow beyond a handful of schools, they couldn't run everything themselves. So they built what they called "Shamiri Hubs"—local teams that ran programs in their own communities. It worked. In 2022, they were reaching 1,000 students. By 2024, they had reached 100,000.

Shamiri's next goal had initially been to reach a million young people across Kenya by 2028. But recently, as at many nonprofits reliant on global development funding from agencies like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Shamiri's leaders have had to rethink how they can continue to grow sustainably.

Osborn doesn't have a perfect answer. He's exploring a hybrid model: communities that can afford to pay will subsidize those who can't, with governments contributing what they can.

Eventually, he hopes to innovate beyond mental health and clean energy, turning his focus to a broader, more systemic challenge: how institutions themselves can better serve the people who rely on them. "One of the greatest challenges for my generation in Kenya is that so many young people don't have real pathways to live the lives they dream of," Osborn says. The impediments to those lives can take many forms—from environmental degradation to mental health challenges.

His goal is to give more young people the chance to do what he did: recognize problems and feel equipped to solve them. "I want to spend more time figuring out how democracy and government can create more opportunities for young people," he says, "not just in Kenya, but across Africa."

THE UNDERGRADUATE

For International Students, the Weight of Silence

Measuring anxiety in text chains and hushed conversations

by ANDRÉS MUEDANO

By the time my flight reaches the Boston Logan port of entry, it is dark outside. Inside the terminal, a sign reads, "Visitors enter here," and with it I am reminded of who I am in the eyes of this country. My education in America reducible to that, it appears: a visit. Beyond the sign extends a long queue of fellow international students returning to college from spring break, among them that junior in Winthrop House who sometimes wears a keffiyeh. Eventually, a Customs and Border Protection officer scans my Mexican passport. I watch her mouth stiffen. "Stand against the wall," she commands.

I request an explanation. She replies impatiently that someone will escort me somewhere soon. Startled by her non-answer, I hold my breath. A few minutes later, another agent approaches; the first officer hands him

my passport, and the second demands that I follow him. On our way downstairs, we stop to pick up two other Harvard sophomores, both American, one of whom I know because we took organic chemistry together as freshmen. They explain to me in whispers that they bought a bottle of whiskey at a duty-free liquor store in the Charles De Gaulle Airport: an illicit act, since both are still under 21. The scene feels too absurd to be real. What I am being detained for, I have yet to discover.

For a little under an hour, a third officer examines my documents. He is sitting at his desk, and a large monitor casts blue light on his face. His gaze is fixed on my Form I-20, a document certifying my eligibility to study in this country. He asks me a series of protocol questions: where I am travelling from (the Netherlands), what I was doing there (visiting my best friend), whether I have any sharp objects (no). His gloved hands proceed to inspect my backpack and carry-on. Finally, he lets me go. "You're good."

Only in the airport parking lot do I realize that the third officer has kept the folder with my documents, so I rush back to the site where he interrogated me. The back of my neck feels constricted, and my throat begins to tighten. A fourth officer kindly informs me that I must head to a poorly lit, tucked-away room, where a fifth officer yells at me. "What do you want from me?" he screams with anger. Eventually, after a few minutes, he hands me my precious folder.

I arrive at my dorm at 10:50 P.M., my body still shaking. I text my parents, and my dad calls me over WhatsApp. He and my mom take turns on his phone, the three of us threading together more questions than answers. Was I randomly selected, or did they choose me because I am an international student at Harvard? Did I forget my folder, or did they intentionally try to withhold my documents? I had recently begun writing op-eds for *The Crimson*—should I now self-censor and maintain a low profile, stay quiet?

I'm not in actual danger, I reassure them. Writing one pro-Palestinian article pales in comparison with what other international students have done. Many of them have attended protests—something I haven't dared to do, not since coming to America. The prospect of losing my visa made me intensely anxious as a freshman, and it was this anxiety that prompted me to join *The Crimson*'s editorial board during my sophomore fall. I was hungry for a safe avenue to express my ideas. As a former science concentrator, I had only recently found that avenue in writing.

"Calladito te ves más bonito," my mom says. Her reply is a phrase known too well by any Mexican: you look prettier when your mouth is shut. I know she is saying it out of fear, simply wanting me to stay safe. I feel too overwhelmed and jetlagged to challenge her. I tell her not to worry.

FOUR DAYS AFTER MY INCIDENT at customs, six Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained Rümeysa Öztürk, a doctoral student at Tufts University. I was too anxious to leave my dorm that week, obsessively rewatching the surveillance footage of masked, plainclothes officers handcuffing Öztürk and taking away her belongings. It shocked me then that the only evidence wielded against Öztürk was a single op-ed she had co-authored in *The Tufts Daily* the year prior, a piece in which she called for Tufts University President Sunil Kumar to "acknowledge the Palestinian genocide" and to "divest from companies with direct and indirect ties to Israel." I, too, had written an op-ed criticizing my university's investments tied to Israel. It made me anxious that writing could merit such punishment in this country.

I remain confused and overwhelmed by the events that followed. Beginning in April, the Harvard International Office (HIO) hosted multiple "know your rights" information sessions over Zoom. On April 16, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem threatened to revoke Harvard's eligibility to host international students. Harvard Executive Vice President Meredith Weenick sent an email three days later, encouraging international students to "stay as focused as possible" on our academic work. A close friend, also an international student, started to make jokes about ICE agents chasing us down Plympton Street. We would laugh together, our

Illustration by Nicolas Ogonosky

situation so surreal it was hard to take seriously. Eventually, on May 22, Noem called for the Department of Homeland Security to implement her April 16 threat. (It was later blocked by a federal judge, though the Trump administration has appealed.)

Noem declared that many international students are "anti-American, pro-terrorist agitators" who had participated in attacks against Jewish students. Rising hostility toward Jewish individuals indeed constitutes a serious problem, both at Harvard and in America writ large. University initiatives and research elsewhere have laid bare the alienation that many Jews on campus experience—including, though barely mentioned, Jewish students who hold pro-Palestinian viewpoints. But Noem's order provided no evidence to support her assertion that international students were the culprits. I found this unsurprising. When we "visitors" are already deemed to be "radicalized lunatics" and "troublemakers" by the U.S. president, it is easy to label us as antisemites, too.

A WhatsApp group chat with hundreds of international students exploded minutes after Noem's order. "I can't wait for all of this bs from the trump administration to end," texted one sophomore. "I'm so tired of being frustrated and anxious about their fascism all of the time."

Feeling stressed, I video-called one of my blockmates. Born in the United States and raised in Central America, she was outside of the country at the time, buying groceries at the supermarket with her parents, all of them seemingly unbothered. "This will all pass," her mother said in Spanish.

She would have to think about her priorities, the risks she was willing to take. "Tú qué harías?" my friend asked me. What would you do?

My parents reacted differently. "Start working on your transfer applications," said my dad, and my mom agreed. I replied that they were getting ahead of themselves, that I would wait to hear from the HIO. I also admitted to them that I no longer wanted to stay in the States after graduation, not if I wanted to be a writer. "What's most important is that you finish your degree," my dad reminded me. "Then you can leave the country."

Almost a month later, on June 23, I received a call from a close friend and Harvard classmate. Like me, she was born and raised in Mexico, so we spent a lot of time together during our freshman year, growing acclimated to life in America. As I picked up the phone, she was crying.

Earlier in the spring, she had been offered an internship at the Secretariat of the Economy in Mexico. Amidst all the uncertainty, however, she had started to doubt whether it was safe for her to travel back to Mexico from the U.S. Looking for support and guidance, she scheduled an online appointment with the HIO.

"Se veía harta," my friend told me—she looked fed up—referring to the overworked HIO advisor with whom she had met. During their meeting, my friend had expressed her concerns about being unable to re-enter the country before the start of the fall semester. Late in May, she published a column in a Mexican newspaper in which she voiced her fear under the current U.S. administration. The advisor told her that she would have to decide what was more important to her: an internship in Mexico or her ability to return to the U.S. She would have to think about her priorities, the risks she was willing to take. "Tú qué harías?" my friend asked me. What would you do?

Her question did not present me with a hypothetical scenario. I had cancelled my plans to visit Mexico City earlier during the summer, worried about winding up in a similar or worse situation than what I had faced coming back from spring break. Knowing my answer would be disappointing, I recommended that she stay in Cambridge.

I thought about the call for days. I kept parsing through the HIO advisor's reply, thinking about the issues that matter most to me, the risks I am willing to take. At the same time, I struggled to make sense of the reasons behind my silence. I am neither hateful, antisemitic, nor anti-American. Why had I stopped writing? Why should I be afraid?

I see nothing "radical" about rejecting fascism, nor do I see "lunacy" in criticizing an institution's material complicity in genocide. But this view is just my opinion. Whether publishing it is a form of "troublemaking" has become less certain; it inevitably leads to the much harder question of whether writing holds the potential to change the world for the better.

I hope that it might. Over the last few months, I have learned that silence doesn't.

2025 Aloian Memorial Scholars

Two students have been named the 2025 David and Mimi Aloian Memorial Scholars for enriching the quality of life in their Houses: **Joseph Foo '26** (Pforzheimer House) and **Hayden Graham '26** (Leverett House).

Joseph Foo, of Singapore, was elected secretary of the House Committee and is a steady, uplifting presence who fosters community through quiet, consistent acts of care, most notably in the connections he builds with dining hall staff. He is also Pforzheimer's student ambassador to the Office for the Arts and brings creativity to his leadership—connecting peers to artistic opportunities and curating interpretive labels for newly installed House artwork.

As co-chair of the Leverett House Committee and director of all 24 residential House chairs, Hayden Graham, of Vernon Hills, Illinois, has transformed a modest team into a dynamic and collaborative group of more than a dozen members. He has also led the planning and execution of a wide range of events—from weekly Stein nights to large formals, the Spring River East party, Housing Day celebrations, and more—that bring together hundreds of students and foster a deep sense of belonging.

VITA

An Unassuming Spy

Richard Skeffington Welch: 1929-1975

by TOBY HARNDEN

RICHARD WELCH '51 was no James Bond. He had a lifelong aversion to guns and delighted in the intricacies of Aristotelian logic. His bald pate, spectacles, and clipped mustache gave him the air of an Ivy League professor. This would be the image seared into the public consciousness when his photograph appeared across the world.

In fact, Welch was the consummate spy. When he was assassinated by Marxist terrorists outside his residence in Athens in December 1975, he was at the top of his game: a chief of station for the Central Intelligence Agency and a future contender to lead its clandestine service. He remains the most senior CIA officer (his rank was the equivalent of a major general) to be killed in the line of duty. In death, he may have played a part in saving the agency he loved.

Welch had lost the use of his left eye in 1938, at the age of eight, in an accident with an ice pick at home. That year his comfortable life, in which he was driven to elementary school by a chauffeur, ended abruptly. His father, Colonel George Patrick Welch, A.B. 1923, an investment banker who had lost most of his fortune in the Depression, left the family home to become a writer and soldier. Growing up in Providence, Rhode Island, Welch found solace in the study of the classics and won a Harvard scholarship.

He graduated *magna cum laude* while also making money by frequenting the pool halls of South Boston, betting against blue-collar locals certain they could beat the effete scholar who had foolishly challenged them. His class was strongly patriotic and had, as one classmate noted, a "profound lack of cynicism about government" that perhaps seems quaint today.

Welch was among the reputed 5 percent of the class of 1951 who joined the CIA. He had the distinction of being the only half-blind CIA officer to pass his entrance medical with a rating of 20/20 vision in both eyes. Fortuitously, the vision test involved the opening sentences of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which Welch had memorized at Harvard. He was able to repeat it when his right eye was covered.

Welch was endearingly cantankerous and as willing to express himself with the vernacular of an infantry sergeant as that of the erudite man of letters. During an overseas move, he was asked by a CIA bureaucrat to provide a urine sample from his baby daughter. Affronted by this preposterous red tape, he instead supplied a vial of liquid from his basset hound—named after John H. Finley Jr., A.B. 1925, Ph.D. '33, L.H.D. '68, the revered master of Eliot House and professor of Greek literature. Afterward, Welch delighted in telling his friends that Finley had passed the test.

Welch served undercover in Athens and Cyprus, blossoming into one of the CIA's most accomplished recruiters of assets—among them the private secretary to Archbishop Makarios, the president of newly independent Cyprus, which secured NATO's southern flank. "We knew every breath Makarios took," a colleague recalled. After station chief jobs in Guyana and Peru, Welch returned to his beloved Greece in the summer of 1975. By then, he was renowned in the CIA as a master of covert political action. The outcomes of general elections in Greece in 1956 and Guyana in 1968 owed much to his clandestine work.

As he turned 46, he wrote to his three children that he felt "exactly the same as I did as a freshman at Harvard, a New England Irishman on the make." It was a chaotic year for the CIA: Capitol Hill hearings on the agency's past misdeeds, lurid media revelations, and malicious leaking of names of undercover CIA officers, Welch included.

The anti-CIA tide turned when Welch, targeted as a symbol of U.S. imperialism, was shot dead and President Gerald Ford held him up as an exemplar of service and sacrifice to the nation. Given Welch's own cunning in influencing events, he probably would have admired the agency's effective use of his demise. The "CIA did not miss the opportunity to exploit the Welch death," a colleague wrote, "to smooth the waves of dissent churned up by the congressional investigations."

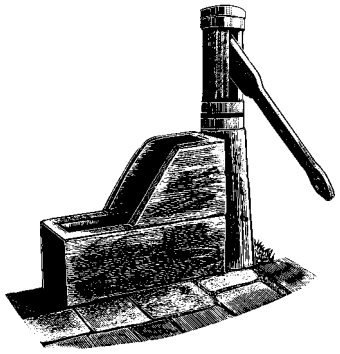
Welch's funeral at Arlington National Cemetery had all the pomp and ceremony of a state occasion. An agency veteran judged it likely the largest public gathering of intelligence officers in American history. The words "Central Intelligence Agency" appear on Welch's tombstone, the first time a CIA officer had been identified on his grave.

Richard Skeffington Welch, 1970

Photograph courtesy of Toby Harnden

Toby Harnden, a former newspaper foreign correspondent, is the author of a book about recipients of the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Cross—among them Richard Welch—to be published by Simon & Schuster in 2026.

Ghosts



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

ALAMY

This magazine's John Harvard's Journal section for July-August 2020—the first issue produced remotely, during the onset of COVID-19—began with a two-page spread on Massachusetts Hall, the University's oldest building, at its 300th anniversary. It embodies what most people envision when they think of the campus: a free-of-frills early Georgian design, of mellow red brick with white trim. A brief text recounted the beloved building's far-from-placid history, replete with renovations, wholesale changes of use, and a 1924 fire (a metaphor for passages through change and through storm). Assisted by the peerless Harvard University Archives staff, who exhumed plans for the structure, correspondence about paying for it, and physical evidence (the spikes that held it together, bricks), we had intended to report much more extensively. But one thing after another intervened—the pandemic precluded revisiting the archives for photographs, and after that, the right opportunity never arose.

Fortunately, a University nearing its 400th birthday presents boundless opportunities for commemoration, and so we turn to perhaps the *least* iconic old part of Harvard Yard (or at least its environs). That would be Wadsworth House, the yellow clapboard building whose front door, once facing a rural expanse, now dumps smack onto Massachusetts Avenue across from the looming bulk of Josep Lluís Sert's Smith Campus (née Holyoke) Center. In the context of brick-everything Harvard, Wadsworth is something of an ugly—or at least odd—duckling, but it too has a claim on the collective memory. When it reopens this autumn, after a stem-to-stern renovation, it will be on the cusp of its 300th year, too.

In *Harvard: An Architectural History* (1985), Bainbridge Bunting observes that "the provincial legislature celebrated the appointment of conservative President Benjamin Wadsworth (1725-1737) by building him an official residence...planned on a generous scale," a beneficence unimaginable today. (He goes on to note that "the committee overseeing construction ignored the legislature's authorization of £1000...The final cost was almost twice that appropriated." It's an outcome that sounds familiar, even routine, to the modern observer of Crimson construction.)

The original layout included a barn, outhouses, and a pasture, per Bunting: "The president's field comprised a good part of what is now the Old Yard; when this area was mowed, it was the responsibility of the freshman class to rake the hay." Out front was a "pleasant garden with a paved courtyard," lost to subsequent enlargement of what was then Braintree Street and is now Massachusetts Avenue. Presidents resided there for more than a century. It became University office space in 1950 (at one time housing the Harvard Alumni Association and this magazine).

Bunting does not report two other parts of Wadsworth House's past—but their ghosts very much resonate today.

To Harvard's credit, spurred by student researchers under the guidance of Bell professor of history Sven Beckert, the University in 2016 affixed to the clapboards a stone tablet acknowledging the four enslaved people who lived there when Presidents Wadsworth and Edward Holyoke (1737-1769) were in residence: Titus, Venus, Juba, and Bilhah.

Six years post-Holyoke, another notable event transpired there. On July 2, 1775, when General George Washington arrived to assume leadership of the Continental Army, he made the house his headquarters. His residence was brief—a couple of weeks—but eventful. From there, he took command of the troops (on Cambridge Common). And Washington apparently convened his first Council of War at Wadsworth and met there, among others, with Abigail Adams.

Both of these latter bits of history merit reflection today. At a time when some find it fashionable to denounce Harvard as apart from, or even alien to, its home country, it is worth remembering that the University was present at the creation, even before there *was* a United States of America, and has remained embedded in the nation's well-being for the duration. In widening its vision to encompass all of its own legacies, including community members' enslavement of other human beings, the modern Harvard has done another small bit to bring *Veritas* to the American story writ large.

—PRIMUS VI

A 1904 postcard of Wadsworth House

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 (continued from page 8)

sponsored research will be developing new, objective means of assessing the quality and importance of faculty research" ("A Reckoning, and a Chance to Reinvent," September-October, page 15).

What a pity and how shortsighted. We won't be seeing the likes of a Bell Lab again? And basic research in the medical and health fields is undoubtedly going to lead to some financial rewards.

Perhaps the school can encourage continued basic science research by extracting a tax on corporate grants of, say, 20 percent to be applied to a basic research fund. Any profits that arise should be plowed back into research and graduate student training, but if the marketplace realities are just too great, some of the profits could be distributed back to the corporations on a prorated basis.

Lawrence Berman, M.D. '63
Wyckoff, N.J.

The magazine's upbeat description of Chan School of Public Health Dean Andrea Baccarelli's decision, in the face of existential federal funding cuts, to "pivot" to corporate partnerships and "easy, quick, and cheap" solutions overlooks the school's long-standing commitment to domestic U.S. health policy engagement and, most importantly, advocacy. Will the Chan School lead resistance to this administration's dangerous plans to defund and deconstruct the U.S. public health system? Will any public health faculty who remain after these cuts be protected if they challenge Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s anti-vaccine, anti-scientific lies? We ignore these questions at our peril.

Lauren Waits, S.M. '94
Atlanta, Ga.

A LETTER PROPOSES EXPULSIONS

The letter from Mark Rutzick, J.D. '73, in the September-October issue (page 6) is mind-boggling.

"Harvard can adopt whatever restrictions on free speech it feels are necessary to enhance students' educational experience." Restricting speech enhances education? That's beyond oxymoronic.

Harvard should ban phrases "threatening, directly or *indirectly* (emphasis mine), *the life* (ditto) of any Jew anywhere in the world?" Bit of a stretch. If I were to point at a fellow Harvard student in a hostile crowd and shout "Kill that Jew!" the law would be down on me instantly and the University would kick me out in a heartbeat. It's neither constitutionally protected speech nor tolerable student behavior. But not everybody who embraces the "river-to-the-sea" slogan advocates murdering Jews. And at a university, if nowhere else, the way to counter bad speech is with better speech.

A "100 percent expulsion rule for *speech violations* (my emphasis again)—with no exceptions?" Draconian. Worse: Trumpian.

Robert Hecker '69
Guilford, Vt.

In response to Mr. Rutzick's letter: Of course, Harvard is not bound by the First Amendment protection of free speech. But its entire existence as an educational and research institution indisputably binds it to protect freedom of speech. Without it, a university is a mere weathervane. The idea of banning people from chanting "from the

river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is frightening, particularly when it is remembered that the Likud Party's founding document stated, "Between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty."

Richard E. Brodsky, J.D. '71
Coral Gables, Fla.

NAME, IMAGE, AND LIKENESS

In the new era of university sports revenue-sharing and Name, Image, and Likeness arrangements, recruiting a championship team, especially in big revenue sports like football and basketball, is increasingly a function of the wealth of a university and its alumni. With their long histories of educating the nation's captains of finance and industry, this seems like the ideal moment for the Ivies to opt into NCAA Division I.

Harvard is being hounded and abused for most everything else they do, so this may be the moment to embrace big time sports and give our image a boost. Ten thousand rich alumni, one victory today!

John Walsh, M.P.P. '78
Catonsville, Md.

CAN WOMEN HAVE IT ALL?

The title of Yasmeen Khan's essay, "Baby, Maybe?" reminded me of the book *A Baby? ...Maybe* (Bobbs-Merrill 1975), authored by my late wife, Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, S.M. '68, during what Ms. Khan describes as second-wave feminism, when educated women achieved equal opportunity in the workplace and began to ponder whether they could balance motherhood and careers. Elizabeth and I did "have it all," raising our daughter, Dr. Christine Whelan, to be an Ivy League and Oxford graduate and a mother of five, as well as an author and a professor of sociology. I encourage Ms. Khan to "want it all"—and to read Elizabeth's book for some guidance.

Stephen T. Whelan, J.D. '71
New York, N.Y.

CRIMSON FINERY

The college pump ("Tips of the Hats," July-August, page 56) was in error when it said that only those who earn the Ph.D. degree get to "strut the crimson finery." Back in 1992, when I received my Ed.D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, my fellow Ed.D. recipients and I definitely wore crimson gowns AND velvet tams. We were not an aberration. As someone who was the director of career services at the education school from 1983-1991 and who attended many Harvard graduations, I can report that the crimson gowns were regularly donned by Ed.D. recipients. (HGSE did not confer Ph.D.s in that era.)

Belle Brett, Ed.D. '92
Wells, Maine

Primus VI responds: Thanks to Belle Brett for correcting my error (and congratulations on your Ed.D. and the accompanying crimson finery). Stephan Magro, the University's Commencement director, clarifies: recipients of Ed.D. and other *Ph.D.-equivalent* degrees, such as the Business School's D.B.A., have since 1955 worn crimson doctoral gowns. Current equivalent degrees, like the Law School's S.J.D., also qualify. Degrees *not* considered Ph.D.-equivalent, like the Graduate School of Education's Ed.L.D., do not entitle their recipients to the crimson gown. Primus appreciates the opportunity to get the record right.

HM To read more letters visit harvardmag.com.

CARE GAPS AND DISABILITIES

I commend the attention to the critical issue of disability care ("Quality of Care," May-June, page 32) but was disheartened by the omission of people who are hard of hearing—a community that is repeatedly left out of the disability conversation.

When people who are hard of hearing lack access to compatible assistive technologies in medical settings, they are effectively left unaided. If you cannot hear your doctor, how can you give informed consent? This is a basic legal principle in medical malpractice—and yet, it is not treated as serious enough for inclusion.

It is time for Harvard and the broader medical and policy communities to recognize that hearing loss exists on a spectrum, that it is a serious disability—and that excluding people who are hard of hearing from research, teaching, and policy has real and damaging consequences. The omission is not just academic oversight—it is a barrier to equal care and federal legislation.

Janice S. Lintz, M.P.A. '23
Washington, D.C.

ERRATA

In "The Professor Who Quantified Democracy" (July-August, page 33), Kilmar Abrego Garcia should have been identified as Salvadoran, not Venezuelan. We regret the error.

(continued from page 29)

some lower court judges appointed by Republican and Democratic presidents, who worked "painstakingly" to apply the law as it existed and were overturned, feeling frustrated and betrayed—undermined and abandoned by the super-majority of the Supreme Court. "It is inexcusable," one judge told Hurley about those justices. "They don't have our backs."

In a dissent from the *CASA* ruling, Justice Sotomayor echoed her complaints about the *Trump* ruling a year earlier: "The Court's decision is nothing less than an open invitation for the Government to bypass the Constitution. The Executive Branch can now enforce policies that flout settled law and violate countless individuals' constitutional rights, and the federal courts will be hamstrung to stop its actions fully. Until the day that every affected person manages to become party to a lawsuit and secures for himself injunctive relief, the Government may act lawlessly indefinitely."

Throughout his two decades as chief justice, Roberts has looked to historical role models for guidance and comparison—from the clear-eyed approach to justice embodied by his early mentor, Henry Friendly, to the human qualities of his former boss and predecessor, William Rehnquist, whom he called "an extraordinarily good and decent man." Prominently, Roberts has also cited the legacy of John Marshall, the legendary chief justice from 1801 to 1835, as a practitioner of principled and pragmatic jurisprudence.

But the Marshall-Roberts comparison isn't entirely apt. Marshall was aligned with a political regime out of power—he was a Federalist, at a time when the nation was divided between Federalists, who favored a strong national government and a commercial economy, and anti-Federalists, who favored a limited national government and an agrarian economy. A month after he was sworn in as chief justice, Marshall swore in the anti-Federalist Thomas Jefferson as president—and spent much of his almost 35 years on the bench trying to resist or reckon with a contrary regime in power.

Roberts is positioned more like Marshall's successor, Roger Taney, who was chosen by, and generally on the same side as, the regime in power during his 28 years as chief.

Taney has been ranked among the country's great justices by professors of law, history, and political science, as the historian Walter Ehrlich wrote in the *Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*. In his long tenure, Ehrlich wrote, Taney "preserved and refined the main lines of Marshall's constitutional law, opened economic opportunities for many Americans, and retained a strong national power redefined to accommodate a judicial dual sovereignty" with that of each state.

> **"The Court's decision is nothing less than an open invitation for the Government to bypass the Constitution."**
>
> *—Justice Sonia Sotomayor, dissenting in the* CASA *case*

But that's not how most people know of him. Taney is infamous for inflaming America's bloody division over slavery and for making the Civil War inevitable. As Ehrlich wrote, "Even though he saw nothing positive about the institution of slavery itself, Taney withal was a southern gentleman imbued with southern values, and here was an opportunity to settle the issue."

In the *Dred Scott* case of 1857, Ehrlich summarized, the "southern and proslavery" majority of the Court, with Taney writing its notorious opinion, ruled that Black people couldn't be American citizens; that the Constitution regarded slaves as property; and that each state where slavery was lawful could decide if an emancipated person could be made a slave again. The decision and the opinion made Taney a pariah and gutted the authority of the Court.

In his confirmation hearing, Roberts called that decision "perhaps the most egregious example of judicial activism in our history," with "disastrous consequences." After the ruling in the *Trump* case, though, some progressive commentators reacted by declaring that Roberts is as contemptible as Taney, based on a comparison of the *Dred Scott* and *Trump* decisions and their arguably similar shattering of the American republic. The commentary illustrated deep agitation about Trump and his dominance. It was part of what Roberts called "the personalization of judicial politics," whose harm to the Court he worried about early in his tenure.

A fatalistic way to view Roberts's intentions has taken hold in the first year of the second Trump term. Some legal observers contend that the conservative majority has exercised prudence in many of those emergency rulings, by engaging in Roberts's method of judicial self-protection. By issuing a procedural decision in favor of the administration, the reasoning goes, the majority put off a difficult reckoning. It avoided the risk of issuing a substantive order that the president would defy, creating a full-

Rucho v. Common Cause, 2019

Result: Federal courts, including the Supreme Court, lack the power to review partisan gerrymandering because that presents a political question.

Roberts, for the majority: "Federal judges have no license to reallocate political power between the two major political parties, with no plausible grant of authority in the Constitution, and no legal standards to limit and direct their decisions."

Kagan, dissenting: "The partisan gerrymanders in these cases deprived citizens of the most fundamental of their constitutional rights: the rights to participate equally in the political process…[they] debased and dishonored our democracy."

After his presidential swearing-in ceremony on January 20, 2025, President Trump gestures to Roberts in the Capitol rotunda.

blown constitutional crisis. As the legal scholar William Baude commented in *The New York Times* in July, "Even if you wanted the court to maximally stop the Trump administration, surely it would need to pick and choose its spots carefully. There's just too much lawlessness to do otherwise."

Outside the circle of professional Court watchers, though, the self-protection, if that's what it has been, looks like partisan support for the Trump administration. It looks as if the Court is forsaking its checking function in the system of checks and balances and using its power in service of the Trump agenda. After the *CASA* ruling, many judicial observers remarked on how, through its emergency docket, the Court was often ruling for the Trump administration without explaining why—rule by edict in place of rule by law.

The legal scholar Rogers Smith wrote in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in June, "In a country deeply divided over constitutional conservatism, Roberts's tenure as chief justice has led to the opposite of what he has said he seeks to achieve. The American public now respects the Court less than ever and sees it as more political than ever."

Twenty years ago, in his speech against Roberts's confirmation, then-Senator Obama recounted a conversation with Roberts from the day before. Roberts, Obama recalled, had told him that "he doesn't like bullies and has always viewed the law as a way of evening out the playing field between the strong and the weak." Knowing that his "nay" vote wouldn't halt Roberts's confirmation, Obama offered a wish for the future: "Given the gravity of the position to which he will undoubtedly ascend," he emphasized, "I hope that his jurisprudence is one that stands up to the bullies of all ideological stripes."

Trump, to many, personifies the bully Obama warned about. His assault on democracy has tested Roberts's institutionalism in ways the chief justice seems not to have anticipated, or not to have wanted—or been able to lead—the Court to constrain.

As a singular American figure, the 47th president might have a singular effect on Roberts's legacy. That's why the *Trump* opinion looms so large. It would be a tragedy for Roberts if his long tenure as chief justice were reduced to that single ruling and opinion because the portents of doom in the Sotomayor dissent prove accurate in the extreme—and turn what Roberts meant as the solution to a problem of constitutional governance into a license for autocracy.

It would also be a tragedy for the Supreme Court and for the United States. This is a moment in the nation's history when the need for a strong and respected Court is acute. But the *Trump* ruling seemed to embolden the president to further stretch the bounds of the Constitution—and each new decision in Trump's favor erodes public trust that the Court will constrain him.

Ensuring that the executive respects the rule of law is the ultimate test Roberts may face. Suppose the Court orders the president to end a policy because it violates the law—a policy Trump deems essential to his cause. If the *Trump* decision and the Court's loss of public legitimacy lead the president to think he has the power to disobey that order, what safeguard against authoritarianism will be left?

In a landmark decision almost 75 years ago—striking down an effort by President Harry Truman to seize and operate most of the nation's steel mills—Justice Robert Jackson wrote famous words in a concurring opinion about the Supreme Court's duty to constrain a president who disobeys the law: "With all its defects, delays and inconveniences, men have discovered no technique for long preserving free government except that the Executive be under the law, and that the law be made by parliamentary deliberations. Such institutions may be destined to pass away. But it is the duty of the Court to be last, not first, to give them up." ▽

Lincoln Caplan '72, J.D. '76, a contributing editor, is a senior research scholar at Yale Law School and the author of six books about the law. He is also a lecturer in English and in political science at Yale. His previous piece for Harvard Magazine, *"Cruel and Unjust," appeared in the March-April 2025 issue.*

Photograph by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

TREASURE

Souvenirs of 'Old Japan'

Hand-painted photographs of a country on the cusp of modernization

Under the shade of red-leafed maples, a woman in a blue kimono sits on a platform beside a river, while a serving girl holds a tea set. In the distance: a footbridge with a lone pedestrian. "Oji, Tokio (maple)," the title reads, referring to a bucolic area of the Japanese capital. The image is beautiful and perplexing—realism tinged with surreal pops of color.

Dating to about 1890, it is one of more than 5,000 hand-painted photographs that collector E.G. Stillman, A.B. 1908, brought home from Japan and donated to Harvard in the 1940s. Some were photographs he likely took himself, but most were professional prints sold in curio stores as souvenirs for the growing number of Western tourists.

The practice of hand-colored photography was introduced in Europe during the 1840s but perfected by Japanese artists, says Joanne Bloom, photographic resources librarian at Harvard's Fine Arts Library, which houses much of the Stillman collection (the rest is at Widener Library and Harvard-Yenching Library). Most of these images started out as monochrome albumen prints produced on paper coated with a light-sensitive egg-white emulsion and salt. In a tedious, delicate process, artists added colors with water-soluble paints and, later, synthetic dyes. Made during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Stillman photographs capture life during the Meiji period, when rapid modernization was underway but had not yet transformed society.

"The Old Japan as it will never appear again," reads an inscription in one of Stillman's photo albums. The progeny of industrial and banking tycoons, Stillman was a medical researcher and a lifelong "Japonist" who first visited in 1905. The photographs he brought back from that trip and others show workers in a rice paddy, a farmer with a packhorse, villagers, singing children, teahouses, temples, brothels, kimono-clad musicians, and a man walking a remote path, with Mount Fuji rising in the distance. These images seem both hyper-real and hazily fantastical—bright glimpses of a vanishing world. —Lydia Lyle Gibson

Above: Autumn view showing maple trees and a Japanese woman having tea at a scenic place along the Takino River, ca. 1890
Courtesy of Harvard's Fine Arts Library/Special Collections/E.G. Stillman Japanese Collection

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