THE TWENTY-NINTH PRESIDENT

Your recent story on Harvard's next president, Lawrence S. Bacow, was excellent (“The Pragmatist, September-October, page 32). The review of Bacow's endeavors provides a wonderful vehicle to present and develop a breadth of educational issues that generate a myriad of key questions and approaches. All who read the article on will have their own personal reactions as to which of so many issues most resonate or most demand our attention.

For me the issue of the costs of education and the burdens of those costs to students and family came to the fore. That burden is not nearly as threatening for Harvard as it is with many other institutions. Harvard’s endowment and its prestige afford a degree of confidence that inadequate funds will certainly not significantly, adversely affect its place as possibly the finest educational institution in the world, it should maintain its place as possibly the finest educational institution in the world, it should continue to flourish—but will education flourish? I suggest that as a nation, we do not allow wealth and class distinctions to diminish the importance and availability of education due to excessive costs or financial burdens. While Harvard must always strive to maintain its place as possibly the finest educational institution in the world, it should also work to assure that our nation's system of higher education does not evolve into one that reflects the “have” and “have not” realities that appear to have taken root, grown and even been encouraged by both policies and practices in the recent past.

Don Bergmann, J.D. ’66
Westport, Conn.

Thank You, Times Two

The feature appearing at page 54 is the last by associate editor Sophia Nguyen, who departed in late August for an exciting new position at The Washington Post. She goes with our best wishes, and warm thanks for wonderful service to readers during her four years on Harvard Magazine's staff.

That work, and the rest of the magazine's contents in print and online, depend significantly on contributions from readers. Our deepest appreciation to the thousands of supporters who have made donations during the past year; you are recognized beginning on page 86.

—The Editors

Harvard or its graduate schools, their faculties or, most importantly, their students. Bacow will of course confront financial issues and, most assuredly, will implement steps and policies “that work.” The question I would raise is Harvard’s role in the broader national effort to make education more affordable, less burdensome, and less subject to the one dimensional cost/benefit analyses that surface so often in our dialogue on education. Harvard and comparable institutions will continue to flourish—but will education flourish? I suggest that as a nation, we do not allow wealth and class distinctions to diminish the importance and availability of education due to excessive costs or financial burdens. While Harvard must always strive to maintain its place as possibly the finest educational institution in the world, it should also work to assure that our nation's system of higher education does not evolve into one that reflects the “have” and “have not” realities that appear to have taken root, grown and even been encouraged by both policies and practices in the recent past.

Don Bergmann, J.D. ’66
Westport, Conn.

President Bacow is clearly a person of enormous talent, but he understimates antisemitism on college campuses. According to the Anti-Defamation League’s Anti-Semitic Incidents report, there was an 89 percent increase in antisemitic incidents last year on campuses where the Boycott, Divestment and Sanc-
tions (BDS) movement was most active. For all practical purposes, only anti-Israel speakers can speak freely to students.

The vitriolic rhetoric used by BDS fits the United States State Department’s definition of antisemitism, including denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterize Israel or Israelis, and drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

By not confronting the seeds of hatred inherent in the BDS movement, anti-Semitism has become normalized on campuses, leaving no room for the “teachable moment.” For example, at Tufts, the institution which Bacow previously headed, a blatantly dogmatic course, “Colonizing Palestine,” is being offered this fall. It is hard to square this with his avowed desire to help students become more effective citizens “who are both effective advocates—and aggressive listeners.”

ALEX BRUNER, M.B.A. ’76
Boca Raton

THE SOLICITOR GENERAL

There is one crucial, and I think overriding aspect of the Solicitor General’s role as counsellor to the Court, that Lincoln Caplan does not mention (“The Political Solicitor General,” September-October, page 47) and that I hope remains entirely uncompromised through the passage of administrations, personnel, and political perspectives: that the work coming out of the SG’s office is scrupulously accurate, displaying fully and candidly all relevant facts, presenting all arguments and fairly noting all precedents and other legal material—whether or not the brief or oral argument embraces, rejects or distinguishes these. It is in this way that the SG most appropriately assists the Court. An SG’s brief should be like the floor in a perfectly run kitchen: whatever the dish, you should be as confident eating from it as from the finest china set on a spotless tablecloth.

CHARLES FRIED
Beneficial professor of law
Cambridge

Caplan’s detailed examination of the role of the Solicitor General misses the fundamental point that the Supreme Court itself is responsible for its own politicization. As the Court transformed itself into an engine of the sexual revolution in the contraception and abortion cases, it provoked people of faith to respond. Roe v. Wade, in particular, stimulated Jerry Falwell to abandon the traditional Baptist disinterest in political involvement. The Court’s immoral mandates, raw legislative acts that had no objective basis in the Constitution, prompted the creation of the Moral Majority which in turn propelled Ronald Reagan to the presidency.

The Reagan Revolution was a cry of outrage at the Court’s assault on American democracy and its enforcement of a social revolution that facilitated sex outside of marriage and a holocaust of infant life. Yet Caplan, far from raising an alarm at the Court’s usurpations, instead chides the Reagan administration for attempting to restrain and reverse the Court’s abuses.

The politicization of the Court is a result of the Court’s own improvident power-grabbing. The participation of the Solicitor General in the counterrevolution was part of thelarger reaction of a majority of Americans to the Court’s cultural revolution. Reagan’s Solicitors General thus were not activists abandoning the office’s traditional role of neutral analysis. Instead they sought to redirect a runaway Court to return to the traditional judicial role of applying rather than creating law.

MARTIN WISHNATSKY ’66, PH.D. ’75
Prattville, Ala.


FACEBOOK

President drew Faust’s comments (“Focus on Faust,” July-August, page 46) regarding the need for a “reassessment of Facebook and other social media” (as the magazine put it) since Mark Zuckerberg’s 2017 Commencement speech are disappointingly lacking in specificity and seem designed to avoid confronting the real issues relating to
Facebook. The implication that it was only after the revelation of the inappropriate use of Facebook data by Cambridge Analytica that it was necessary “to ask broader questions...” is not supported by the facts.

Were Faust and the members of the Corporation and the Board of Overseers unaware of the extremely numerous reports in widely read publications over many years regarding the cavalier attitude toward user privacy of Facebook leadership (e.g.: https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-a-history-of-mark-zuckerberg-apologizing/?mbid=Botto mRelatedStories), in conjunction with evidence that the company leadership clearly prioritized growth and profit over user welfare despite protestations to the contrary? Were the leaders of the University also unaware of the repeated instances of Facebook having to “adjust” the numbers and methods for publicly reported advertising metrics (e.g., https://www.forbes.com/sites/great-speculations/2016/11/17/more-bugs-found-in-facebook-ad-metrics-to-the-dismay-of-advertisers/#481f0abe2a85)? One might have thought that these widely reported and well-known realities would have weighed heavily against inviting Zuckerberg to deliver a commencement address at an institution that claims to prize, as its highest value, “veritas.”

Neil Greenspan '75
Shaker Heights, Ohio

IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

REGARDING the letter from David W. Thompson in the September-October issue (page 2) decrying the lack of ideological diversity at Harvard, I wonder just how easy it is to have ideological diversity on a university faculty when almost half of the ideological spectrum in this nation does not accept science, changes long-held beliefs on a dime, and believes truth is not truth?

John T. Hansen, LL.B. ’63
San Francisco

VITAE

WITHIN two years, profiles of George Bucknam Dorr and William Morris Davis have been published (September-October 2016, page 44; September-October 2018, page 44). Neither profile mentioned the other alumnus by name, though their relationship was tight—especially in 1902 when Davis invited Dorr to join his scientific team to the American Southwest. Later that year Dorr returned the favor by inviting Davis to join his companions (including Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.) for an ascent of Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in eastern North America.

Yet their most lasting institutional contribution may have been as charter members of the Harvard Travellers Club, established in 1902. Under Davis’s presidency, speakers discussed their explorations of sites from the South Pole to Abyssinia. Dorr’s home was the site of the club’s second meeting—which continues to convey their enthusiasm to this day.

Ronald H. Epp
Farmington, Conn.


AMERICAN TRUTHS

ACCORDING to Casey N. Cep’s review of Jill Lepore’s These Truths: A History of the United States (September-October, page 64), the revision from “these truths” being characterized as “sacred and fundamental” to “self-evident” meant that those rights were “the stuff of science” and not “the stuff of religion.” But the term “self-evident” precisely excludes scientific observation as the basis of knowledge. We cannot, through scientific inquiry alone, discover that all mean are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” And the Creator puts religion right back into the picture—if not organized religion, at the very least Faith.

Regardless, I have the highest degree of admiration for Lepore and look forward to reading her book.

Michael Jorrin ’54
Ridgefield, Conn.

ERRATA

A production error transposed the names of Charles E. Gilbert III and John F. Kotouc, both winners of 2018 Hunn Memorial Schools and Scholarships Awards, in photo captions (September-October, page 71).

In the fifth paragraph of “Little Shards of Dissonance,” (September-October, page 61), the first “c” went missing from Michael Schachter’s name.

We regret these miscues.