

# Sex at Harvard: Getting to Yes

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

April 4, 1992

**SEX.** Everybody wants it, but nobody at Harvard knows how to get it. Historically, sex at Harvard has been as hard to get as an A from Harvey C. Mansfield, but the problem seems to be more acute now. What is it about Harvard that makes romance so elusive? Why does this campus seem so sexually stagnant?

The appearance of an article in this month's *Esquire* magazine suggests that the sexual atmosphere on Harvard's campus has actually gotten worse. On every campus, fears of disease, unwanted pregnancy and rejection have always had chilling influences on sex life.

But the article in *Esquire* and the dialogue that has ensued since its publication have drawn attention to what has become a dire situation for many Harvard students, and not just for the conventional reasons.

Still, sex at Harvard is possible. Here's how:

LYNN DARLING '72, the article's author, cites what may be the most important reason that business at Harvard Square's lingerie shops has slowed down in recent times: the lingering remnants of the debate on sexual politics that has dominated the campus press over the last couple of years.

While the work of groups like Response and the Date Rape Task Force has encouraged dialogue and informed students of harassment and acquaintance rape, it may have also intensified the fears and anxiety about dating and romance.

I remember one of my dorm's first study breaks in the fall when we discussed some of the problems involved with the dating scene. The most frequently asked question by the women was "How do I get to know a guy better without leading him on?" The men who were attuned to women's fear of violence then asked

"Well, how do we know when women are interested in us as more than friends without taking the uncertain leap into possible embarrassment or aggressive behavior?"

For those brave souls who are still dating or are at least contemplating dating, there is also the natural Harvard tendency to overanalyze everything.

As Laurence J. Sprung '92 put it in the *Esquire* article, "It's a total fucking mess. Everything has become so analyzed...[that] in bed, you just don't know what's going on."

Assistant Professor of Psychology Todd F. Heatherton attributes the sexual confusion to "ambiguous roles in society, like who should ask whom out. Harvard students are attuned to these issues and a lot of males are inhibited about coming on too strong."

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Given this tense atmosphere of sexual confusion, it's no wonder that students compare themselves to the character in T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* who hysterically asks, "Do I dare to eat a peach?"

Before you say "speak for yourself" too quickly, look at the facts. When the Indy's survey on Harvard students' sexual practices came out last fall, it only confirmed the plague of despairing celibacy. Almost half of all Harvard students have not even had a relationship with another Harvard student.

The problem must have gotten worse by February because by then, Rabbi Sally Finestone, the acting director of Hillel, was giving advice to students in a lecture entitled "Sex, Romance, and Rejection."

Murray A. Rabinowitz '95, a student who attended the lecture, said, "You know it's bad news when you have members of the *clergy* giving tips on meeting members of the opposite sex".

Darling is right for pointing out that sexual politics, overanalysis and AIDS have put romance on the back burner for many students. It seems to me, however, that these reasons are only part of the answer.

**WHILE IT IS TRUE** that many students are abstaining from sex out of fear, disease or possible criminal prosecution, one also has to consider the people who are saying "no" themselves--Harvard students.

What is it about Harvard that encourages students to put on this communal chastity belt? It's probably not Michael Berry's clandestine efforts to season the food with sexual depressants. If only it were that simple.

A closer look at average Harvard students and our environment shows that stagnant sex life is the logical outcome of our particular circumstances.

The first characteristic that comes to mind about the typical Harvard student is a high degree of academic and extracurricular dedication. Many students, continuing a habit established in high school, devote large blocks of time to activities that naturally draw them away from the development of interpersonal social skills. Have you ever been to The Crimson?

We're also a pretty egocentric bunch. For all our lives, many Harvard students have been the focus of attention from parents, teachers and friends. As a result, we never learned to share or consider another person's perspective.

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When it comes time for a relationship, students inevitably have trouble talking about something other than themselves--or worse, listening to what others have to say. Just think, when was the last time someone ever let you finish a sentence around here?

This self-centeredness can also create fragile egos. After having been accepted to such a prestigious institution as Harvard, an unusually high number of students are afraid to face possible rejection from a mere mortal.

Structural problems abound within this Puritan institution as well. Some students have complained that there is no physical building here like a student center where one can go to just hang out, especially for first-years who don't have house grills or other social spots.

In Yard life, the suite configurations preclude any common room for entire entries. "You just end up spending time in your room without meeting many new people," said one first-year too embarrassed to be named in an editorial about sex.

"It's not very easy flirting with a facebook," said another first-year. "There aren't any casual social gatherings and you can't just spill cereal on her lap in the Union either."

So what is the remedy for this affliction of loneliness? Luckily, I have a three-point plan which might help some of the lovelorn and/or sex-starved.

1. Harvard students should adopt the friendliness rules of Wal-Mart. If you come within 10 feet of another individual, smile, look them in the eye and greet them with either hello, good morning or my, you look ravishing. (Caution: Use the third greeting sparingly, lest you appear insincere.) Even if you do not attract members of the opposite sex, you will at least contribute to making Harvard a more civil place.

2. Look around your entry and be prepared to sacrifice personality or looks for convenience. This cuts down on precious commuting time and gives you an excuse for frequent but short study breaks.

3. Take a chance. Lighten up. (Note: These are to be done in conjunction with each other. It is not either/or.)

And then maybe we'll all be able to have a peach.

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*Dan Markel '95, a Crimson writer, is taking a chance this weekend. But he's doing it in New Haven. He knows it wouldn't make a difference in Cambridge.*

## An Open Letter to Bill Clinton

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

November 13, 1992

Dear Bill,

Now that the election is over, the feeling of What next? is certainly lodged on your mind. During the campaign, you and the electorate rightly chose to frame the race around one issue: the economy. This choice, however, put all the demands of the global picture on the back burner and now there is the danger of problems boiling over, particularly in the Mideast.

And while it's true that the Republicans left you a big mess to clean up in Washington and elsewhere, you still have major responsibilities as President-elect to the world outside America.

One of the few things that the Not-So-Fabulous Bush and Baker Boys did not screw up was bringing the Israelis and their Arab neighbors to the negotiating table.

But that was a year ago, and for Bush, getting re-elected with Jim Baker's help was more important than letting Baker do his job in the Mideast. Now it's time for your new administration to send the right signals to all parties involved in Mideast negotiations.

**On a good note, the day after you took office you specifically said in your statement that you want to see "continued progress in the Mideast peace talks."**

It's your task to ensure that these talks progress substantially; after a year of the participants haggling over the shape of the table and the color of the drapery, it's time that you prod these talks along. Here are some tips based on the constraints you face and the possibilities you have.

. Your Administration should clearly define and enunciate the fundamental principle that underlies these peace talks. Both sides realize that any discussion of peace entails trading (some) land for peace. We all know it, it's your job to just say it. Needless to say, you need not specify which lands should go to whom and on what date; that's for the negotiators to work out.

. Recognize the dual claims of nationhood within the land that exists between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Realize that little real progress will be made between Israel and her neighbors without a negotiated agreement that grants a gradual shift to autonomy and self-rule for the Palestinians.

. The one possible exception to this is a potential Israel-Syria peace. Though it's probably not in the best interests of everyone, it is still possible that Syrian President Assad will make a separate deal with Prime Minister Rabin. Itamar Rabinovich, the chief negotiator for Israel (with Syria) since Labor won last June, has done an excellent job in moving the Israel-Syria talks forward.

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Nevertheless, proceed cautiously on this one. Assad's Syria is still on the list of countries supporting terrorists, and supporting him outright would make your promise to not "coddle" dictators a dubious one. Furthermore, both Syria's and Iran's continued arms buildup require skillful diplomacy to balance each other.

**Should a deal be worked out, there is still a constructive role for you to play. If (or, more likely when) the Israelis partially withdraw from the Golan Heights, the U.S. can serve as armed observers to ensure that the transition and/or interim period is orderly and peaceful.**

Remember--it is more important for the U.S. to ensure that all negotiations proceed successfully. By allowing the Syrians to duck out, you're giving Assad more time and resources to tighten his grip on Lebanon and achieve regional hegemony. (If Hezbollah continues its attacks on Israeli towns and villages, the chances of this separate peace emerging are decreased somewhat.)

. Retract your silly campaign promise to object to any formation of a Palestinian state.

Strategically, your rhetoric offers no incentive to the Palestinian delegation to negotiate peacefully. As Cabot Professor of Social Ethics Herbert C. Kelman, a specialist in negotiations, pointed out, "Those Israelis who favor withdrawal from the territories are now basically thinking about some form of a Palestinian state

as the best arrangement...so it's silly for the U.S. administration to make a policy that opposes Palestinian statehood outright."

. Tactically, it makes no sense for you to oppose something which ultimately, you have little control over. Moreover, most Jewish groups both in America and in Israel are prepared to accept Palestinian self-rule so long as it's not at the expense of Israeli security.

. Appoint a high-level envoy to the peace-talks to demonstrate your commitment to the talks. A special emissary with the prestige of either former President Carter or Jim Baker will show you mean business.

Judith Kipper, a Mid-East expert at the Brookings Institute, favors appointing Carter and calls him a "superb choice" because of his ability and readiness to hear all sides. You shouldn't forget that Carter's enormous contribution to the Camp David accord between Israel and Egypt was due in part to his relative evenhandedness and his meticulous attention to detail.

Baker, on the other hand, has been conducting shuttle diplomacy for the last 18 months and has a familiar rapport with the leaders in the region. The big question is whether Baker would cross party lines and accept an offer of a short-term position as a special emissary.

My guess is that he would accept for one of two reasons. First, his shot at the presidency in '96 was substantially weakened by a Democratic victory; if he could somehow facilitate dramatic progress at the talks, his credit as a diplomat would rise markedly, thus increasing his political capital. But if he's concentrating right now on how history will appraise his Washington experience and perhaps winning a Nobel Peace Prize, accepting the offer to be a special envoy would be the right choice. He has little else to do except go fishing.

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Most importantly, both Baker and Carter have a reputation of fairness among all sides and should be competent enough to act as a presidential surrogate while you and Al concentrate on fixing the economy. My personal recommendation would be Carter, if only because he's much more of a mensch.

Finally, make sure that your sources of advice and counsel on this issue are as broad as the ones you consult on other issues that concern you. The most important thing a president requires is free-flowing information channels so that all ideas are well-represented.

Don't just rely on Marty Indyk, Michael Mandelbaum and Tony Lake for advice--as smart as they may be. Academics and policy experts may be bright, but a president needs to get people from many fields of knowledge too, i.e., medicine, religion, law, business and technology.

Of course, there's no way that the U.S. can solve any of these problems on its own. The dual threats of violent Islamic fundamentalists and hypernationalist Israelis persist daily. Your task here is to assist others to do what you did during the campaign: marginalize the fringe further and reclaim the center. That's not a small task in a region where moderation is the acknowledgement of another's right to exist.

Ultimately, the parties have to work things out for themselves. But now is the time for you to actively engage the participants with a display of your enthusiasm, empathy, and intellect. Peace be with you.

## Can We Call You Al?

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

December 9, 1992

I don't know about you but I'm tired of this professor crap. Day in, day out, we have to call our professors by their title and last name. It's just so passe. It's time that we start addressing our professors by who they are, not what they are; that means, yes, by their first names.

I make my proposal not just because it's so out of touch with the rest of society to continue calling people by their titles, but because there is a very compelling

pragmatic reason for doing this, and it's based on proven military practice. Here's what I mean.

When I was a little kid, my history teachers at the local Hebrew day school often spun grand tales about the fighting effectiveness of the Israeli Defense Forces. We were told how the IDF were the most feared military unit in the Middle East, and that person for person, the Israeli military could kick anyone's tuchus from here to the World to Come.

Well, like any trigger-happy 10 year-old, I sought out more information about the IDF, the world's most shitkicking minyan. I subscribed to Jane's Defense Weekly. I wanted to find out what it was about the IDF's organizational structure that made them so darn good.

It was only after visiting my cousins in Israel, who were serving in the IDF at the time, that I discovered what, to use some social sciences jargon, the intervening variable was.

While on weekend leave, my cousin Shlomi's commander dropped by for coffee, without either the battle fatigues or imposing manner one would expect from a platoon leader. After he left I asked Shlomi who this friendly guy was. Shlomi replied, "That's Dudu (a common Hebrew nickname for guys named David). He's a close friend and he's also my boss."

Wait a second, I said incredulously, you call your military commander by his first name?

"Sure. All soldiers call their leaders by their first names."

Needless to say, I was dumbfounded by his casual response. I verified this information recently with Alon Peled, a graduate student in the government department who is studying Israeli military structure and policy, and he said that after basic training, it's not unusual at all for reserves and enlisted men to call their superiors by their first name, even four or five ranks above.

The IDF's effectiveness, I decided, had nothing whatsoever to do with state-of-the-art technology, years of extensive training or the special sauce that the army uses in their falafel recipes; it was predicated on their unique egalitarian spirit.

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**H**arvard faculty, not especially known for hanging out with undergraduates, could learn a lesson from the Israeli army. Because of their preeminence, our professors bear a special burden in leading the fight against the Forces of Ignorance and Dogma (FID). No longer can Harvard profs continue to coast by on the reputation, resources and riches of Harvard.

Like the IDF, Harvard must learn to avoid stiff formality at all costs. The best way for Harvard's community to become more effective in crushing FID once and for all is, to quote Ross Perot, "join hands together and just lick this problem."

FID can only be destroyed by reclaiming the moral high ground of egalitarianism. Precisely because professors are more experienced in this battle, they should lead their students in the same way that Israeli commanders lead their troops (specific policies notwithstanding).

Regardless of their title and length of tenure, all professors should introduce themselves by their first names and be addressed by their students in this egalitarian way.

FID is a tough adversary and it won't be an easy transition to shift to this military-like organization. Already, Thompson Professor of Government Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. has declared his opposition to such a call to first names: "We need more elitism in our society, not more egalitarianism," Mansfield said. "A professor is not your friend," he added.

**W**ell, maybe Mansfield's not, but others have indicated their desire to join my crusade. Porter University Professor Helen H. Vendler stated that "[students calling her by her first name] would not bother me at all." Besides, she added, "Leadership must be acknowledged, not claimed, unless you're Hitler."

Noting that the custom of calling professors by their first names is prevalent in Bennington College, she remarked that the present formal convention of using titles is just an "arbitrary social custom."

I called up Lawrence Buell, the dean for undergraduate education, to get his read on the situation. He said he did not advocate "a topdown edict" that would dictate policy on personal address at Harvard from The Crimson pages, University Hall or the department chairs. He emphasized that, "much more significant than the level of address is the level of humanity in the teaching process."

But, he did pledge his "fundamental support" to anything that would facilitate "the joint partnership in inquiry" between students and instructors. Overall, Dean Buell added, it would have to be left to the instructor to decide and take the initiative.

I'm not so sure we should settle for this compromise. A call to first names will not only draw us together more closely, it will destroy the hard-line patriarchy in place at Harvard.

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Ironically, many of us spend huge amounts of time studying thinkers who were iconoclasts, people who broke down social barriers and shook things up. If Western civilization is rooted in what the Greeks had to teach us, maybe we should learn this final lesson.

Plato and Socrates went by their first name. Often they taught little study groups under the shade of the tree. And perhaps, most indicative of their informality, they didn't even wear pants.

C'mon Harvard. It's time for this nonsense to go. Drop your titles, if not your shorts.

*Dan Markel '95, a Crimson editor, is dying to just walk up to the University's president and call him Neil.*

# Boring, But Still Free

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

February 12, 1993

A funny thing happened last month when I went home for intersession. It occurred to me that the news in Canada always sounds the same. Always, The times I spend reading Canadian newspapers or watching the CBC--for you Yankees, that's the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation--I get all squishy inside because I know that Canada's the type of place that, warts and all, you just find profoundly relaxing.

Or, that is, boring.

But amidst all this wonderful boringness, there is a short rebellious streak, as Canadian as good beer, of setting itself apart from the rest of the advanced industrial countries--or at least from the United States. This rebellious nature often has to do with relatively small events, but the effects are nevertheless far-reaching.

One example is the immigration precedent established last week by the Canadian government. In a decision made by Bernard Valcourt, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, Canada will now consider granting asylum to women who can show persecution as a result of their gender.

This decision is based on the case of a Saudi Arabian woman who left her home country in April 1991 to further her education. Initially, this woman was denied refugee status in Canada.

But after she went into hiding, various feminist and human-rights groups lobbied the government on her behalf and for women in similar situations.

In an interview with The New York Times, the woman, who asked to remain unnamed, said, "The situation [in Saudi Arabia] will become more and more unbearable, and then it will explode because the condition of repression of human beings can't continue forever." She was referring to the mixture of Islamic

and conservative Arab traditions in which women are forbidden to travel alone or drive and must be veiled in public.

Furthermore, the woman complained about the restrictions on her autonomy in Saudi Arabia, where "you have to have permission of a man when you want to study, go to a friend's house, work, travel, everything."

Recall, for instance, the demonstration that took place in a Riyadh supermarket during the buildup to the Gulf War in November 1990, when seventy women from prominent Saudi families *dismissed their chauffeurs and drove by themselves* in protest of the driving restrictions.

That things are horrible for women in Saudi Arabia isn't surprising, at least for those familiar with strongly patriarchal societies. What is interesting, however, is the reason underlying the persistence of gender discrimination in these kinds of places.

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According to Mark Heller, a visiting professor at Harvard last year, Saudi society (and, presumably, many others like it) will begin to face social crises of this sort, but with much larger dimensions. Heller predicted an imminent social conflagration, a rebellion against these traditional values within five to 10 years.

No doubt, this rebellion will be hastened when the Saudis realize that women have something more to contribute to civil society other than their breast milk.

Should other women from Saudi Arabia follow her route to Canada, this brave Saudi woman might end up setting off the fires of rebellion. You read it here first.

Of course, this isn't the first time Canada has been on the liberal forefront of social or security matters. Indeed, when a gay man fled Argentinean authorities last year, Canada granted him asylum based on his claim of persecution for his sexual preference.

One wonders if Canada's historical problem of underpopulation will eventually be solved if it continues to break new legal ground in this fashion.

Our motto might be, "Give us your women, your gays, your (fill in your oppression here)." Sometimes you've got to be proud of a country that proudly builds its own gorgeous mosaic.

Is Canada going too far? I don't think so. When the Immigration and Refugee Board in Ottawa decides to broaden the definition of refugee to include women suffering in states that don't protect them from domestic violence, genital mutilation or legal discrimination, our borders will still stand.

And perhaps from that day forward, the border guards will even hold their chins up a little higher than usual.

Or, at least, until the news starts sounding the same again.

*Dan Markel '95, a Crimson editor, still thinks Toronto's a great place to grow up, but he wouldn't want to visit.*

## The Soft Scourge of Sacrifice

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

March 5, 1993

**P**anic is in the air, fueled by too much talk about sacrifice, the S-word here in the Land of the Free. Americans, not accustomed to confronting reality, are overdosing.

After announcing parts of his budget plan in his State of the Union address, President Clinton campaigned for its approval all over the country with extended marketing pitches--a true Clinton signature if there ever were one. One wondered if Carville and Begala had focus groups react to the plan before it was announced.

Over the course of the renewed campaign, Clinton substituted "contribution" for sacrifice when explaining some of the 'extreme measures' that the economy's long-term health requires. Even this euphemistic phrase caused paranoid pundits to write about the 'austerity revolution'.

Back home in Canada, on the other hand, we smile widely when we hear about increased taxes, particularly those that punish the wicked. Indeed, our moralistic cravings are deliriously satisfied when the 'sin taxes' on gas, cigarettes and alcohol are jacked up. Somewhere, Canadians are doubling over in laughter, thinking "Ooooh, poor America, time to pay off the bills. Poor, poor, baby. How will they ever deal with this?"

Clearly, American politicians feel that their constituents can't digest the truth in their already distended stomachs. But more than bloated bellies, the doublespeak of "contribution" reveals the potentially corrosive force that mendacity has in American politics. Clinton has been extensively praised for his honesty and "tough-talk" on the editorial and op-ed pages of the nation. For what? For the "fairness" of the plan and its oh-so-serious attempt to reduce the budget deficit? Or for its far-reaching vision (i.e. re-election in four years) to rebuild and invest in America?

Cynical musings coming to the fore? Perhaps. It's certainly not a large concession to admit that Clinton has moved the body politic forward in spirit, if not in body. The infamous polls express that quite clearly.

In any case, I (and some of my Canadian and European counterparts) can't help bemoan the relatively shallow level of political discourse here. In America, words of sacrifice still sound pagan, or at least like some foreign religious tradition. This discrepancy in American and Canadian politics is particularly apparent in the discussion of health care.

Last week, Bob Rae, the premier of Ontario, spoke in an unusually frank manner at the Center for International Affairs on lessons that the United States could learn from Ontario's health-care system. At one point in the discussion, he remarked that the absurd amounts spent on marginal health-care technology to preserve lives already at their tail end was a fruitless attempt to raise our collective quality of life. American medical-research institutions, he said, are trying to do to natural death what the Victorians did to sex--sweep it under the carpet and pretend that it doesn't exist.

As cold-blooded as this may seem, this self-evident truth (Op-ed rule no. 12: Always dismiss potential criticism by labelling your assertions as self-evident) becomes more compelling when you realize the danger posed by the disparity in funding between children and the so-called golden-agers (or used people, as Hollywood now calls them).

Those who remember Boston University President John Silber's gubernatorial run in 1990 will recall that he too mentioned the necessary consideration of limiting Medicare funds at a given point. His metaphor of apples being ripe for picking did not go over well when Bill Weld, his opponent, responded with TV ads showing sprightly old people dancing and playing bingo and then being told that, at the state's request, they should drop dead ASAP to ease the fiscal crisis. Even though the idea had distant poetic ancestry in Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori*, Silber's campaign fizzled soon thereafter. Still, Silber's message, though transformed somewhat, has survived.

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That a particular group of Americans may be disproportionately affected by Clinton's plan raises the ire of many Americans. It's weirdly interesting to note that sacrifice, the "extreme measures" needed to rectify a fiscal problem, must be perceived as fair and equal treatment of all people. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville wrote that the Americans value their equality more than anything else; Americans would sooner be treated equally as slaves than they would tolerate any disparity in the way in which they are treated by their government.

I haven't quite figured this out. The government makes preferences all the time and yet no one wants to ever admit to it: affirmative action, sugar subsidies, and most-favored-nation trade status are all decisions made because they are believed to be in the interest or good of the country. Tough-talk doesn't necessarily mean giving up the results of these hard choices. Similarly, sacrifice shouldn't always mean equal treatment. It requires the bald-faced honesty to say to those who pollute or smoke or drink: Pay up. The free ride is over.

# Educating Harvard

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

April 13, 1993

I'm nearing the end of my sophomore year now and like some others, I wonder if Harvard thinks we're really learning much.

Amazingly, the student body is as apathetic as the faculty about fixing this situation. Too often it seems, we're busy worrying about, if not being consumed by, important details of life such as extracurriculars, exams, and interviews. I fear that we are not paying enough attention collectively to the actual education we get (or make for ourselves) while we are at Harvard.

Perhaps there are strong competing reasons to come here aside from a good liberal-arts education: if you are one of the people who came here with the calculated goal of getting a good job after college and meeting impressive people while you're here, stop reading. If not, and you too are distressed by what passes for a Harvard education, then please read on.

Harvard is not educating us poorly. Rather, it could do better with what it's got. Harvard's goal, I suggest, ought to be the complete restoration of a Socratic dialectic in our education. An ethic of continuous self-improvement demands more than just CUE Guide evaluations.

I have two questions: first, why are the connections between lectures, readings, sections and assignments so often unclear? Second, what's the point of having so many classes in which the assignments don't really test mastery of the material, or in the Core's alleged case, approaches to knowledge? I've taken 17 classes here (OK, one of them was Expos), and am amazed that a significant number of them had no clearly-defined mission or statement of purpose.

Professors rarely explain the connections between lectures and reading assignments. Are lectures simply expositions of the reading, or do they represent a professor's particular spin on the texts? Are assignments designed to integrate what we've learned or simply to indulge our individual research interests? Are

closed-book midterms and finals truly the best gauge of our knowledge? Many Core and departmental course requirements provide little evidence that anyone in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences pays attention to what people in the School of Education have been telling us for years.

In humanities and social sciences, for example, many large lecture classes still use midterms and finals as their basic requirements. Some toss in an undefined term-paper at the end. The Core office mandates its professors give, at minimum, a midterm and a final. This inertia continues despite what education scholars have long recommended: The most effective teaching and learning occurs through constant writing and revision.

Most departments know this in part and offer writing-intensive tutorials in sophomore year. Yet the College makes little effort to spread the good word to many large classes. For example, one of the largest courses at Harvard, Literature and Arts C-37 (The Bible and Its Interpreters), doesn't require any written work. Is it any wonder then that most people blow off the reading until the midterm or reading period? Clearly, students of all stripes are attracted to guts. But the price we pay is a lost opportunity to gain and retain something valuable--knowledge.

While exams do provide the opportunity (some might say coercion) to make us review our course material, how much do we actually retain once we've handed in our blue books? True, not all courses rely solely on midterms and finals. My point is that Harvard should make more use of our tutorial system, which focuses on close reading of texts, discussion and continuous evaluation.

One significant way of achieving this is through revisions. How many of your classes encourage you to actually revise a paper when you get it back? I'm taking three gov classes this semester with nine papers required; none of my classes allow for or encourage revisions. By contrast, in last semester's gov tutorial I wrote five papers and had five opportunities for revision. It's no surprise that tutorial was my most rewarding class yet.

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Why not encourage revisions? The major objection I've heard is that revisions create more work for students as well as for teaching fellows. I wonder if this objection is really compelling. Contrary to popular belief, a recent study showed that most college students are under-worked. College students spend only thirty hours a week on academic affairs. Most students in the humanities and social sciences only average between twelve and fifteen hours in class per week; some can arrange as few as eight hours.

Students are ostensibly in college for educational purposes. Would it really be the end of the world if we had an option to revise our papers? How many of us wouldn't appreciate the opportunity to raise the quality of our grades, if not our actual essays? The one good thing about Expos was its emphasis on revision as part of the learning process.

As for the teaching fellows, perhaps they would have more time to read papers if we did away with most traditional lectures. I don't quite understand why we persist with this archaic format where professors just read the same lecture notes they've read for years, changing them a little every now and then. Why is it so unthinkable to do away with the speech and fluff that goes into a fifty minute lecture?

I've sat through too many lectures where a lame professor belabors the same point for twenty minutes and I end up with less than a half page of notes at the end of class, and drool on the side of my mouth from dozing off. (The dozing off is a consequence, not a cause, of my paucity of notes.) On the other hand, some professors' lectures are so dense that it's virtually impossible to make sense of what they're saying. In both cases, a written copy of the lecture material might make the presentations more rigorous, comprehensive and comprehensible.

I imagine that in classes that require no physical demonstration and offer no interaction, both students and professors would be better off dropping the lecture format. No doubt, at least half of my classes easily could adapt to a strictly tutorial system. For students who might miss the "live" thrill of being there in Harvard Hall or at Sanders, perhaps we could hire a few professional lecturers to perform their "art" on different topics all day. It would at least make for a better

division of labor. Under this system, professors might have extra time to teach sections--and actually see their students up close.

Harvard should either make its lectures more interactive or ditch them completely in favor of more sections and time spent on reading and writing. Similarly, the Faculty should apply more thought and scrutiny to course requirements. It seems unlikely that the College will encourage collaborative work in the social sciences or humanities any time soon. We should at least attempt to make wise use of our individual time and effort.

**Remember that we (ostensibly, anyway) came here for a good liberal-arts education.**

## No Flowers for Rushdie

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

February 14, 1994

Today is Valentine's Day. It does not appear marked in either my Filofax or my calendar from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Why is this so? Is it that the English have no patience for love? Do the patrons of the Holocaust Museum fear and tremble before even the mere *contemplation* of love? Probably not. But perhaps what the English and the American patrons realize is that February is not just a time for expressing a desire for love, but also a time for expressing a desire for justice.

Today, some might recall, is the fifth anniversary of the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie for his novel, *The Satanic Verses*. To call this date an anniversary, however, is to approach cognitive dissonance. It is an anniversary for which there are no gifts, no chocolates, no flowers no waltzes.

Last year, towards the winter holidays Rushdie appeared in the White House. Like all his surprise appearances, this one was magical because we do not know either from where he comes or whither he goes. Indeed, our only good measure of

his nearness is the distance created by the burly men from Scotland Yard around him.

By hosting Rushdie at the White House--the symbolic representation of the free world--our not-so-feckless leader Bill Clinton morally outdistanced his predecessor, who cravenly avoided the wrath of petrodollars. But Clinton did not go much further. In fact Clinton chose to downplay the glory of his decision by retrospectively characterizing his meeting with Rushdie as brief and insignificant.

To editorialists, novelists and booksellers, Rushdie is now principally a symbol because he now symbolizes, now embodies, certain principles. By discounting his significant meeting, Clinton rejected the worth of these symbols and the principles which follow them.

But symbols and their signifieds matter to us and others, and hours after the brief meeting, Clinton was excoriated by the *imams* and their political bedfellows in Iran and other Islamic states. Certainly not all Muslims participated, but in scope and intensity enough to help finely attune our moral compasses once again.

How absurd and obtuse it must seem, then, to look at books entitled "There's no such thing as free speech, and it's a good thing too!" Stanley Fish, the author of this book (published by Oxford!), and his fellow-travellers along the postmodern abyss do not really mean what they say, do they?

I am and must be incredulous against their claims. We all must be. For incredulousness is the only enabling virtue to govern an occasion like *this* Valentine's Day, an occasion for which even Hallmark, alas, does not have a greeting card.

What is Fish thinking? How rich the moronic irony is when one write not from the sweaty cellars of "safe houses," but rather from the oh-so-radical perspective of Duke University's English department chair. It is Rushdie who must now conjure up an Imaginary Homeland. Fish, mean while, never had his taken away.

Despite the sound and fury of thorough-going academic postmodern multi-culties, they, and not liberal values, are the ones who signify nothing. Because of today, February has joined Eliot's April in its iniquities against the human soul.

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Not always, but sometimes, there exist giants and dwarfs. Our task is to tell them apart and treat them accordingly. We do so when we remember Rushdie's Valentine's Day, that is, the one without gifts and chocolates, flowers or waltzes.

## Reading Between the CUE Guide Lines

*Harvard's Black Book of Classes Does a Good Job; It Could Do Even Better*

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

February 19, 1994

An Open Memo

To: Undergrads, Members of the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE),  
Dean for Undergraduate Education Lawrence Buell

From: DM

Nietzsche said that there is no such thing as fact, only interpretation. No other dictum is as important as this one to keep in mind as we approach the end of our beloved Shopping Period. With study card day looming over us, now is the time to consider our most important reference material--not the Confi--The Crimson's own recycled yet still funny jokes about the accents and titles of our professors--but rather the CUE Guide.

As usual, this year's black book of old reading lists and scientific surveys is supposed to "provide undergraduates with reliable information to be used during the process of choosing courses." No one, I am sure, can reasonably deny the utility of the good efforts of the folks at the CUE Guide. It is from this respectful perspective that I proffer a few suggestion at this timely moment.

The initial problem is basic. As I scope potential courses for the new semester, the first thing that strikes me when looking at the CUE Guide is the absence of

the survey for the course I am thinking about taking. No doubt, everyone who takes a seminar or tutorial experiences this same problem.

Sophomore tutorials are sparsely reviewed. This year's volume contains no survey results for Government, Economics, or English, choose from just some of our largest concentrations. Since nearly all concentrations have tutorials, information about the reading lists and the various teaching fellows and professors would be invaluable.

Though the CUE Guide actually publishes the survey results of some seminars, my criticism extends well beyond the tutorial system. Too often it seems to me, departmental courses have no review, or if they have the survey tables, they have no written write-up.

To be sure, this is not always the fault of the CUE Guide staff. Indeed, the introduction to the book clearly states that the heads of each undergraduate course are offered the opportunity to be evaluated: "Instructors are not required to participate in the evaluation process; if a course does not appear in the *Guide* we were most likely unable to obtain the instructor's permission." What is *up* with that? Teaching undergraduates at the world's best university is a privilege, one that should be conditional upon the assent given to evaluation.

Perhaps some professors worry about academic integrity or pedagogical freedom, and therefore do not participate. Granted, these are not unimportant issues, but students retain a legitimate claim to the opinions of their fellows before enrolling in a course. This does not threaten academic freedom. It responds to it.

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Last year, Kenan Professor of Government Harvey C. Mansfield '53 told me that student evaluations of professors lead to a situation in which those who know are judged by those who do not. Considering that Professor Mansfield himself won the Levenson Teaching Award last year, I wonder if he would reconsider his view of the know-nothing *demos*.

To restore the spirit of liberalism to matters of education, I will make an analogy. Just as the government should structure markets to ensure competition, regulate

safety features and provide information to consumers, the University must ensure that its departments and professors are responsible to their students by providing adequate information about the courses being offered.

But are the instructors and the University the only guilty parties? Perhaps not. The editors of the CUE Guide absolve themselves pre-emptively for not choosing which courses are evaluated and printed. In boldface type they write, "This decision is entirely in the hands of the instructors." But this seems impossible. Indeed, they state further that for courses with enrollments of less than 15 students, there are no writeups, just survey tables. Is it possible that in such courses, students unanimously elected not to fill out the second page of the CUE Guide sheets?

Clearly, some choices on the part of the CUE Guide staff appear to exist. One might similarly ask, "Where on earth do all those Expos evaluations go?."

Essentially my criticism is twofold: first, the publishers of the CUE Guide are not providing us with all of the information they receive; and second, they are not getting enough information because some professors and departments refuse to be evaluated.

A good reform would include three steps. First, the University should mandate that all classes and courses be evaluated. Second, if necessary, more money should be allotted for the CUE Guide so that a more comprehensive edition can be published. Finally, if it proves financially unfeasible to publish reports for classes of 15 or less students the records and questionnaires should be made accessible to students who wish to see them.

The University has done a good job over the years of making undergraduate education a higher priority. Indeed, on occasion they even find it *useful* to ask our opinions on these issues. Consider this an answer, Dean Buell, to a question that needed asking.

## Himmelfarb Pushes Post-structuralism Into the Abyss

## ***BOOK***

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

March 3, 1994

### **On Looking into the Abyss:**

#### **Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society**

by Gertrude Himmelfarb

Knopf

\$23.00

192 pp.

Every few years it seems we are forcefully reminded of how the academy and the liberal state are tied together inextricably and that any radical attempt to change the former threatens the very existence of the latter. This, in short, is the subject of the eminent historian Gertrude Himmelfarb's new collection of essays. A thoughtful diatribe against those who would treat philosophy as poetics and politics as aesthetics, *On Looking into the Abyss* shows the worthlessness of the intellectual currency traded in most places of higher education today.

In each learned essay, she contends that the current academic fad of poststructuralism and its skepticism towards 'meta-narratives' have consciously blurred the distinction between the greatest tragedies and achievements of our civilization. The result is the moral obtuseness and intellectual numbness of many in the academy today, both faculty and students. Himmelfarb shows that postmodernism as an ideology is not at all an abstract debate about the virtues of decentering authors and questioning "modes of emplotment."

Rather, postmodernism's ideology is founded on the defanging of the beasts of twentieth-century evil. Consequently, the Holocaust always lurks menacingly in the background of these essays. In the introduction to the book, Himmelfarb herself calls attention to the Holocaust as a 'rebuke to historians, philosophers

and literary critics who, in their zeal for one or another of the intellectual fashions of our time, belittle or demean one of the greatest tragedies of all time."

Himmelfarb goes on to write that "historians who think it the highest calling of their profession to resurrect 'the daily life of ordinary people' can find little evidence in the daily life of ordinary Germans of the overwhelming fact of life--and of death--for millions of Jews." She contends that "those who look for the 'long-term' processes and impersonal 'structures' in history tend to explain this 'short-term event' in such a way as to explain it away: and those seeking to 'deconstruct' the history of the Holocaust as they deconstruct all of history come perilously close to the 'revisionists' who deny the reality of the Holocaust."

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Himmelfarb has perceptively traced the contours of the pestilence that threatens truth, which is the very purpose of the university. But Himmelfarb does more than describe the pestilence. Indeed, employing some of the same lines of argument as Allan Bloom, Himmelfarb confronts this pestilence with the tools of reason and moral virtue that Moderns and Ancients (a term which applies to any one who seeks the truth--rather than truths) share in their joint struggle to beat back the dangerous aspects of the postmodern herd.

Himmelfarb rightly states that "for the historian, as for the philosopher, the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns is being superceded by a quarrel between the Moderns and the Post-moderns. If the greatest subversive principle of modernity is historicism--a form of relativism that locates the meaning of ideas and events so firmly in their historical context that history, rather than philosophy and nature, becomes the arbiter of truth--postmodernism is now confronting us with a far more subversive form of relativism, a relativism so radical, so absolute, as to be antithetical to both history and truth."

*On Looking in the Abyss* is a trenchant analysis of the postmodern condition and its threat to liberalism and the liberal imagination. The subtitle of Himmelfarb's short book is 'Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society,' and she means it. By arguing for the restoration of partial truths and solid standards, Himmelfarb's book is a Modern's response to the postmodern condition. Since Himmelfarb is

now a professor *emeritus* and a historian of nineteenth-century England, one might be tempted to discount her description of the current impoverished state of the humanities. This would be a grave mistake.

Himmelfarb has compiled seven essays and lectures here, forming a sustained and coherent argument against some of the contemporary trends in American higher education and culture. *On Looking into the Abyss* is one of the most important books young minds (and old ones too, I suppose) should be aware of and reading.

But to say that the subject of this somber book is the postmodern 'condition' would imply that the condition is now universal, perhaps even ingrained in human nature and society. This is empirically a falsehood, since, for the most part, Zulus and Czech window-washers do not fret over, let alone care, about postmodernism (yet!).

Moreover, the fact that we can *say* it is a falsehood means that postmodernism is not in fact ingrained in human nature or society today, because by its very nature, postmodernism does not accept notions of truth.

All I can say is thank goodness we never actually arrived at this imaginary place beyond good and evil, the place where we would not be able even to mark the 'partial, contingent, incremental truths of Moderns, let alone the truths of the Ancients. *On Looking into the Abyss* is a lucid explanation to those like Paul De Man who, when they looked into the abyss and walked away smiling, should really have wept.

Focus

## 'Getting to Yes' Redux

*HMS should broaden its scope, at least for weekends.*

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

April 13, 1994

Two years ago this month, my first piece for The Crimson appeared. It was an editorial entitled "Getting to Yes: Sex at Harvard." This piece lamented the structural impediments to hooking up as a first-year at Harvard: few truly "common" spaces, no listings of parties, and general fear and loathing on the East Coast.

Two years later, I return to this noble issue. It is spring after all: the living is getting easier, and the proverbial fish and cotton are starting to rise from their slumber. Moreover, since this column will hereafter strictly concern politics, education and books, this may be my last opportunity to reflect quixotically on eros and the public sphere. Indulge me this once, and then forever after, crack the scourge of reason upon my back.

The title of my first article is borrowed from the eponymous bible of Roger Fisher's Harvard Negotiation Project. Ironically, HNP has just completed the training of the newly-established Harvard Mediation Service (HMS). I wonder if the cosmic forces at work here know of the link between the HMS and my first article...

You see, the HMS was founded to serve as a facilitator of dialogue between conflicting groups on campus. Not just any conflicting groups, mind you, but racial, ethnic and other 'difference'-related ones. This focus on only certain kinds of conflict, however, discriminates against conflicts which are not "difference-related."

What is this discrimination founded on? Doesn't Dean Epps realize that all *sorts* of conflict seek recognition and resolution from the Harvard Mediation Service? This discrimination is strikingly odd, no? After all, the entire theory underlying the mediation enterprise holds that all sides are more or less equal. But as evinced by the fact that the HMS will not take just any conflict, this will to neutrality is not extended universally. We should reject this narrow definition of interest. It's time for the HMS to broaden its scope. Why?

Because when you're about to give your significant other a Costanza special--i.e., "It's not you, it's me"--you will not be able to take advantage of the able skills of the HMS to work out a friendly break-up. Of course--and here's the real problem--

-the HMS does not only not help out with breaking up, it rejects its responsibility to help bring people together.

This is no laughing matter. For years now, we've been inundated with cries of "No means No!" Whatever happened to "Yes means Yes?" What kind of mediation service abdicates its duty to get Harvard students to Yes? Now, maybe, since the HMS is just in its infancy, we should cut them some slack. But, as long as HMS decides to focus on inter-ethnic dialogue and problem solving, it will be grossly underutilized.

For the HMS, a campus relatively at peace With itself means that it cannot justify its organizational existence. Last we stir up conflict for publicity's sake. Crimson headlines bleat: "HMS Saves Yard from Riots It Started." I say to Dean Epps, "Let's diversify our interests."

Perhaps this expansion is premature. After all, in these largely post-ideological days, racial conflict still endures. My compromise is that during the week, HMS stay focused on its original mission of resolving ethnic conflict. For weekends. however, HMS must establish a task force dedicated to the resolution of eros-driven passions.

Only when HMS declares itself the Harvard Matchmaking Service will it be worthy of its name. No earlier, no latter. Two Years later, it's still necessary to help Harvard students get to Yes. Perhaps the HMS can help you.

Focus

## Filling Up the Core

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

April 27, 1994

**Harvard's vaunted core could use some Great Books.**

Like the majority of students in The Crimson's poll last week, I'm frustrated with the core curriculum. You know it, I know it and the American people know it: the core today is incoherent.

It's time we called on the core program to give us what we want: an optional track within the core that has the Great Books at its heart, the survey of Western Civilization as its soul.

For those of you who are bitter and outraged that the Fine Arts department cut its surveys of Western art, you must stretch the scope of this outrage across the entire range of undergraduate education.

What underlies this radical desire? Plain common sense. Let's face it, most students come to Harvard without a clear idea of what constitutes a liberal education. A little guidance couldn't hurt. What we want--and there's no reason to be ashamed--is the option to buy a six-track greatest hits collection of Western Civ.

One can easily imagine what a canon track would look like: a survey of the ancients and medievals including the early Greeks and readings of Plato and Aristotle, followed by a short stay in the Rome of Augustus, moving on to a study of the Hebrew and Christian Bible, and then, a look at the works of Augustine, Aquinas and Maimonides. This would comprise the first two courses in this six-track cassette.

To follow this, we need a two-semester class that moves to the modern period--something like a diluted English 10 combined with Government 1061. Doubtless, we'd have to include Dostoevsky, Balzac, Goethe and the Americans: Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and DuBois. Perhaps, selections from Smith and Freud too.

The third part of the canon track would be a survey of Western art and music, primarily in the Renaissance and after, thus blending the fine arts surveys with some of the clapping for credit courses in Literature and Arts B.

How should these courses be taught? I've no ideas on teaching art, but I'm sure others do. But with respect to the book-based courses, they should be tutorials taught by competent and broadly educated grad students, meeting once a week for two hours, with eight three to six page papers each semester (no exams ) and two supplementary lectures a week, provided by professors. The course would

continue through reading period and a larger paper might replace one or two smaller papers, by teaching and reading these books closely and in small groups with supplementary lectures, we might actually begin to achieve cultural literacy.

I know this imperfect plan needs some corrections and I hope this spurs some thought on what liberal education is. But, students would take this track fully informed that this is only an introduction and by no means comprehensive. Students would knowingly give up some of their social lives and their fingers might numb from writing up to 50 pages per semester (with rewrites, of course). These six courses would exempt students from Lit and Arts, Moral Reasoning and perhaps two electives or two non-science cores.

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Upon leaving Harvard, many seniors feel pushed out to join the "company of educated men and women." But the so-called "approaches to knowledge" which Dean Rosovsky gave us is only good for those who want to dabble and pick. Notwithstanding this minority, no good reason against an optional six-course humanities track within the Core exists.

All that's required is a little courage and effort. Daring souls await....

*Dan Markel's column appears on alternate Wednesdays.*

Focus

## Atilla and Me

*The three strikes proposal needs to be reconsidered.*

By [Dan E. Markel](#)

May 11, 1994

**The three strikes proposal needs to be reconsidered.**

Governor William F. Weld '66 has always had sharp political instincts, but his recent statement of his position on crime--"I'm somewhere to the right of Atilla

the Hun"--only demonstrates that he's finally caught up with what the people have been saying for months.

Just in yesterday's New York Times, for example, a page-one story recounted how state legislators are tripping and falling over themselves in their rush to enact "tough" sentencing laws against criminals. Criminals seem to be the one constituency wholly out of favor with politicians.

The most popular of these state measures is the "three strikes and you're out" proposal. Unless you've been living in Cabot Library for the last year, you probably know that this proposal mandates sentencing criminals to life in prison without parole if they are convicted of three serious felonies.

As the Times reported, 30 variations of this proposal have been introduced in state legislatures since last November, when voters in Washington state first approved it. To some degree, it's really a shame that intellectual property rights don't have force here; otherwise the policy wonks who dreamed up this idea would be living large on the royalties from this policy sweeping the nation. "Three strikes and you're out" has enjoyed a success politically equivalent to having a number one album on the Billboard 200.

What's interesting, of course, is the seeming arbitrariness of "three strikes and you're out." Why, for instance, three strikes and not two or four? It's clearly the symmetry with America's pastime that has driven Americans to their present war cry against crime. On the other hand, why couldn't it be four downs and you punt? I guess it's not as catchy.

But, despite the popularity of three strikes, the game of political one-up-manship has already started. In some states, three strikes is being viewed as too generous to criminals.

Georgia, for example, recently passed a law that allowed only two strikes for violent felons. Zell Miller, the governor there who faces re-election in the fall, said, "If you want three strikes in Georgia, You'd better join a baseball team."

Californians, not to be outdone in sentencing innovation, are now reviewing "one strike" legislation that would sentence child molesters and rapists to life without parole.

Nobody could beat the "toughness" of the Californians, or so one might think. But in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, one legislator, who remained nameless in yesterday's Times article, is advocating "three strikes and you're dead." Now that guy's tough. Smart too, since he realizes that if you're going to keep someone in jail for life without parole, you might as well save the taxpayers the upkeep and maintenance of the prisons. How thoughtful.

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With all this toughness around me, I am fearful, quite fearful. Not that I'll now go out and commit one, two or three felonies. That, as my grandmother tells me, should be my greatest worry in life.

No, I'm worried that criminals who are not deterred by these sentencing measures will become all the more violent, in a calculated move to evade arrest when facing life sentences without parole.

Maybe that's a reasonable price to pay for the deterrent effect these state legislators are counting on. But then again, maybe it's not. We should not be afraid, in any case, to think hard about why we punish the way that we do.

*Dan Markel's column appears on alternate Wednesdays.*

## **An Alternative Class Day Address**

*"Among Athens, Jerusalem and Now, Los Angeles"*

By Dan E. Markel

June 7, 1995

*The following speech will not be delivered at a Class Day ceremony any time soon...*

Fellow Graduates, today's address is in fact just a riff on an older speech, given 40 years ago by another man who spoke before another convocation at another university.

This man, Leo Strauss, spoke at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he gave a speech entitled "Between Athens and Jerusalem." His speech addressed the tension between navigating the course of one's life either by the lodestar of Jerusalem or the lodestar of Athens. Like the earlier giants on whose shoulders he stood, Strauss searched for the answer to whether one should live one's life by the dictates of faith or the demands of human reason. He unceasingly examined all the efforts on narrowing the gulf between God and Mind, seeing if he could better articulate and possibly resolve the old quarrel between Ancient and Modern. In Strauss's time, thoughtful people tried to live their lives mindful of these serious challenges. Today, however, I wish to address the emergence of a new challenge, a new lodestar by which we set our course, a challenge which is more immediate and pressing to those gathered today.

That challenge is the challenge to be hip. Cool. Fly. Sassy. Call it what you want. Most importantly, that challenge is a call to be ironic. While we once considered living a life of poetry or of philosophy, of penury or piety, or even a life of politics and philandering, we no longer do so. Today we live inside quotation marks.

I've been scooped by the editors of *Esquire* magazine. A few months ago, they asked the most important question of the 1990s: Is it better to be hip than smart? And of course, it is *far* better to be hip than smart. What they should have asked was, *why* is it better to be hip than smart? The *Esquire* editors had Jerry Seinfeld on their cover, but really, *Fifteen Minutes (FM)*, *The Crimson's* weekly magazine which chronicles the feats and foibles of students here, could just as easily have been on their mind.

For FM is the Seinfeld of print; it's a magazine that prides itself on being about nothing. We readers have always been in search of 15 minutes of fame, 15 minutes of mindless ecstatic delight in the marginalia of our college, continually examined and undressed. Addictively, slavishly, we read FM with our eyes glazed with dim recollection, with our teeth gnashing over memories of the low-fat plum pudding bars and fish pizzaiola which Harvard Dining Services purveys. We are

easily stupefied by the most clever publication around. Like the couple in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, who make love only in the "style" of a certain century, *Fifteen Minutes* encourages us to revel in the pop cultural dross of Americana. What accounts for this phenomenon? How did it all happen?

In the past, graduates of this school considered two options after their graduation: to preach or to profess. Today, the most coveted job in Harvard's spring recruiting is at Walt Disney Company, or second best, the NBA. For us, piety emanates not from Jerusalem, the Vatican, Mecca, Kyoto or Banares. It's Los Angeles. The celebration of banality found in Los Angeles carries over to Harvard. We throw ourselves into the gorge.

Where we once considered the metaphysics of Athens and Jerusalem, today we are mosquitoes to the lights of Las Vegas and Hollywood. And though we may pretend otherwise, we're more interested in raising the consciousness of kitsch than of ourselves or of our parents. We'd rather know the names of the children from *Eight is Enough* than the birthdays of our friends.

We have made our answer to *Esquire's* question amply clear. We prefer to be hip than to be smart. We prefer to be cool than to be pious. We are beyond piety, and certainly we are close to being beyond the power of persuasion. Faith is a dream, knowledge a seventy-yard field goal. We are extraordinarily far from Athens or Jerusalem. Instead we have ensconced ourselves in the sugary bosom of a pop culture manufactured by sweaty-toothed media moguls in Los Angeles who cannot bear to be without their cellular telephones even when they go to the bathroom.

All this irony, this self-awareness, has drained us. As the result of our creativity, we are left, my friends, in a world of wavering, accelerated only by our continued reliance on instrumental reason. We don't just waver. When looking for the answers, we stagger, stumble, falter and fumble. We are stuck. Even here at Harvard, my classmates, we've become tired of ambition and its costs. Yes, sitting here among us are some future senators, maybe a curator for the Met or the MFA, a few novelists and certainly some George Soros. All right then, many George Soros. But the majority of us are now tired, still recuperating from a late winter

full of theses and cover letters. And so, an old question, perhaps the oldest: What is to be done?

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As our champagne flutes clink now, at this moment of intense insobriety, we may not see the choices which lie ahead of us, choices which we might have already made. These choices are not the ones of professional occupation--law school, medical school, business school, dentistry. No, these choices are more important, more telling. I mean the choices regarding the way we shall live our lives, the question which concerned, among others, Socrates the Impudent: How best shall we live?

This, my friends, is the recalcitrant question, a recidivist doubt still worth pondering, even if only for 15 minutes, even if only every Thursday. For in an age where our collective moral self-confidence consists in nothing more than a diluted brand of UNESCO cosmopolitanism, where our minds are so open that our brains fall out, we should ask nothing less.

And who knows? Maybe, in this alleged age of belatedness, of post-everything exciting, we'll reread that old essay of Emerson's ("The American Scholar"), the one which we were supposed to read four years ago before we first crossed this Yard's iron gates. And maybe we'll be persuaded by listening to that scholar who, when facing similarly recalcitrant questions and doubts, implores us, cheers us on, raises us higher, and guides us by showing us facts among appearances. Maybe, there might still be more to do. A whole lot more to do. We owe it to ourselves to find out. For even the glimmer of that possibility must be seized, seized with a relentless ferocity and a blazing fury.

To this goal, Class of '95, I wish us all great luck and even greater courage. Lord knows, we shall require both in boundless quantities.

*Dan Market will study philosophy in Jerusalem next year.*