

The Other Harvard Legacy by Michael Gould-Wartofsky

Behind Harvard University's hallowed halls lies a hidden history of dissent. It's a history of student movements that have challenged ivy orthodoxies for the past century and change, making this a very different place along the way.

For most of its 370 years, this place was a bastion of exclusion and inequality. In many ways, as you will read about in these pages, it still is. But if it wasn't for the students and others in this community who stood up for something bigger than themselves, Harvard would still be a place reserved for those with white skin, with old money, a Y chromosome, a hetero sexuality, and a faith in Jesus. It would be a place where everything from research on the most lethal weapons to investment in Apartheid and genocide would have gone unquestioned, and where financial aid and decent pay would only be meant for the president and his friends.

This is the intro to Harvard you won't get in your first year orientation, your presidential addresses, your walking tours, or your Crimson headlines. These are the stories you won't hear anywhere else. First, here's a sample of that hidden history.

Universities like Harvard have always compelled some students to challenge the assumptions of their society and demand something more than a higher rung on the social ladder. For instance, Henry David Thoreau (Class of 1837) and W.E.B. Dubois (Class of 1890), prophets of civil disobedience and racial justice respectively, made their early marks on this campus.

Campus activists began to organize themselves in earnest in the 1930s, finding their power in the Harvard Student Union. HSU took on everything from organizing campus campaigns for a more open university to putting on "proletarian theater" to fielding candidates in town elections. Thanks to their efforts, Harvard was finally forced to start admitting more African-American, Jewish, and lower-income students (though quotas continued into the '60s), and teams were forced to reverse a policy of periodically benching minority athletes. A band of students even went to Spain in 1937 to fight the fascist armies, years before the World War.

Though Harvard officially succumbed to the "witch hunts" and political censorship of the '50s, some campus journalists didn't hesitate to publicly challenge Senator McCarthy and his House Un-American Activities Committee. Then, the gates were thrust open. In the Sixties, Harvard became the center of radical politics and culture known as the "Kremlin on the Charles."

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the young anti-war movement came to Harvard, and soon the university had the biggest chapter in the country. SDS organized an unprecedented drive to protest Harvard's complicity in the Vietnam War, decrying its proxy research for the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency, university assistance to companies manufacturing weapons that were killing hundreds of thousands,

and the unwelcome presence of the Reserve Officer Training Corps on campus, as it trained students to kill even more Vietnamese people.

The SDS offensive culminated in 1969. That year saw a sit-in at a faculty meeting on the question of ROTC and, in April, the legendary takeover of University Hall. When state police, called in by the administration, staged an early-morning raid on the building and beat the protesters bloody, students went on strike by the thousands and effectively shut down the university for two months. Their call to arms offers an illuminating look at the student sentiment of the time:

STRIKE FOR THE EIGHT DEMANDS
STRIKE BECAUSE YOUR ROOMMATE
WAS CLUBBED
STRIKE TO STOP EXPANSION
STRIKE TO SEIZE CONTROL OF
YOUR LIFE
STRIKE TO BECOME MORE HUMAN
STRIKE TO RETURN PAIN
HALL SCHOLARSHIPS
STRIKE BECAUSE THERE'S NO POETRY IN YOUR
LECTURES
STRIKE BECAUSE CLASSES ARE A BORE
STRIKE FOR POWER
STRIKE TO SMASH THE CORPORATION
STRIKE TO MAKE YOURSELF FREE
STRIKE TO ABOLISH ROTC
STRIKE BECAUSE THEY ARE TRYING TO
SQUEEZE THE LIFE OUT OF YOU
STRIKE

Ultimately, the administration was forced to kick ROTC out, bring African-American Studies in, and soon, work to equalize the education of men and women—with quotas on women at the College abolished by 1975. These protesters struck at the very core of old school Harvard, and its connections to war, tyranny, racial and gender discrimination. The threat was genuine. The urgency was real. And the university had no choice but to change its ways.

Throughout the '70s and '80s, the Old Harvard faced further challenges, many led by the growing population of students of color. The university's hundreds of millions of dollars invested in apartheid South Africa fueled a decade-long campaign by the South Africa Solidarity Committee. The Committee demanded that the university divest from the regime, reaching a head in 1986 with a semester-long shantytown built in the Yard to bring home the oppression of Black South Africans. Then-president Derek Bok, who was recently brought back to head up Harvard, refused all divestment demands, but the campaign helped bring national attention to the struggle against apartheid.

With the advent of the 1990s, activism died down some as many students tuned out of politics and tuned into making lots of money. They were following Harvard's example: Between 1991 and 1999, the university's endowment tripled to over \$15 billion.

But students started wondering about all the people left out of the rosy picture: The workers trying to live on poverty wages while working for the wealthiest university in the world. The women going to a school that would allow high rates of sexual violence, but not a women's center. The students of color going to a school that would tolerate hate crimes on campus, but no room for ethnic studies. And last but not least, all the people around the world impacted by our university's striking compliance with the Bush Administration and its wars.

Many students have kept their mouths shut through all of this. That silence is a function of what's known as the "Harvard bubble," a function of our privilege and insulation from the rest of the world. This is the same bubble that kept female, Black, Jewish, Latino, Asian, and poor students out of Harvard for so long. But then there's the other Harvard legacy, the one that you didn't hear about in your orientation. Today, that legacy of dissent is alive and well, and your class could be a new generation of activists just waiting to take back the campus.

Within these pages, you will read more about the ongoing issues facing us here at fair Harvard, and the movements that are fearlessly taking them on. But this Disorientation Guide is not just made to tell you things you didn't know about the school you're going to. It's also about the school you could be going to. What kind of school do you want to go to? You might think that you decided that already when you chose Harvard, or Harvard chose you.

But really, it's something we decide every day.