

Once the
bulldog
of the
Ivy League,
Yale University
now finds
itself riddled
with debt,
doubt
and denial

The Last Boola- Boola

*And now I have the best of both worlds:
a Harvard education and a Yale degree*

—John F. Kennedy, on accepting an honorary
doctorate from Yale University in 1962

"HARVARD SUCKS"

—Defensive T-shirt seen on Yale campus

Following a burst of trumpet fanfare, the Yale Precision Marching Band, cloaked in black and uncharacteristically solemn, led a long procession of Yale dignitaries in resplendent academic gowns about the gargoyle-studded, neo-Gothic campus that rises like Oz amid the squalor of New Haven, Connecticut. Delegates from a hundred universities were on hand, from Oxford and Harvard on down to little Sacred Heart, of nearby Bridgeport, as well as grand old Elis like Cyrus Vance, John Lindsay and, in stunning lavender, Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore Jr. At the head of the long, majestic parade was the university's new president himself, former Yale dean and eco-

nomics professor Richard Levin, who drew cheers as he waved to the crowd. For one fine, sun-splashed afternoon last fall, Yale was Yale once more. It was the inauguration of a new president, and never mind what had happened to the last one.

As part of the ceremony, Levin received a number of historic symbols of office, most impressively the Yale Mace, a twenty-four-pound silver-gilt war club that represents the presidential authority. Most likely, he will need that and more to restore Yale to its accustomed position of jostling with Harvard (my own alma mater) for primacy among American universities. Yale obviously retains a certain glow, considering that three of the last five U.S. presidents earned Yale degrees and the Yale Law School was the fabled meeting place of Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham. But such tributes from the past cannot obscure the troubles of the present. These are extremely tough times for a university that, like the Whitneys, Harknesses, Mellons and

By John Sedgwick



other first families that have succored Yale practically since its founding, in 1701, is not used to adversity. The hallowed campus has in recent years been rocked by everything from a faculty-led putsch against its last president to allegations in *The Wall Street Journal* that it was turning into a gay school, from the murder of an undergraduate to the scandal-clouded resignation of its senior fellow.

And those were just the troubles that hit the papers. There were also the deeper issues of a deteriorating physical plant that will cost \$1.5 billion to fix, a decaying environment in New Haven and a faculty that has been gradually but surely losing its luster. Asked where he believes Yale is heading, political scientist Charles E. Lindblom, a retired Yale Sterling professor—the university's highest teaching honorific—who started at the university in 1946, reaches out and points a bony finger straight down. "It's not conspicuous," he says. "It's a glacial slide, and a lot of people around here deny it. But I'm afraid it's true." Adds Theodore Marmor, a professor at Yale's School of Organization and Management, "When I came in the Seventies, the university *seemed* troubled. A decade later, it *felt* troubled. Now, I'd have to say it is troubled."

It is possible to take the charitable view, as Yale itself is inclined to do, and say that such problems merely reflect the perilous condition of higher education in general. And it's certainly true that, after a tremendous postwar expansion turned a college degree into an American birthright, most American colleges and universities are facing a period of painful contraction. They are racked by cutbacks in federal outlays for research, besieged by PC niggling and pushed to the wall by ever-rising labor costs. Higher education, that is to say, is now facing the same reality check that has been visited on the other supposed wellsprings of great American prosperity—the big-three automakers, IBM and the major defense contractors. "Here's the real problem in higher education," says Henry Chauncey, a former secretary of Yale. "Are the customers going to continue to pay for what they're getting?"

Devoted Yalies can take solace in the fact that theirs is not the only troubled campus in the groves of academe. Referring to the events of 1992, a particularly blistering year for the university that culminated in President Benno Schmidt Jr.'s resignation, Calvin Trillin, the *New Yorker* writer who serves on the Yale Corporation, has joked to alumni groups that Yale was merely following the lead of Stanford, whose troubles began with accusations of presidential misuse of federal funds and went up the Richter scale from there. "Only we didn't have an earthquake," Trillin liked to say. Then he was obliged to add: "But that's only because Connecticut doesn't have earthquakes."

Yet even when set against the background of the declining fortunes of higher education, Yale presents a unique tale of woe. The school always used to consider itself fully the equal of Harvard, standing together at the pinnacle of higher education, and, indeed, the two are still often linked in the public mind as if there were no difference between them except that one bleeds crimson, the other blue. Not quite. By all accounts, Harvard now stands alone at the top. "Of course, Harvard is the greatest university in the world," says Yale's Chauncey, as though the matter weren't worthy of discussion.

By the most reliable indicator of a college's current market value—its "yield," which is the percentage of the students it accepts who choose to attend—Harvard now leads Yale by a wide margin, 75 percent to 55 percent. In number of the most elite candidates, the National Merit Scholars, Harvard's lead is even wider, as it took 383 to Yale's 139 in 1992. "It's hard to say no to Harvard," admits David Leonhardt, editor-in-chief of the *Yale Daily News*. "Harvard is Harvard. It's the Big H, the top of the heap." This seems to have inspired some bitterness among the Elis. Leonhardt has noticed the presence of more than a few "HARVARD SUCKS" T-shirts around campus. "I haven't seen any 'YALE SUCKS' T-shirts at Harvard," he notes wistfully.

Yet Yale's position as a trying-harder number two is also threatened. Although the college justifiably prides itself on its undergraduate program, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked it third this fall, behind Harvard and Princeton, for the second year in a row. Judging by its 55 percent yield, Yale has fallen to fourth, behind Harvard, Princeton and Stanford. In fact, since Yale has always placed its primary effort on its undergraduates, the school may have dropped even farther behind in regard to its graduate program. Since the Second World War, Yale has done little to expand its graduate studies except when, belatedly and halfheartedly, it started a business school, the School of Organization and Management, in the early Seventies. At one point, says Lindblom, former president A. Bartlett Giamatti simply ignored an offer of \$10 million from Averill Harriman to establish the equivalent of Harvard's Kennedy School. "Nothing ever happened," says Lindblom with a shrug. "It was a terrible missed opportunity." Meanwhile, Stanford, the University of Chicago and even state schools like the University of Michigan have grown in stature. And, of course, Harvard has continued to expand, having dramatically bolstered its school of government and school of education in the postwar years. While Harvard's total student population has grown to almost 20,000, Yale's hovers at around 10,000. And its endowment has swelled to \$6 billion, while Yale's stands at \$3.2 billion.



Yale's stately campus is literally falling apart, thanks to the long postponement of maintenance.

Meanwhile, Yale has had trouble keeping up what it does have. To put its enormous deferred maintenance bill in perspective, \$1.5 billion amounts to about half its endowment and twice its annual operating budget. Much of the stately campus is literally falling apart. There is a terrible irony in this, an irony that makes the truth of the situation all the harder for Yalies to grasp. When the modern campus was built in what Yale history professor Gaddis Smith calls “a single spasm” in the 1930s, thanks largely to the beneficence of the Harkness family, the university was determined to look as ageless as its inspirations, Oxford and Cambridge. So workmen deliberately “antiquated” the great Gothic halls and towers by dripping acid on the stone, chipping away at the slate roofs and smudging the façades with soot. And, in the Sixties and Seventies, when Yale should have been attending to the upkeep of its physical plant, it was hindered by a dire financial situation, the result of rising inflation and losses from its heavy investment in a declining stock market.

According to former vice-president of finance Michael Finnerty, the endowment lost almost half its purchasing power over a ten-to-fifteen-year period. So the maintenance was put off, and as it kept being delayed, the cost skyrocketed.

Now, sixty years after it was built, the campus really does look ancient, and it is suffering grievously from the decades of inattention. The leaks in Sterling Memorial Library, which houses one of the world’s largest collections of books, are so bad that librarians have had to throw tarpaulins over bookshelves to protect the holdings during rainstorms. In the winter of 1993, a water main burst, knocking out the plumbing, heat and electricity at two residential colleges, Pierson and Davenport, and forcing the students to relieve themselves in Porta Pottis set up in the courtyards. The Yale Bowl, the historic football stadium, is in such disrepair that, in the words of one architectural critic, “it now has come to resemble the Roman ruins it was based on.” And the Payne Whitney Gymnasium, at one time the second-largest athletic facility in the world, after the Moscow Olympic gym, is slowly dissolving into a pool of melted plaster. It seems everyone on campus has stories of toilets that run for months on end or near-daily power outages that wipe out computer files or classes that have to be moved because, as happened recently, a large portion of the ceiling caved in on a lecture hall.

Then there’s New Haven, the Elm City that once formed a pleasing backdrop to university life but which, with the departure of its manufacturing industry, has turned into a war zone of poverty, crime and drugs as frightening and oppressive as those of some of the worst cities in America. The unofficial unemployment rate is 30 percent,

50 percent for young people. Much of the downtown area is boarded up. The city’s only large hotel, the Park Plaza, is in bankruptcy, resulting in an eerie, Baghdad-during-the-war feeling among its few guests. Yale is the city’s largest employer and its biggest landlord, but for too many, drugs are the only game in town. When a cabdriver took me on a tour of the projects, grim concrete slabs with nicknames like the Jungle, he told me to watch the eyes of the teenagers hanging out on the sidewalk. Sure enough, as we rolled up, they all turned eagerly toward me, their faces suddenly bright with the hope that another suburbanite had come to buy. “Drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs,” said the cabbie, shaking his head in disgust as we drove off.

The drugs have led to other contagions: an AIDS rate that leads the nation and a per capita murder rate that, until recently, beat out those of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Most of the slayings involve gang members and drug dealers knocking one another off around Dixwell Avenue and the Hill, areas bordering the college that

Yalies quickly learn to avoid. But the urban warfare makes its presence felt on campus. Paul Kahn, a Yale law professor, happened to mention that he often heard gunfire around the law school during the day. “Gunfire?” I asked, incredulous. “Well, yeah,” he said. “At least, I always figured that’s what it was. You know, loud popping sounds.” That night, as he was driving me back downtown from his house, on the outskirts of the city, we heard a small explosion behind us, close enough and loud enough that I instinctively ducked my head. He turned to me. “Like that,” he said. “What the hell do you call that?”

Now and then, the gunplay emerges from the background. There

was a shoot-out on the front steps of the courthouse in 1989, and two years later some teenagers fired away inside New Haven’s sole remaining shopping mall, contributing to Macy’s recent decision to exit the city. But from the Yale community’s perspective, the most chilling case occurred in February three years ago, when an undergraduate was shot and killed during a robbery near elegant St. Mary’s Church on Hillhouse Avenue, a block from the president’s house. Charles Dickens had once called Hillhouse “the most beautiful street in America.” The whole event had such an allegorical ring to it that the crime was doubly shattering—first, for what happened; second, for what it meant. It seemed like the Death of Yale. The student’s name, remarkably, was Christian Prince. He was a fourth-generation Yale man, played on the lacrosse team, was tall, blond, handsome. He had been walking back from a party held by the Aurelian Society—an elite social club akin to the better-known Skull and Bones—when, according to reports, a local youth stepped out of a car, shoved a pistol in

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Prince's face and demanded his wallet. Prince quickly obliged, but the robber fired anyway, stopping Prince's heart with a single bullet. His wallet, still full of cash, was found near the scene. James "Duncan" Fleming was tried twice for the murder, but he was acquitted after the companion who had provided most of the evidence against him recanted his testimony. The tragedy galvanized the university to heighten security measures at a campus already accused of having a fortress mentality. Emergency call boxes, painted Yale blue, sprouted everywhere; shuttle buses were organized; and more campus entrances were locked up after hours. Still, a recent poll in *USA Today* found Yale to be the most dangerous campus in the nation.

It is hard to tell when a great institution starts to lose its edge. When did the Roman Empire go into eclipse? Perhaps the best way to grasp Yale's declining fortunes is to take a backward glance at its recent presidents, each of whom, for various reasons, seemed to manage a little less well than his immediate predecessor. Alfred Whitney Griswold, who took over in 1950, was by most accounts the best of them. Clearheaded, forceful, an eloquent defender

of the value and purpose of a liberal education when it was endangered by McCarthyism, he seemed to embody the best of Yale. In 1963, when he was suddenly struck down by cancer at the age of 56, Yale lost what might have been its last chance to emerge from Harvard's shadow. His successor, Kingman Brewster Jr., was a natty *Mayflower* descendant best remembered strolling about campus with his dog. But he was nearly undone by the tumults of the Sixties and the epic New Haven trial of Black Panther Bobby Seale, in 1970, which, if not for Brewster's adroitness, might have brought Yale down in flames. He was followed in 1978 by A. Bartlett Giamatti, who may be a

one of the graduate schools. Buried on a back page was a little squib about Giamatti's deciding to ban bladder ball, a time-honored undergraduate pastime involving an enormous leather ball. Giamatti was also forced to deal with a number of punishing strikes by Yale clerical workers that seemed to bruise the president as badly as they did the university.

And then, in 1986, came Benno Schmidt Jr. At the time, he seemed the perfect choice to lead Yale into the next millennium. The son of a venture capitalist from Abilene, Texas, who had risen to become a senior partner in New York's elite venture-capital firm J.H. Whitney and Company, Schmidt was bred for greatness. He went to all the best schools, starting with Saint Bernard's, in Manhattan, and Exeter, and then Yale, collecting degrees from the college—a virtual requirement for the presidency—and from the law school. Upon graduation, he clerked for Earl Warren (it was said that Schmidt's ultimate ambition was to sit on the Supreme Court) and served as a successful dean at Columbia University law school. Through his third wife, the documentary filmmaker Helen Cutting Whitney, he entered into New York society, even landing a bit part as an obstetrician in Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*. "Benno was a perfect paper president," says Carter Wiseman, editor of the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, which publishes independently of the university. "His résumé was fabulous, but when it got down to the tips of the fingers. . ."

Close observers of the selection process have noted that each Yale presidency seems to be conceived as the antidote to the previous one. In this case, the search committee, headed by Cyrus Vance, was looking for some toughness to counter Giamatti's geniality. Toughness it got, to the point of needless belligerence. Schmidt once allowed that he had no patience for politics—an admission that, some say, should have immediately disqualified him for the presidency—and he had an unfortunate penchant for making moves without developing the consensus necessary to support them. When things went bad, as they ultimately did, there was only Schmidt to blame. And right now, Schmidt is probably the least popular man in the history of Yale. "Benno Schmidt is not despised but detested," says classics professor Victor Bers. "There's a difference, you know."

The tone and course of Schmidt's presidency were set in his third year, when he decided to revamp the hopelessly fractured School of Organization and Management. Without consultation, he preemptorily installed Michael Levine as the SOM's new dean. A former senior executive of New



Schmidt's immediate predecessors as president were, from top, Alfred Whitney Griswold, Kingman Brewster and A. Bartlett Giamatti.



Benno Schmidt, smart and tough, seemed perfectly primed to fix what ails Yale. But the faculty revolted over his budget cuts.



erudition he brought to the post of baseball commissioner but is viewed with some disdain at Yale for failing to see the big picture. "The poor man was overwhelmed by the details of the office," says former secretary Chauncey. He recalls the day when *The New York Times* ran a lavish front-page account of Harvard President Derek Bok's grand plans for

York Air, Levine was a graduate of the Frank Lorenzo school of labor relations. He summarily axed six non-tenured members of the department, while Schmidt himself transferred eight others to the faculty of Arts and Sciences. The high-handedness of these moves appalled the normally unflappable business students, who hired a plane to fly over the field during the Harvard-Yale football game bearing the banner "RESIGN LEVINE." It did not sit well with the faculty, either, some of whom formed a committee to investigate Schmidt's actions, a development the *Yale Daily News* termed "an historic attempt by the professors of the college to question the legitimacy of the completed actions of a sitting president." There would soon be another. In the fall of 1990, Benno Schmidt took a fateful tour of Yale's Davenport College at the request of its master, Henry Turner. As Schmidt later told *The New York Times*, he was staggered to see its condition. "There were cracks in the masonry, leaks in the roof, wooden shutters that were literally rotting off their hinges, cupolas and towers that were almost falling down. . . ."

Appalled, he dispatched engineers to conduct a full-scale infrastructural audit of the university. It took them nearly two years to finish their report. "We had engineers literally crawling through every building," Schmidt says. In the end, even the administration's worst fears for the repair bill were off "by orders of magnitude." It was clear, as he says, that "Yale needed a massive and urgent reallocation of resources to rebuild its infrastructure."

The battle for that reallocation did not go well, and he speaks about it now not from the Yale president's office in Woodbridge Hall but from a courtly office, adorned with oil paintings and a rolltop desk, at Whitte Communications in New York City, to which he repaired after the faculty refused to go along with his recommendations. The experience has aged him. Deep frown lines have creased the face that was routinely described as boyish not so long ago. But he is not significantly changed. In an hour's conversation, he reveals many of the quirks of character that made him so exasperating at Yale. He says all the right things—with the possible exception of some feckless horn-tooting about his fund-raising skills—but says them in such a phony, speechifying way and with such awkward body language that you can't help but want to disagree with him. "For complicated reasons I don't understand," he says at one point, turning away from me to gaze solemnly out the window down Fifth Avenue, "most institutions in our society have woefully neglected their infrastructure. It's true of government, public institutions and private institutions." He shakes his head mournfully, moved by his own words. "I'm afraid that it's simply the fact that Yale's situation in this regard is virtually unique in its

extremity." Later, discussing New Haven, he calls the condition of urban America "a terrible threat to so much of what we hold dear." Do university presidents, or ex-presidents, *have* to talk this way? Only once does Schmidt produce a straightforward answer. It comes when I ask if there was anything in his past that prepared him to deal with structural problems of Yale's proportions. "No," he says.

Giamatti had increased the maintenance budget to \$15 million a year. "But even at that level, Yale was still slipping," Schmidt says. "That number had to be tripled or quadrupled." Not only did the campus have to be restored but certain areas, chiefly the sciences, would need to be expanded to keep up with the competition.

Where would the money come from? To his credit, Schmidt immediately decided that the financial-aid budget would not be touched. Essentially, that left faculty salaries. To cut those, Schmidt faced an uncomfortable choice. He could institute across-the-board cuts in the form of a university-wide hiring freeze, or he could single out certain

departments to bear the brunt of the economies. Obviously, the first course was, Schmidt notes, "politically safer," but he opted for the second in the belief that to excise spots of weakness rather than bleed the entire university made for a stronger Yale. Unfortunately, Schmidt was in no position to push such measures across. Personally, he was already being rapped as an absentee president, since he continued to keep a residence in New York so that his wife could maintain her filmmaking career; at Yale, "WHERE'S BENNO?" became a standard taunt on protest posters. "There was more quibbling about that than I expected," Schmidt says angrily now. He was also a victim of his own fund-

raising success. Having seen Schmidt pull in \$80 million just from the Bass family, the faculty reasonably wondered why it needed to be downsized just to save a few million bucks. "There was a paradox there," Schmidt admits. "I probably didn't do as good a job explaining it as I needed to, but goodness knows I tried."

In February 1991, Schmidt's provost, Frank Turner, announced that a restructuring committee would be formed to single out certain departments for cuts. The faculties of the various graduate and professional schools offered little resistance, since they were, as Schmidt puts it, "closer to the financial and institutional realities." But the faculty of Arts and Sciences responded with a yelp of outrage. It probably didn't help that the dean of the college, the neo-conservative Thucydidean scholar Donald Kagan, had recently assailed the faculty for the way its liberal element joined with liberal students for a "mutual massage of an imperfect and unprofessional kind." Now the Yale faculty had a chance to give flight to its own rhetoric. Joseph

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In response to the pressure, the administration modified its targeted 15 percent reduction to 11 percent, and then, in March 1992, the restructuring committee issued its recommendations, which called for sharp cutbacks in such major departments as sociology, applied physics and engineering, and two others. The news left the faculty reeling. “It was harsh, it was sudden, and it was done without consultation,” says Kai Erikson, then chairman of the sociology department.

The faculty formed a review committee, headed by biology and psychology professor Thomas Carew, which a few weeks later replied with recommendations of its own before Schmidt and 300 faculty members. First, John Geanakoplos, a specialist in mathematical economics, offered a financial analysis in which he granted that there was indeed a significant budgetary shortfall—a major concession—but argued that it could be covered with fewer faculty cuts and a slight increase in the percentage that the university regularly drew from its endowment. That won hearty applause. Then the mild-mannered Carew astonished everyone by taking the floor to criticize the procedures used to determine the cuts and then propose the formation of an ad hoc committee to review the recommendations. In the words of one professor who was there, “Basically, Carew said the president was full of shit.” The cheering for him was even louder.

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Professor Victor Bers, “Applause is really not done at Yale faculty meetings.” Schmidt listened quietly to both presentations, then rose to defend himself. “It is damaging for Yale not to have a credible plan to return to financial equilibrium during the current academic year,” he protested. But he also admitted that he couldn’t proceed without the approval of the faculty.

That was the end of Benno. Two weeks later, Provost Turner, sensing he’d been hung out to dry, resigned. As one faculty member told the *Daily News*, he’d been “Sununued.” A month after that, Dean Kagan resigned, too, with one last blast at the faculty for its “frenzied denial and defensiveness.” Then, on commencement day, in an act that most of the Yale community still finds unforgivable, Schmidt gave notice of his resignation to the Yale Corporation—but not before he had given the news to *The New York Times* and posed for a photograph with his new employer, Chris Whittle, which appeared the next morning on page 1. This was followed a few days later by the appearance of Schmidt’s photo in a full-page advertisement for Whittle Communications’ Edison Project—a plan to establish a group of private schools—that struck many at Yale as shameless profiteering. “That Whittle ad was really vulgar,” says Bers. A new phrase started appearing on campus posters: “SCHMIDT HAPPENS.”

Now at Yale, the administration is carrying on as though Benno Schmidt never existed. It has suspended his plans for eliminating faculty and scaled back his efforts at renovation. Schmidt has returned a few times to the campus, and he walked in Levin’s inaugural parade, an act that seemed only a little less strange than a dead man’s showing up as a mourner at his own funeral. Neither the new president of Yale nor any of his top officers would agree to be interviewed on the subject of Yale after Benno. The new dean of Yale College, Richard Brodhead, did meet with me briefly, but only because his secretary had mistakenly scheduled me for an appointment without his permission. When I arrived, Brodhead said he hadn’t agreed to see me and claimed not even to know what I wanted to discuss. As soon as I mentioned the words “Benno Schmidt,” he blanched and jerked back his head, as I hastily explained that “I assumed the new administration would be pouring balm on the waters.”

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Nevertheless, in turning to Richard Levin, the university is plainly trying to undo the damage of the previous administration. Indeed, one of his first interoffice E-mail messages jokingly called for a committee “to develop a strategic plan for the restoration of paradise.” In contrast to the antagonistic Schmidt, Levin seems particularly eager to please. One of his first official acts was to institute

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Among the players at Yale, from top: Henry Chauncey, former Yale secretary; Michael E. Levine, former dean, School of Organization and Management; Richard C. Levin, newly installed president; and Frank M. Turner, former provost.

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Sunday basketball games with the students, and he has reestablished the tradition of the Presidential Master's Tea, during which the president receives students in his home. Such openness has raised the spirits of the



Yale community considerably; Levin received a rare standing ovation when he formally assumed the presidency in Woolsey Hall last fall.

But at this point, one wonders how much Levin, or any president, can do to reverse Yale's decline. "There is nothing wrong with Yale that can't be fixed with \$2 billion," jokes Robert Dahl, a Yale professor emeritus of political science. In fact, Yale is in the midst of a \$1.5 billion campaign, one that was not helped by the sudden resignation in September of Yale's senior fellow, Vernon Loucks, after revelations that his firm, Baxter Corporation, had been fined for engaging in anti-Israel trade practices in order to secure accounts with various Arab nations. A big pot of money would do a lot to fix the buildings, beef up security and attract a more distinguished faculty. As it is, several chairs have gone unfilled because Yale has been unable to interest appropriate professors. But its most fundamental problem can't be fixed by money. As the old real-estate adage goes, it's all location, location, location. Even if New Haven's economy could be revived, its drabness lifted and its criminality dispelled—three miracles no one is expecting—Yale would still be caught in a choke hold, consigned as it is to a little

patch of nowhere three hours from Boston and two from New York. "There really isn't anyplace to go," says Rebecca Neuwirth, the editor of the weekly *Yale Herald*.

New Haven makes Yale a bit less than Yale; it makes it Dartmouth or Amherst. Like their confreres at those other prestigious but out-of-the-way institutions, Yalies don't have much choice but to turn inward. As one student told me, "Yale doesn't radiate out, it radiates in." To which another responded, "Yeah, that's why 'Yale' sounds so much like 'jail.'" Still, despite the recent PR drubbing of their school, most Yale students remain deeply loyal. They don't see New Haven as the hazardous waste dump it is portrayed to be but as a place that gives them the opportunity to help out with America's urban problems—although rarely after dark. And to them the Yale campus is a hot spot brimming with extracurricular activity. "You may not be able to go barhopping the way you can in New York," says David Leonhardt, "but there are always plenty of parties and things to do on Friday and Saturday night."

"There is nothing wrong with Yale that can't be fixed with \$2 billion," jokes one professor.

Considerably less private than Skull and Bones, the Pundits club has assigned itself the job of lightening up things on the intense Yale campus. Here, a nude romp through the library during exam week.

There is special enthusiasm for the Gay and Lesbian Co-op's parties, which is what caused *The Wall Street Journal* to speculate, unfairly, that Yale was turning gay. It's just that, as one student explained, the GLC has "the momentum as the best party."

And then there are some other free-form events that blossom in Yale's hothouse atmosphere. Like the activities of the Pundits, a kind of anti-secret society that regularly performs stunts, japes and other impromptu amusements to loosen up the stiffs on campus. "Only at Yale would you have an organized pranks group," says current Pundits leader Martin Hale. For some reason, the members have lately focused on the medieval-style Sterling Library, where they released a wild turkey in the reading room and, later, turned the student lounge into an airplane cabin, dressing themselves as airline attendants to distribute condoms, No Doz and *Playboy* magazines to the student "tourists," who played along by bringing luggage.

This past winter, during the first day of exam period, about two dozen Pundits transformed themselves into what they called "Finals Fairies" by stripping off their clothes to race through the stacks and the reading rooms naked—except for some tinsel here, an exam blue book there, some poinsettia "pasties" and an S-and-M-style leather harness strategically placed over some members' private parts—to distribute chocolate kisses and other candy to the students.

Tipped off to the spectacle, I was amazed that library denizens were so nonchalant at the sight of so much genitalia rushing by. Their eyes left their books only for a few moments to determine the cause of the disturbance, then dropped back down to their studies, with scarcely a word about what they had just seen. But Pundit Al Coppola, who had bravely worn only a backpack for this escapade, said that I'd gotten it all wrong. "Everybody was flabbergasted with astonishment and fear at the size of our collective Johnsons," he declared. And Amy Zimmerman, dressed only in a cape, was sure one student in the stacks nearly fainted at the sight of all the (continued on page 225)

DAN RATHER

idea began to take hold that the client was the person that you were covering. Now, I'm saying this with a smile. It's puzzling to me, and I do lament the change. I didn't think it was a big deal to ask Bush those questions. I thought he'd have an answer."

On September 29, 1993, Rather went before a convention of news directors and gave a ringing denunciation of what his business had become. "We should all be ashamed of what we have and have not done, measured against what we could do," he told them. He cited Murrow. Depending on where you stand on Rather—and nobody stands in the middle—you either applauded or gagged. The next day's speaker was better received. He was Pete Williams.

Of NBC News.

Dan Rather was right, damn it. That should count for something.

It is airtime.

"Whoo-eee," says Rather, startling everyone who is crammed into the hallway of the dead office park. "Love that *tackle football*."

Outside of the pope and James Jordan, nothing much is going on this day. Rather will do the news standing in front of a window. Unfortunately, there is a man named José outside, washing this window, and he

has not yet gotten the word. It is possible that 55 million Americans are going to see Dan Rather do the news with a long squeegee rising and falling behind him. Rather knocks on the window. "Excuse me, sir," he says. "Thank you for all your help, but could you stop for a minute?" José smiles and comes inside. He will watch Dan do the news from the hallway.

Rather goes up on the balls of his feet. On his face as he stares into the camera is a look very much like the one Marvin Hagler took into the ring for the third round against Thomas Hearns. "Good evening," Rather says to the nation. José's face is rapt with wonder. He has done a good job. The window behind Dan is clear, and you can see a long train pulling out of the rail yards below, running south toward Texas. Downtown, the thousands of glowing young Catholics are getting caught in a swiftly moving thunderstorm, ducking into the souvenir tents to get out of the downpour. Dan Rather stands there looking as if he might bust right through the window, but, framed now by the storm, he stays where he is, above all the sacred and the profane, with lightning on his left hand and a rainbow on his right. •

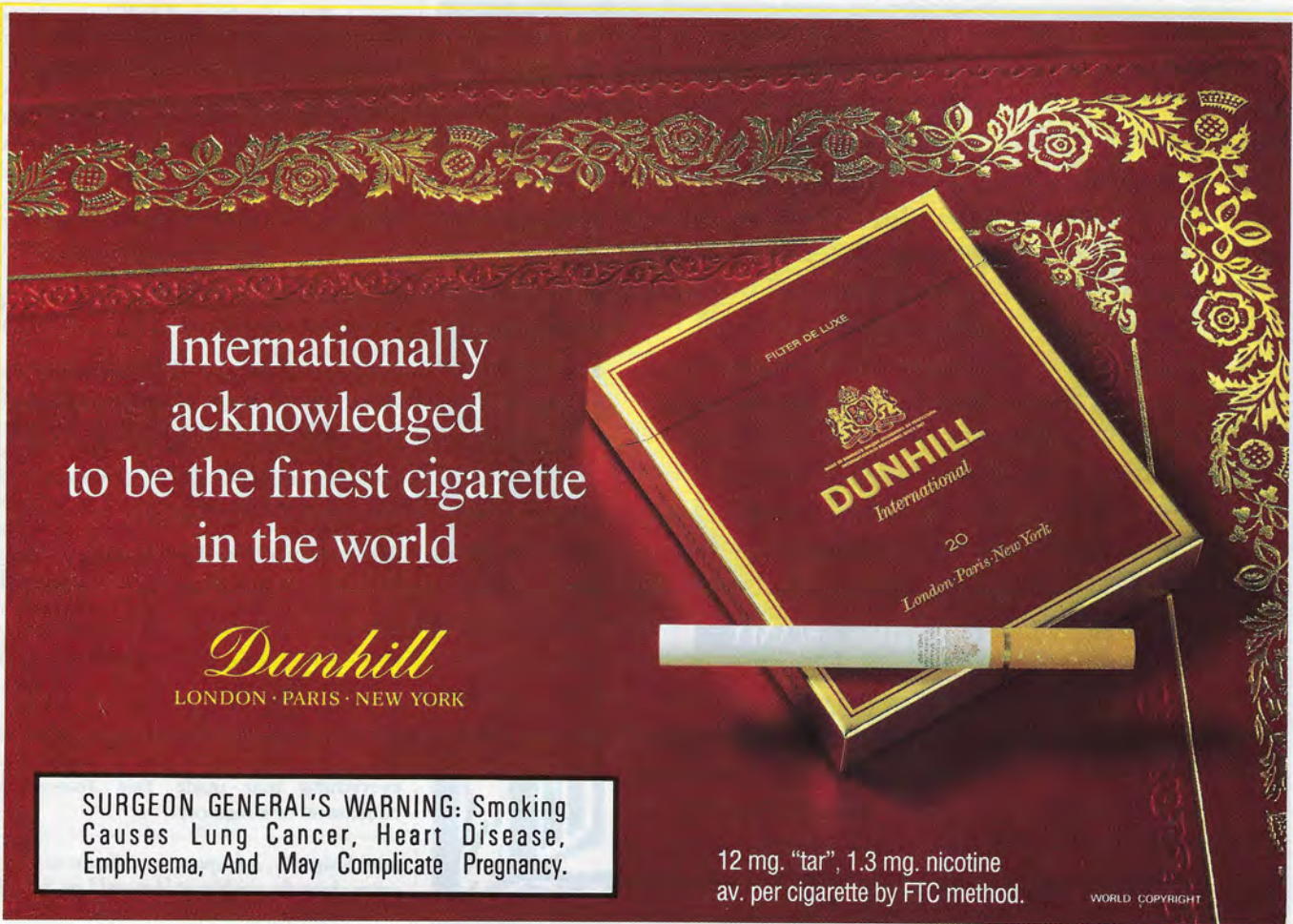
Charles P. Pierce is a GQ writer-at-large.

THE LAST BOOLA-BOOLA

(continued from page 189) galloping flesh. "All she could do was go 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!'" she said.

"There's kind of an obsession with nudity here," Neuwirth explains. It may be the result of Yale's small-town-itis. The residents are pulled together so tightly, they start to feel like siblings, and that may rechannel some natural desires. "No one gets any play here," student Simon Greenwald says, using a Yale-ism for sex. "There's even a T-shirt about it. It says 'SEX KILLS, SO COME TO YALE AND LIVE FOREVER.'" So the students get naked instead. It has become a Yale tradition. There's the annual Faybrook Strip, when residents of Faybrook College take it off at a football game in the Bowl; this in turn inspired the yearly Morse Moon: At Yale, it is not unusual to look out your dorm window at 3 A.M., as Neuwirth did last spring, and find a group of Yalies playing stickball in the nude. And every spring, on Future Freshman Day, it is customary for residents of Vanderbilt Hall to come barreling out of the dorm in the altogether, led by a nudist riding bareback on a white stallion, to impress (if that's the word) the incoming class.

But no matter how entertaining, such diversions remain diversions. Ultimately,



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THE LAST BOOLA-BOOLA

geography is destiny. Political scientist Charles Lindblom believes that New Haven is killing Yale. Already, it has limited the number of faculty willing to come: first, because it is such a miserable place to live; and second, because it creates what is widely termed the "spousal problem"—the fact that the husband or wife of a faculty appointee has little chance of finding meaningful, challenging work of his or her own. Lindblom notes that while alumni of other universities, most significantly Stanford's David Packard, have demonstrated their loyalty by founding companies in their alma mater's vicinity, Old Blues—although they control Fortune 500 companies in prodigious numbers—have so far been unwilling to do the same. There is a limit to their loyalty, apparently.

In fact, the entire relationship of the alumni to the university is something of a puzzle. For a long time, Old Blues were probably overinvolved with their alma mater, as their Waspy conservatism held Yale back from such progressive—and inevitable—steps as hiring Jews on the faculty (which didn't happen in any numbers until the Fifties) and admitting females to

the college (finally, in 1969). Typically, once coeducation occurred, the alums punished Yale by withholding much-needed donations for years afterward. Since then, however, the Old Blues have been strangely complacent about Yale's twenty-year slide down the chute. For instance, shortly after Benno Schmidt resigned, arguably the single most embarrassing incident in Yale's recent history, then-President George Bush, Yale '48, called Schmidt from Air Force One to congratulate him on his new job.

If the alumni don't start founding firms in and around New Haven for Yale to grow on, the Old Blues will find themselves with less and less to cheer about as the years roll along. Lindblom believes that, in the end, the number of elite American universities will dwindle to just six, all of them dependent on the allure of their immediate environment: Harvard, with Cambridge/Boston; the University of Chicago; Stanford, with Palo Alto; Columbia and New York universities, with Manhattan; and Duke, with the research triangle bordering Durham. Yale doesn't make the cut.

Lindblom has gone so far as to recommend the rather drastic solution of turning Yale into what he calls a "world university," with half its faculty and half its students drawn from other countries. As such, it would foster a multicultural, multidisciplinary approach to such global problems as the environment, the economy and ethnic tensions. For this, New Haven's very isolation might be an asset, as it would encourage professors to collaborate with one another, rather than dissipating their energies in big-city distractions. Lindblom sees the plan as Yale's last chance for greatness. But when he described it in a letter to Levin last spring, the president-elect did not respond with much enthusiasm.

The world university may not be the answer, but something needs to be done. As I was leaving the campus after the Levin inauguration, while the few hundred guests were enjoying their Dove ice-cream bars and the new president and his wife were busy shaking the hands of well-wishers in the shade of a tent, it surprised me to look back and see how small Yale is. Compared with some of the new state universities, Yale seems to be little more than an overgrown prep school. In physical terms, there really isn't that much to it. Things happen, are happening. Another failed presidency, a disappointing fund drive, another murder. . . Sure, the place would survive. But everything that made Yale *Yale*—that could soon be a memory. •

John Sedgwick, a frequent contributor to GQ, wrote about the troubles at Harvard Law School in the February 1993 issue.

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