

colloquy

HARVARD KENNETH C. GRIFFIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Elections

Making Voting Easier, Fairer,
and More Secure



to note

Nominate Your Candidate



Help the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) recognize distinguished master's and PhD alumni by nominating an alumnus/a for the **Centennial Medal**, Harvard Griffin GSAS's highest honor. The Centennial Medal acknowledges alumni who have made outstanding contributions to society, the roots of which are based in their graduate education. To submit a nomination, email the Graduate Student Alumni Association (GSAA) at gsaa@fas.harvard.edu, and include your reasons for selecting the candidate, along with their curriculum vitae and bio. Nominations may be submitted at any time of year. All submissions will be reviewed each November by the GSAA Council's Centennial Medals Selection Committee and senior University officials, whose recommendations are voted on by the Harvard Corporation each December. You can read more about the Centennial Medal and this year's extraordinary honorees in this issue of *Colloquy*.

The **Harvard Medal** and **HAA Alumni Award** are additional opportunities to recognize extraordinary alumni! These awards acknowledge dedicated service and commitment to Harvard University in as many areas as can be imagined, including teaching, fundraising, leadership, and broader alumni activities.

●●● To learn more about the Harvard Medal and HAA Alumni Award and submit a nomination, visit alumni.harvard.edu/community/about-haa/recognition.

colloquy

SUMMER/FALL 2024

8 ELECTIONS

Hope for Democracy | 10

Steve Ansolabehere says voting is alive and well in the US – but it can always be improved

From Possibility to Public Policy | 16

Tyler Simko uses data science to make voting more fair

22 PAYING IT FORWARD

2024 Centennial Medalists are distinguished by excellence as scholars and mentors



3 Voices

Alumni and students speak about their research, their lives, and their time at Harvard Griffin GSAS

4 Talking Points

Boosting financial aid, new deans, Kavli laureates, and more

6 Conversation

Erica Caple James on insecurity and democracy in Haiti

30 Noteworthy

Mateo Jarquín on the last major revolution of the 20th century

32 Connect

Save the date for upcoming alumni events!

••• **Contact Colloquy:** Send your questions and comments about the magazine to gsas.comms@fas.harvard.edu. We'd love to hear from you!



SINCE I WROTE LAST, events have shaken both our country and the world, the effects of which we continue to grapple with. True to our engaged community, I have heard from many of you about your concerns, your thoughts, and your ideas. What remains clear to me is that the importance of graduate education in cultivating and practicing deep thinking and resistance to easy answers has never

been more essential. Our commitment to our students persists, and our scholar-first mentality will carry us into the next academic year, which will prove to be a productive season. With the revitalization of The Advising Project (TAP), which will elevate and amplify the power of the advising relationship, coupled with the continued findings of the *Report of the GSAS Admissions and Graduate Education (GAGE) Working Group*, our community will thrive with research, study, and connection.

The campus will be active with events and chances to learn, including multiple opportunities to engage with our students, from Alumni Day to the Harvard Horizons Symposium. I invite you to join me in Cambridge and see everyone at work, with our students doing what they do best: questioning, discovering, and setting the stage for future innovation and impact.

Our community's influence is worldwide. What you'll read throughout these pages is a sample of the myriad ways that Harvard Griffin GSAS is the beating heart of the University. The fundamental and lasting contributions of this year's recipients of our Centennial Medal—the highest honor bestowed by the School—to knowledge, their disciplines, their colleagues, and society are just one example.

Additionally, the months ahead also bring the culmination of a presidential election in the United States. In this issue, you'll see stories that demonstrate the influence of Harvard Griffin GSAS and its alumni on society, and how their efforts help safeguard elections and preserve democracies.

Thank you for reading and listening alongside me.

—EMMA DENCH
DEAN

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SUMMER/
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Access current and back issues of *Colloquy* at gsas.harvard.edu/colloquy and find a range of other alumni services and information at gsas.harvard.edu/alumni.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome your feedback and ideas. Write to: *Colloquy*, Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 1350 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 350 Cambridge, MA 02138-3846; or email gsascomms@fas.harvard.edu.

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Some of the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences' remarkable students and alumni speak about their research, their lives, and their time at the School.

••• Read the full profiles and find many more at gsas.harvard.edu/news/topic/voices.

A PASSION FOR UNTOLD STORIES

I left high school to help support my family sometime around the 2007 financial crisis when unemployment in the Detroit area was very high. Like a lot of folks, I turned to “under the table” jobs—work that was on a cash basis and off the books. One time I worked in construction 14 hours a day for a week only to have the boss renege on most of my wages and pay me only \$70—a dollar an hour. Experiences like that are in part why I developed a passion for telling untold stories, especially those that too often fall outside the remit of economic history.

JOSHUA LINKOUS, PHD STUDENT
History and East Asian Languages



'BARBARIANS' OR BIG THINKERS?

I originally came from a math and physics background. For my master's degree, I got interested in intellectual history and was drawn to the academic achievements of scholars during the Mongol Empire. It is easy to typecast the Mongols as barbaric and uneducated, but the Mongol rulers of Iran commissioned the building of an observatory that was the largest in the world at the time and paid stipends for scholars and students. While the observatory lost funding and eventually shuttered when the Mongols lost power in the region, its existence upends stereotypical understandings of them.

CARINA DREYER, PHD STUDENT
Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations



SEEING HOW WE SEE

My research seeks to understand how we group smaller chunks of visual information to form holistic shapes and objects, drawing comparisons between human and artificial vision. This work is paving the way to decipher the intricate code we and our artificial counterparts use to interpret the world visually. For example, picture a toaster oven covered in cat fur. An artificial vision system gets confused and registers it as a cat, misled by the furry texture. In contrast, you and I would still see it as a toaster oven. This thought experiment sheds light on how our biological vision is more sophisticated and nuanced than current technology.

FENIL DOSHI, PHD STUDENT
Psychology



CAPABLE AND CURIOUS

Working at a Hispanic-serving institution like the University of California, Irvine is a much different experience from my time at Yale and Harvard. My classes are a mix of small seminars and lectures with over a hundred students. Many of my students are Latinx and come from socioeconomic backgrounds similar to my own. A number are undocumented. They are amazing students, capable and curious about topics in Chicano/Latino Studies. I enjoy enabling them to bring their personal experiences to class and contextualize them in different ways.

CHRISTOFER RODELO, PHD '22
American Studies



A Boost to Graduate Student Financial Aid



Dean Emma Dench last winter announced a substantial enhancement to financial support for Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) students.

Beginning with the 2024–2025 academic year, the annual 12-month stipend for all PhD students will increase to at least \$50,000. On July 1, 2024, the monthly stipend rose to \$4,083, with future increases taking effect on July 1 annually.

In response to student needs, the GSAS Summer Research Award will also reflect the new stipend rate. Academic year-only stipends, such as the dissertation completion fellowship, will be adjusted to \$40,830 for a 10-month period. Additionally, a new “top-up” policy for teaching supplements will offer a guaranteed fixed amount of \$7,265 per term, irrespective of

teaching commitments. This flexible approach acknowledges the diverse ways students support themselves in their G3–G6 years.

These changes, informed by the 2023 GSAS Admissions and Graduate Education Working Group report, underscore the School’s commitment to enhancing financial stability for graduate students. Expressing gratitude to the group of University leaders whose support made the enhancements possible, Dench wrote, “This direction is critical to our mission: to cultivate an environment where every student can be successful.”

FOSTERING DIALOGUE AND INCLUSION AT FAS

Last February, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) announced two moves to enhance the academic environment. The Classroom Social Compact Committee led by professors **Maya Jasanoff** and **David Laibson** aims to foster civil discourse and academic freedom through conversations about classroom dynamics. At the same time, efforts to promote inclusion and belonging were also strengthened with the appointment of **Brenda Tindal**, the new senior adviser on academic community engagement, who will develop programs encouraging dialogue and collaboration among diverse groups within FAS. The moves complement ongoing civil discourse and artificial intelligence projects, demonstrating, as FAS Dean Hopi Hoekstra wrote to the community, “we have the wisdom and insight we need to make FAS and Harvard stronger when we move forward together.”



FROM THE COLLOQUY PODCAST

“People who understand how to work with words and how conceptually to play in spaces are going to really excel at using large language models, ChatGPT, and generative AI, in general.”

— TUFTS UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR JAMES INTRILIGATOR, PHD '97, on the *Colloquy* podcast: gsas.harvard.edu/news/colloquy-podcast-glide-path-getting-most-chatgpt



Juhee Kang, PhD '24

Horizons Symposium Highlights Student Research

How can physics transform fashion? Are “forever chemicals” more widespread – and more toxic – than previously thought? What sort of data do policymakers need to improve the lives of incarcerated mothers and their children? Some of Harvard Griffin GSAS’s most brilliant scholars presented their groundbreaking research addressing these and other fascinating questions during the annual Harvard Horizons Symposium at Sanders Theatre on April 9. The event was the culmination of a months-long process that provided eight students personalized coaching sessions with faculty mentors and the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning to enhance their presentation skills. “The 2024 scholars exemplify the research impact of thousands of alumni who have graduated over our more than 150-year history,” Dean **Emma Dench** said. “All power to the Harvard PhD.”

● ● ● **Find complete coverage of Harvard Horizons:**
news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2024/04/from-scissors-pfas-everywhere-to-effects-of-standardized-tests-incarcerated-moms.



ALUMNI NAMED KAVLI PRIZE LAUREATES

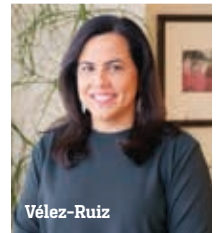
Three Harvard Griffin GSAS graduates were among the eight recipients of the 2024 Kavli Prize, which “honors outstanding researchers doing fundamental science that moves the world forward.” Harvard Professor **David Charbonneau**, PhD '01, and **Sara Seager**, PhD '99, each earned a share of the prize for astrophysics. **Doris Ying Tsao**, PhD '02, was one of three laureates in the field of neuroscience. The three alumni and their five cohorts will each receive a portion of the \$3 million awarded by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

CURCIO AND VÉLEZ-RUIZ JOIN LEADERSHIP

Harvard Griffin GSAS welcomed two new leaders to its administration last winter. **Tony Curcio** joined the School in January as its inaugural director of financial aid. Known as an innovator, Curcio developed a technologically integrated financial aid system for students in his previous role at Harvard Law School. In February, **Dr. Gisselle Vélez-Ruiz** became the School’s new director of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Vélez-Ruiz previously led the Office of STEM Engagement and Inclusion at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. At Harvard Griffin GSAS, she will develop strategic initiatives to support an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment for students and enhance efforts to recruit and retain members of minoritized groups.



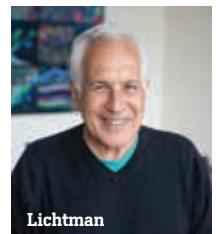
Curcio



Vélez-Ruiz

NEW DEANS OF SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) Dean Hopi Hoekstra appointed two new divisional deans at FAS last April. Professor **Jeff Lichtman**, a neuroscientist who researches the dramatic rewiring of neural connections that takes place in early postnatal mammalian development, was named divisional dean of science. Professor of Philosophy **Sean Kelly**, who explores aspects of the phenomenological and cognitive neuroscientific nature of human existence, was tapped as the new divisional dean of arts and humanities. “Jeff brings people together in genuine collaboration to advance the frontiers of knowledge,” Hoekstra wrote in her announcement about Lichtman. “[Sean] is known for his . . . ability to build community around issues of genuine significance,” the dean wrote in her note about Kelly. Lichtman and Kelly began their new roles on July 1.



Lichtman



Kelly



INSECURITY AND DEMOCRACY IN HAITI

ERICA CAPLE JAMES, PHD '03, IS A MEDICAL AND PSYCHIATRIC ANTHROPOLOGIST WHOSE FIRST BOOK, *DEMOCRATIC INSECURITIES: VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND INTERVENTION IN HAITI*, DOCUMENTED THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF HAITIAN TORTURE SURVIVORS TARGETED DURING THE 1991–1994 COUP PERIOD, ANALYZING THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN “POST-CONFLICT” NATIONS MAKING THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY. CURRENTLY A PROFESSOR AT THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, JAMES OUTLINES THE ROOTS OF THE COUNTRY’S CURRENT UNREST AND SAYS THAT ULTIMATELY, STABILITY AND SECURITY MUST COME THROUGH GOVERNANCE THAT IS ACCOUNTABLE TO HAITI’S PEOPLE.

What does the Creole word *ensekirite* mean?

In a word, “insecurity” but of a particular kind. It’s very much like what the social scientist Anthony Giddens calls ontological insecurity—insecurity at the level of being from one moment to the next. Many in Haiti can’t assume a normative level of security from the built environment, social institutions, or family—none of the aspects of life that help humans develop psychologically and otherwise. *Ensekirite* in Haiti plays out in almost every area of life—including the physical bodies of the people there. Almost invariably, when Haitians described *ensekirite* and outer social space to me during my research, they also linked it to back pain, frequent headaches, and stomachaches. Their psychological experience had been somaticized: fear was ar-

“Ensekirite in Haiti plays out in almost every area of life, including the physical bodies of the people there.”

—ERICA CAPLE JAMES

ticated and experienced in the body. It was almost embedded at the cellular level.

How did it start?

A native Haitian person would understand ensekirite specifically as connoting political and criminal violence between 1991 and 1994 after the coup that overthrew then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, but it began under the hereditary dictatorship of the Duvalier family that ruled Haiti from 1957 until its overthrow in 1986.

After his election in 1957, Francois Duvalier—“Papa Doc”—declared himself president for life and established a paramilitary force, the Tonton Macoute, to consolidate power. At first, it targeted more elite families that tended to be of mixed heritage. Then the use of repression spread to the general population and became indiscriminate, extending to women, children, and the elderly—populations that were formerly considered untouchable or innocent. The strategy was to control everyday life through a sort of violence that violated ethical and moral norms. Keep in mind that the government of Haiti throughout this time was viewed as a friend to the United States, which felt that its business interests benefited from having a strong authoritarian leader in control.

The election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president was a moment of hope for Haiti. Then the coup you mentioned forced him to flee in 1991. In 1994, US and UN forces intervened to provide aid and restore democracy. Why weren't these efforts successful?

The way that US aid was distributed was often governed and structured by a specific goal that was intended to benefit US business interests abroad. International

development assistance was a means to create favorable economic relations, so the institutions supported didn't necessarily have the autonomy, sovereignty, or authority of Haiti as their primary goal.

Additionally, aid was funneled through so-called independent institutions—non-governmental organizations—because it was thought that Haitian institutions of governance could not be trusted. These programs usually had a grant cycle—I call it a grant economy—in which the provision of aid was intended to meet particular deliverables. And so, whether it was a citizenship education initiative or a police-community relations program or, in rare cases, housing, the gaze of the person in charge of the funds was back to the donor and less to the people they were meant to serve. The fulfillment of the deliverable was, in part, the goal—along with the hope of renewed funding.

The second iteration of the US Agency for International Development-supported Human Rights Fund, for instance, aimed to promote human rights and democracy and also to reduce the negative psychosocial symptoms that Haitian victims of human rights abuses experienced. During my research, I found that the process of providing psychological support was often shaped by the need to make it empirically legible to the larger donor institution. The need to manage funds and to fulfill a certain set of results within a specific grant cycle or calendar put a tremendous amount of pressure on those delivering aid. But the time frame didn't necessarily accord in any way with the path of Haitians toward greater security, lower symptomatology, greater capacity to find stable employment, etc. And, of course, this all occurred in the larger context of ensekirite.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Professor of Medical Anthropology and Urban Studies, 2023-Present

Associate Professor of Medical Anthropology and Urban Studies, 2017-2023

Assistant/Associate Professor of Anthropology, 2004-2017

Harvard Medical School

Lecturer, Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, 2015-2017

Harvard University

PhD in Social Anthropology, 2003

Harvard Divinity School

MTS, 1995

Princeton University

AB in Anthropology, 1992

Is there any end in sight to the extreme unrest in the country?

I think the biggest challenge is disarmament. If the gangs don't disarm then there will be no ability to create conditions in which folks are not afraid of kidnapping or violence. There's the possibility of integrating the gangs into civil society as political actors, but, again, are they going to remain armed? There was an effort to incorporate gang members into the national police force in the 1990s and it created divisions and conflicts that recurred for years afterward.

There needs to be a Haitian-initiated plan for security and the sustainability of democracy that is supported by the population. That's the best way to build institutions that can move beyond governance by force and build a civil society. 🍷



Elections

How to make voting easier, fairer, and more secure



STAKES ARE HIGH FOR THE 2024 US ELECTIONS. But while citizens on all sides of the political spectrum may harbor fears about the country's fate after November 5, Frank G. Thompson Professor of Government Stephen Ansolabehere, PhD '89, says they can be confident in the election system's integrity. And for those losing faith in democracy, Ansolabehere, recent graduate Tyler Simko, and their collaborators at Harvard and MIT have some innovative ideas about how to make voting more easy and fair without sacrificing election security.



Hope *for* Democracy

Steve Ansolabehere says voting is alive and well in the US.



That doesn't mean it can't be improved. BY PAUL MASSARI



WHEN A BOSTON PRECINCT was having trouble with voting, they called Steve Ansolabehere, PhD '89, Harvard's Frank G. Thompson Professor of Government and the director of the University's Center for Amer-

ican Political Studies. The problem at the South Boston school where citizens cast their ballots was long lines. If that sounds trivial, consider that waiting in line, along with inconvenient voting hours and polling locations, may have discouraged an estimated 730,000 people from voting in 2012, according to a white paper that Ansolabehere and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Charles Stewart III submitted to the US Election Assistance Commission in 2013. The opportunity cost of lost wages was an estimated \$544 million.

Ansolabehere called Stewart and his MIT colleague Stephen Graves, an expert in operations management. The trio arrived at the school, looked around, and sized up the problem.

"Two precincts were voting in one location," Ansolabehere remembers. "One precinct was large; the other was small. The first table you encountered when you entered was for the small precinct, so the line was out the door with people who needed to vote at the large one. Precinct signs were taped low to the tables so most people couldn't see them. We suggested they put the large precinct at the first table and post the signs up high. The problem went away."

Steve Ansolabehere would be the first to admit that the solutions to many of the challenges facing US democracy are not as simple as the ones he encountered on that day in South Boston. The notion that the 2020 election was "stolen" has become an article of faith for politicians on the right. On the left, there are concerns about voter suppression, particularly in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2013 decision to strike down a portion of the landmark Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965. But Ansolabehere says our US elections are both more secure and fairer than their most strident critics contend. Moreover, just

as with the polling station he and his MIT colleagues visited, some relatively straightforward, practical changes could translate into big improvements both in access and election integrity.

The Truth about Voter Fraud

Nearly two-thirds of Americans are confident in the accuracy of US elections, according to a 2022 Gallup poll, but concerns vary dramatically by political affiliation. Around 85 percent of Democrats are very or somewhat confident in election integrity compared to only 40 percent of Republicans—the largest gap Gallup has recorded in 20 years.

Ansolabehere says that in-person voter fraud is rare in the US. How rare? Justin Levitt, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, studied more than 1 billion ballots cast in general, primary, special, and municipal elections from 2000 through 2014. He found just 31 instances of fraud. In fact, officials in the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency issued a statement during the waning days of the Trump administration calling the 2020 presidential election "the most secure in American history."

What about allegations of 2016 and 2020 ballots cast in the name of deceased citizens? Ansolabehere cites research that matched voting and death records. "Cases of somebody who had a ballot recorded who had died were extremely rare," he says. "Even then, some were people who legally voted absentee at their nursing home or elsewhere before the deadline and then they died, which is obviously legal."

How about accusations of underage voting? Ansolabehere points out that some states and towns allow people as young as 16 to vote in municipal elections. "You'll see 17-year-olds on the voter files in some places, but they're not voting in federal or statewide elections," he says.



YOU'VE GOT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE scrutinizing [voting] data across the United States. There are election lawyers on both sides looking for evidence of something irregular. If a concern holds water, it usually gets flagged." —STEVE ANSOLABEHERE

As for charges that non-citizens cast millions of votes in 2016 and 2020, Ansolabehere is unequivocal: No data supports these claims. “There was a dispute about one survey, and it was shown to be a matter of measurement error: people clicking the wrong button on the survey explained what some claimed was illegal immigrant voting.”

At MIT, Charles Stewart’s examination of the data supports the assessment of his longtime colleague and research collaborator. “There were people who were deceased whose ballots were illegally counted in 2020,” he says. “Some non-citizens voted in 2020 as well. But it was one voter here, one voter there. The numbers were very small. They certainly didn’t determine the outcome of the election.”

Concerns about election integrity are hardly new. Less than a generation ago, the controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election inspired Congress to pass 2002’s

Help America Vote Act (HAVA), signed into law by President George W. Bush. Ansolabehere, whose Voting Technology Project was a major influence on HAVA, says one of the results of the legislation was an expansion of absentee voting often led by states with majority Republican electorates. Since 2000, the practice has ballooned from 10 percent of ballots cast to 60 percent in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, absentee voting was relatively uncontroversial—members of both major political parties preferred the convenience—until recent years. But Ansolabehere says the rapid expansion of the practice does present legitimate concerns, particularly when it comes to counting every vote.

“If you are in a rural area in the United States and you mail your ballot, it takes longer to go through the postal system,” he explains. “So, the states need to know how long it takes, change their voting deadlines to align with when the ballots are all coming in, and make sure they’re counted.”

HAVA also mandated the creation of statewide voter registration databases, making it easier than ever to spot fraud when it happens. Ansolabehere points to the case of North Carolina’s Ninth Congressional District during the 2018 election. Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr., a political operative for Republican House candidate Mark Harris, spearheaded an effort to fake signatures on absentee ballots, destroy legitimate ballots, and fill in others. A political scientist at North Carolina State University noticed anomalies in the election data and identified the deceit.

“That’s one of the great things about our system right now. It’s very transparent,” says Ansolabehere. “You’ve got thousands of people scrutinizing the data across the United States. There are election lawyers on both sides looking for evidence of something irregular. If a concern holds water, it usually gets flagged.”

PROBLEM SOLVER: Ansolabehere and colleagues Charles Stewart and Devon Shaw penned a report for President Obama’s Commission on Election Administration in 2013 that was lauded for its practical solutions to problems confronting voters in the 2012 presidential election.



A Changing Landscape

The rarity of voter fraud hasn't stopped legislatures nationwide from passing laws designed to limit access to the ballot box. According to the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice, lawmakers passed at least 17 restrictive measures in 14 states during 2023. The laws include new restrictions on mail-in voting, bans on ballot drop boxes, and stricter photo ID requirements. Ansolabehere acknowledges that more restrictive voting laws impact voter turnout, but the hit is often less than opponents fear.

"It's been widely studied and debated in the literature and it's hard to identify a sizable effect of, say, restrictive voter ID laws," he says. "In Texas, for instance, maybe 25,000 people would be affected one way or the other but that's a really small percentage in a state with around 16 million voters."

That said, the legal system has a responsibility to ensure that no one who is eligible is prevented from voting. "The questions for judges looking at new restrictions on voting are, 'Was there any reason to be concerned about fraud in the first place? Has anyone ever committed fraud with this system? Have these laws ever prevented it?'" Ansolabehere says. "In the court cases where these measures have been thrown out, it's usually because there's no evidence that they would improve election integrity but plenty of indication that they would adversely affect certain groups of voters."

Those "certain groups" are often people of color, particularly since the Supreme Court's 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*. In that case, the Court struck down section 5 of

the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which required states with a history of racial discrimination to get clearance from the US Department of Justice (DOJ) or a federal court before changing voting laws. In response, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund said *Shelby County v. Holder* "broke democracy," "gutted essential protections of the VRA," "ushered in a wave of discriminatory voting and redistricting laws," and "irrevocably changed the landscape of voting rights in the United States."

Ansolabehere says the Court's decision has had unforeseen consequences—including some that have actually bolstered efforts to secure voting rights. In reality, the DOJ almost always granted section 5 preclearance to states. Once a state got preclearance, it became much more difficult for plaintiffs to sue under section 2 of the VRA, which targets intentional discrimination. Without the prophylactic effect of preclearance, though, the legal landscape changed.

"There were a bunch of new lawsuits in 2015," Ansolabehere says. "The plaintiffs started winning. Things that were precleared were suddenly thrown out."

Ansolabehere speaks from personal experience. In 2016, he joined a lawsuit filed by colleague and election lawyer Kevin J. Hamilton alleging racial gerrymandering in North Carolina's 12th Congressional District. "The legislature packed Black voters into these two districts," Hamilton explains. "The result of that was to 'bleach' the surrounding districts, making them much more white and much friendlier to the party in power. Concentrating Black voters into Black districts and white voters into white ones also tended to eliminate swing districts—places where elections could have been competitive."

Hamilton says Ansolabehere provided critical research on historical voting patterns and demographics that enabled the plaintiffs to prove lawmakers had divided voters based on the color



THE COST OF WAITING: MIT Professor Charles Stewart III collaborated with Ansolabehere on research that estimated the opportunity cost of wages lost by those waiting in line to vote during the 2012 election at \$544 million.

of their skin. His Harvard colleague was pretty sharp on the witness stand, too.

“Steve testified that the district was the ‘least compact in American history,’” Hamilton remembers. “‘How do you know that?’ asked North Carolina’s attorney Tom Farr during his cross-examination. Steve’s eyes lit up. ‘Oh, that’s easy,’ he said. ‘I just calculated the compactness score of every congressional district in American history and then sorted them.’ Farr was completely shut down.”

Hamilton won the case. A district that had been upheld before *Shelby County v. Holder*—“one of the worst examples of a racial gerrymander in thirty years,” according to Ansolabehere—was ruled unconstitutional and thrown out. North Carolina created a compact majority Black district in the Charlotte area.

Moreover, Ansolabehere says minority voting has held steady since the *Shelby County* decision. When it declined, the dip was more likely due to who was on the ballot. “You could see a pretty big spike in Black voting when President Obama was on the ticket and then it dropped when he wasn’t,” he says. “Hispanic voting has continued to trend upward. So it doesn’t look like the end of section 5 has had a big impact on minority turnout—in part because challenges to racial gerrymandering and restrictive laws have been more successful in court.”

Registration and Reform

Although Ansolabehere argues the United States electoral system may be both more secure and accessible than its critics contend, he is conscious of its weaknesses. Among them is the system’s decentralization. “There are 8,000 election offices and about 200,000 precincts throughout the US,” he notes, an often-disconnected network responsible for serving a diverse electorate. The intricate system allows for localized representation but also presents administrative challenges. “In any given election, voters cast ballots for many different offices at once,” Ansolabehere explains. “All those election offices have to generate unique ballots for each precinct, manage the recruitment and training of poll workers, and ensure the accurate tallying and reporting of votes.” Absentee voting adds another layer of complexity to the system.

Stewart says decentralization and the barriers to registration it creates are reasons why the US lags behind other developed nations in the participation rates of voters under the age of 35. “Americans in general—and young people in particular—are notoriously mobile,” he says. “Right now, the system requires people to update their registration whenever they move. Often, people don’t know that.”

To address these issues, Ansolabehere and Stewart suggest several reforms aimed at enhancing participation and accessibility while maintaining election integrity. First is the widespread adoption of automatic voter registration.

“One of the only ways to move the needle on participation rates among young people is to lower the barriers,” Stewart explains. “Automatic registration would allow them to sign up to vote whenever they interacted with the government—when obtaining or renewing a driver’s license, for instance. It would go a long way toward getting voters onto the rolls and keeping those rolls updated when people move. And it would have ripple effects because we know from research that once someone votes, they tend to keep voting.”

Next, Ansolabehere suggests finishing the work started by the Help America Vote Act. A national voter list integrated from the state databases mandated by HAVA would streamline voter registration and reduce the incidence of duplicates. “You do see people registered in New York and Florida,” he explains. “They live half the year in one place, half the year in the other, and just assume it’s okay to vote in both. A national list would help address that problem and address systemic inequities by ensuring that every eligible citizen has access to the ballot. And the thing is, it already exists. Private vendors pull it together from the state lists. Academics and political parties use it for research all the time. It’s a small administrative step for the government to create it.”

Ansolabehere also calls for increased federal investment in studies of election administration. He envisions a dedicated division within the National Science Foundation focused on election integrity and accessibility, which could provide valuable data to state and local election officials. “It would make a big difference to the way that social scientists could help inform the decisions that counties and states make,” he says.

Finally, Ansolabehere proposes the establishment of a national election report that includes certified vote counts from every precinct in the US. “This report would enhance transparency and provide a reliable data backbone for the electoral system,” he says.

Ansolabehere contends that these reforms are practical, low cost, and relatively easy to implement. The real challenge, he acknowledges, is changing the country’s political culture so that improvements can be made. “There’s something about our politics right now that is not accepting of loss,” he says. “If you look at our government over the last 25 years, it flips back and forth between the parties. It’s often divided so even if you lose the White House, for instance, you’re never totally out of power. That’s an important thing to keep in mind.” 🍷



From

Possibility Public Policy

Tyler Simko uses data science to make education and voting more fair

BY PAUL MASSARI

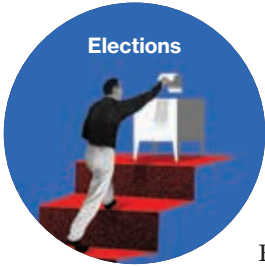
AS PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION in his hometown of South Amboy, New Jersey, Tyler Simko negotiated the complexities of educational policy and budget allocations while engaging with stakeholders in his community. Elected to the board while still in his twenties, he discovered early on the power that local officials have to effect change in the lives of citizens.

“Serving on a school board has a much more direct impact than most academic work,” Simko says. “Academics often study things in the abstract and try to make generalizable arguments. That’s important work but it’s different from putting those insights into practice.”

Simko, who graduated last May with a PhD in government, combined research with action in his years at Harvard’s Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (Harvard Griffin GSAS). Now, as then, his goal is to bridge the gap between possibility and public policy, making innovative use of computer algorithms and machine learning to address electoral issues like partisan gerrymandering as well as larger concerns like de facto racial segregation in public schools.



PRESIDENTIAL TIMBER: While still in his twenties, Tyler Simko, PhD '24, was elected leader of the board of education of his hometown of South Amboy, New Jersey.



Sounding the ALARM on Gerrymandering

As a founder of the Algorithm-Assisted Redistricting Methodology (ALARM) Project, Simko collaborates with Professor of Government and of Statistics Kosuke Imai, PhD '03—as well as students from Harvard's graduate schools, Harvard College, and local high schools—to dissect gerrymandering, the partisan manipulation of electoral boundaries, through the use of powerful computational tools (see “Partisan Gerrymandering in Congressional Districts,” page 19). Some of the software the group has developed—including a package of tools called *redist* created in collaboration with Imai, Harvard Griffin GSAS student Christopher Kenny, alumnus Cory McCartan, PhD '23, and research scientist Ben Fifield—is being used for research, litigation, and policy across the United States and in countries like Japan.

“We use the *redist* software to create alternative districts that follow state and federal requirements, like Idaho's rule that congressional districts with multiple counties should connect based on the interstate highway system,” Simko says. “We then evaluate outliers by comparing the real, enacted plans to a distribution of simulated plans the state could have used.”

These sampled plans can serve as a baseline for non-partisan redistricting, says Professor Imai. “If the enacted plan favors one party, it serves as empirical evidence for partisan bias,” he explains. “We can use these algorithms and empirical evidence to help policymakers figure out the best policy.”

The ALARM team's algorithm has already helped courts in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania decide whether enacted redistricting plans have a significant partisan bias. ALARM's tools have also been used at the US Supreme Court level in

the Alabama racial gerrymandering case *Allen v. Milligan*, which reaffirmed that a core portion of the Voting Rights Act can be applied legally to redistricting. In collaboration with Harvard Griffin GSAS student Emma Ebowe and Harvard College student Michael Zhao, the group is now studying reforms that could lead to fairer congressional districts.

“The ALARM group at Harvard has been a perfect way to combine my passion for policy impact with research,” Simko says.

Taking the LocalView

While doing work that has a national impact, Simko is still focused on the local level. He points out that local governments often have the greatest influence on the day-to-day lives of citizens. City councils and planning boards across the country have extensive power over issues like land use, education, and public health. But because power is so decentralized—and local journalism is vanishing—few large-scale data sources on local policymaking are easily available to researchers, academics, journalists, and the public.

To bridge the information gap, Simko and Soubhik Barari, PhD '23, launched *LocalView*, which uses computational tools to collect hundreds of thousands of meeting videos from local governments across the United States. “*LocalView* enables researchers to use the text, audio, and video data from these meetings to answer all kinds of important public policy questions,” Simko says. “Others, like journalists and the public, can use the data to understand what conversations are happening in communities across the country.”

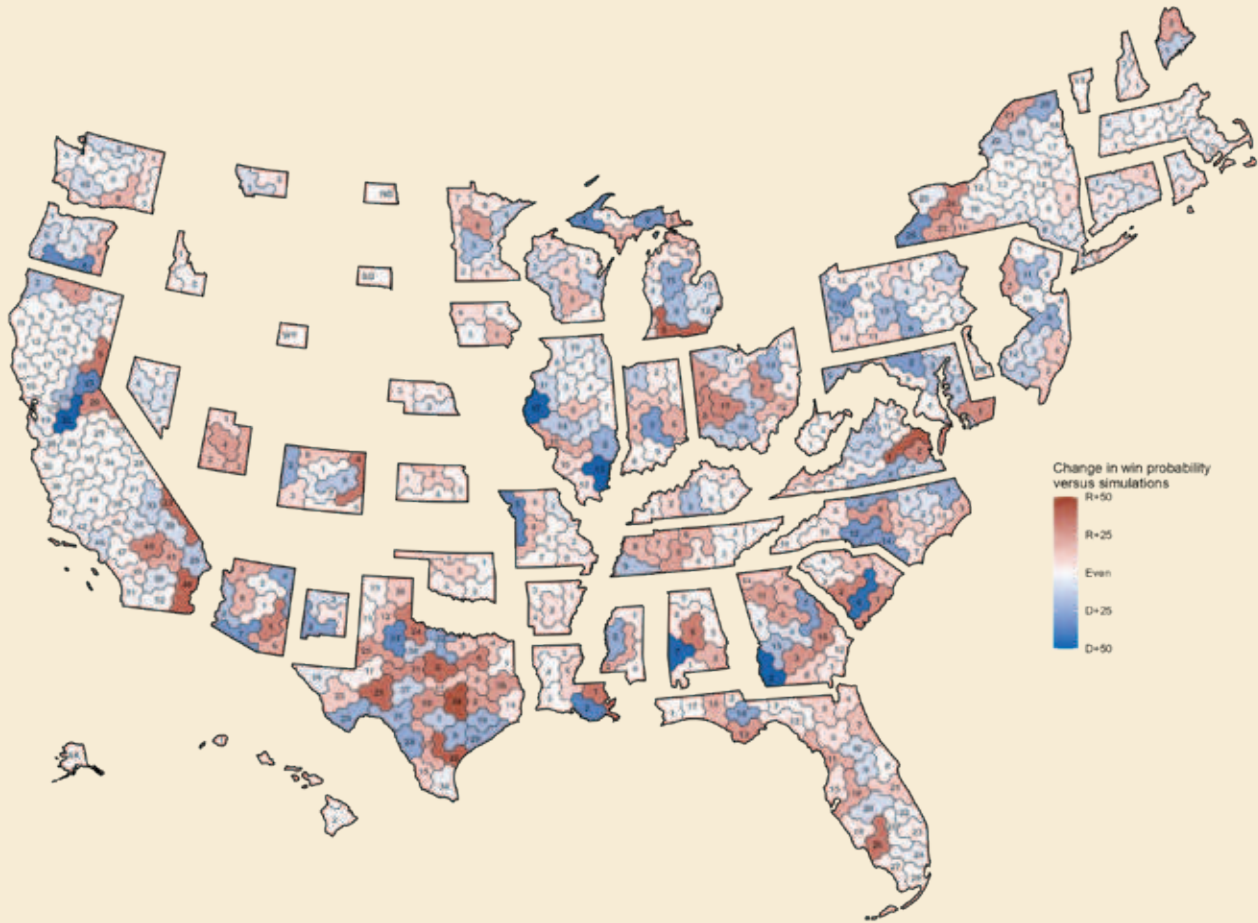
In collaboration with Professor Rebecca Johnson of Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy, *LocalView* recently expanded to collect over 100,000 videos of school board meetings around the US. “We aim to increase



I USE ALGORITHMIC TOOLS to transparently evaluate many possible [redistricting] alternatives and characterize when and where policies can be effective.

—TYLER SYMKO

Partisan Gerrymandering in Congressional Districts



GERRYMANDERING DISSECTED: ALARM's map represents the difference between the probability that a district as currently configured will be represented by one of the two major political parties compared to that of a simulated plan that follows state and federal requirements. "If the [current] plan favors one party, it serves as empirical evidence for partisan bias," says Harvard Professor Kosuke Imai, PhD '03.

transparency, informed decision-making, and real-world impact," Simko says.

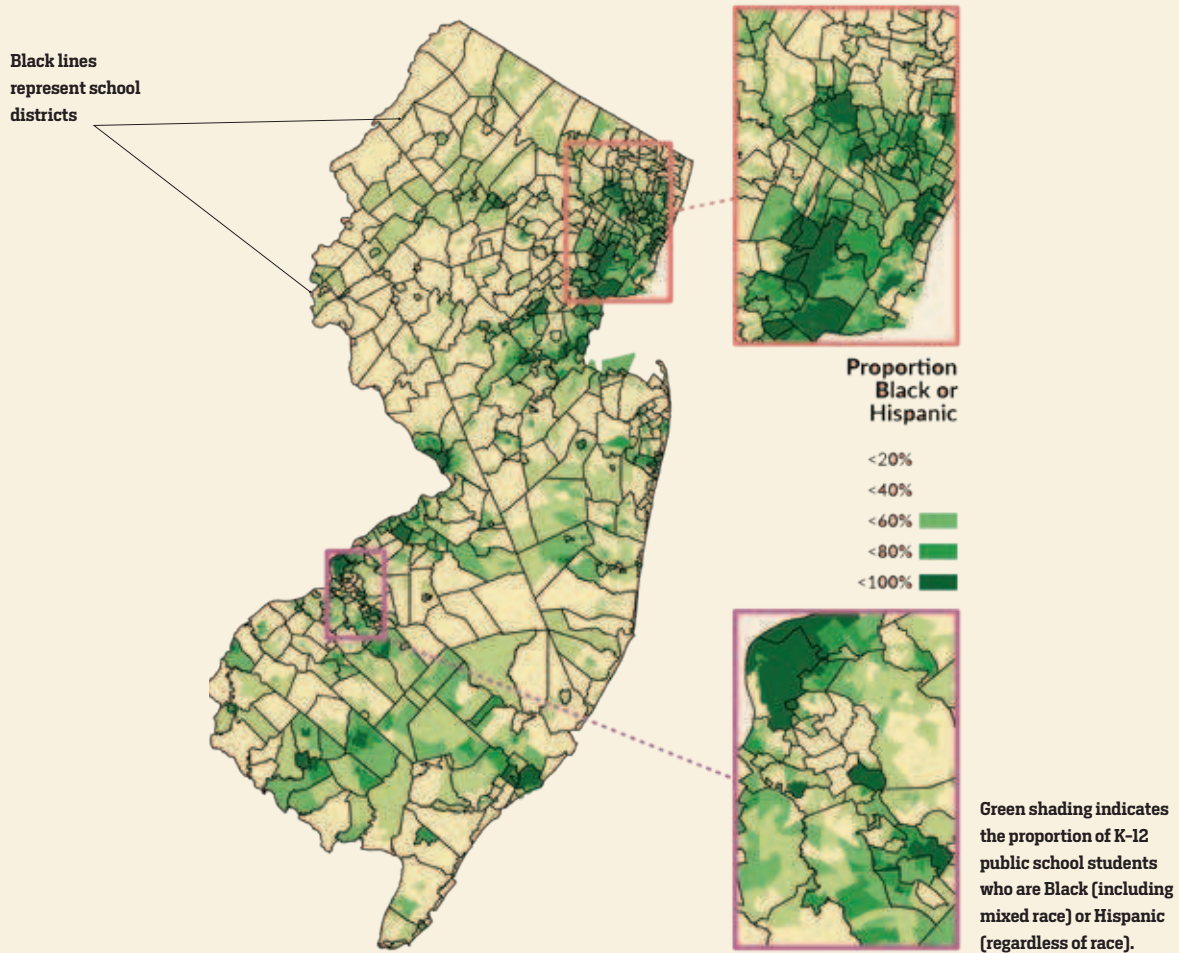
Taking on Segregation in Schools

Because national politics and legislation dominate the headlines, people are often surprised, Simko says, by how much influence local officials can have over their lives. "School boards approve the curriculum, set the budget, choose the textbooks, and negotiate union contracts with teachers and other district staff. They often have a low profile but are very powerful."

In New Jersey, as in many states, the lines drawn on maps have far-reaching consequences for educational equity. While de jure segregation was outlawed after the US Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, de facto racial segregation persists across the US, fueled by zoning patterns and residential choices (see "K-12 Public School Segregation in New Jersey," page 20).

"New Jersey is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the country, but residential segregation is also strong," Simko says. "Like several other states, New Jersey generally divides school districts by town, which are often highly

K-12 Public School Segregation in New Jersey



SEGREGATION IN FACT: Racial segregation in schools has been illegal since 1954 but it persists in states like New Jersey that divide school districts by town.

segregated. These boundaries also often divide homes that are more expensive from those that are more affordable.”

Simko cites the example of the small, affluent community of Glen Ridge, New Jersey. “There’s no legal requirement that low-income students can’t attend school in Glen Ridge, but low-income families are effectively priced out of living in town,” he observes.

The situation has given rise to debates about how US public schools draw their district lines. It’s also sparked lawsuits like

Latino Action Network v. New Jersey, with plaintiffs claiming that the state has failed to remedy segregation caused by school districts and seeking to break the boundary lines in the name of equity. The challenge for those bringing suit, however, is to find alternative ways to draw the boundaries. “It’s not clear how districts could be redesigned to be more racially or socio-economically integrated without increasing other constraints like student enrollment and travel time,” Simko says.

To address the challenge, Simko uses computational algo-



WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE state officials using the algorithms directly to redraw school district lines, Tyler’s results make it vividly clear that it is politics and not practical considerations that stand in the way.” —HARVARD PROFESSOR MARTIN WEST, PHD ’06

gorithms to redraw school districts according to different guidelines and then compares how each would change outcomes like racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation. “For example, states could keep school district lines the same and reassign students to different schools,” Simko explains. “Or states could redraw the district lines entirely. States could even draw school districts at the county or regional level like they do in much of the South.”

Simko says it’s hard to know in advance which approach might work best in a particular setting because of logistic constraints—say, the number of existing schools—and the geographical distribution of students. “That’s why I use algorithmic tools to transparently evaluate many possible alternatives and characterize when and where policies can be effective,” he says.

Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Education Martin West, PhD ’06, says that Simko’s algorithms reveal just how much progress could be made toward desegregating schools simply by redrawing district boundaries. “In New Jersey, racial segregation could be cut nearly in half even without requiring

students to travel farther to school or the construction of new facilities,” he says. “While it is difficult to imagine state officials using the algorithms directly to redraw school district lines, Tyler’s results make it vividly clear that it is politics and not practical considerations that stand in the way.”

Simko says he and his colleagues are not proposing to simply turn the school districting process over to algorithms, no matter how well-intentioned their designers may be. “These tools are not meant to be prescriptive,” he says. “Complex policies like school assignments should ultimately be decided in conversation with stakeholders like district officials, families, and staff. However, these tools allow us to make it very clear what the possibilities are under different policies compared to where we are today.”



LOCAL LEVEL: (Left) A lawn sign for Simko’s re-election bid in South Amboy. (Right) A screenshot from the LocalView project, which enables researchers to access over 100,000 videos of school board meetings from across the United States.

Paying It Forward

2024 CENTENNIAL MEDALISTS ARE DISTINGUISHED BY EXCELLENCE AS SCHOLARS AND MENTORS **BY ELIZABETH GEHRMAN** | ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT COOK



The members of the 2024 Centennial Medalist cohort—like those of the past 35 years—have defined excellence in their chosen fields. “All four of this year’s medalists have increased our understanding of life around us and saluted Harvard with their incredible gifts,” says David Staines, PhD ’73, a professor of English at the University of Ottawa and chair of the Graduate School Alumni Association Council’s Medals Committee.

But, Staines says, the 2024 honorees—a writer and gay-rights activist, a sociologist focused on gender and women’s studies, a biophysicist, and an art historian—have something else in common as well: “Not only have this year’s quartet of winners given the world lasting knowledge of their disciplines, but they have also consistently inspired generations of scholars with their gift of exceptional mentorship.”

The Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences’ (Harvard Griffin GSAS) highest honor, the Centennial Medal has recognized some of the institution’s most accomplished alumni. By helping younger scholars find their feet, however, this year’s cohort earns distinction not only for its past contributions but also for its impact on the future. “They’ve all taken a personal interest in passing on their knowledge,” Staines notes. “So the advances they’ve made will grow exponentially in the years to come.”



Martin Duberman, PhD '57

CENTERING DISSENTERS

NOW 93 YEARS OLD, Martin Duberman knew he was different even as a child—albeit in a way that might surprise those who know him primarily as a gay-rights activist and groundbreaking historian of gay culture. “Different in the sense of being interested in learning and books,” he says. “By college, I had decided I wanted to become an academic, but I ran into considerable opposition on that from my parents,” both of whom could not afford college when they were Duberman’s age and considered graduate school excessive. “They thought I should be content with my undergraduate degree from Yale and making a career in my father’s dressmaking business,” he recalls.

To overcome their initial objections, Duberman wrote to Crane Brinton, a well-known Harvard historian and one-time chair of the Society of Fellows, to request an invitation of sorts. “I said I need a letter from you saying that as far as one can predict, I will have a bright future in the history department,” Duberman remembers. Brinton responded with a note that the young scholar was “our number-one choice.” Duberman’s parents relented.

Brinton’s prediction about Duberman’s chances proved

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**IN ADDITION TO BEING THE MOST
ENCOURAGING AND THOUGHTFUL
ADVISER AND MENTOR, HE’S ALSO
AN INSTITUTION-BUILDER AND A
PHILANTHROPIST.**

—*Marcia Gallo, Professor Emerita, University
of Nevada, Las Vegas*

spot on. “Martin has an incredible body of work in biography, playwriting, and fiction,” says Marcia Gallo, a former student of Duberman’s who is now an author herself and a professor emerita at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. “And in addition to being the most encouraging and thoughtful adviser and mentor I could have imagined, he’s also an institution-builder and a philanthropist. In 1991, while at the City University of New York (CUNY), he founded CLAGS, the first ever center for lesbian and gay studies based at a university, and later founded two fellowships for LGBTQ scholars.”

After years of trying to “get cured” of his sexual orientation, Duberman dropped the therapy and came out in 1971, two years after the gay-rights movement began with the uprising at New York City’s Stonewall Inn, which he chronicled in 1993’s *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBTQ Rights Uprising that Changed America*.

A long-time professor of history at CUNY, Duberman is often called the godfather of LGBTQ studies, not only for launching CLAGS and for his early scholarship in the field but also for his activism as a founding member of the National Gay Task Force, the Gay Academic Union, and Lambda Legal. He has also written about labor and such diverse figures as the Beat poet and writer Jack Kerouac and the actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson, and was briefly jailed for protesting the Vietnam War. His defense of abolitionists’ calls for radical change helped to shift historians’ view of the 19th-century antislavery movement in the US, and his 1963 play *In White America* was hailed as a driver of the civil right movement’s Freedom Summer of 1964.

“His common thread has been to study people who dissent, who are outsiders,” says Robert Hampel, a historian of education and a professor emeritus at the University of Dela-

ware. Duberman identifies with them. “It wasn’t always easy,” he says. “There was no queer history when I was in school. But academia was a relatively safe place to be gay.” Though he didn’t come out until after his graduate experience, he says it “speaks well of Harvard” that the institution was the

first place he felt community as an adult. “I found my people there,” he says, “both academically and among my fellow grad students. It was a horrible time to be gay, and we would protect one another. I made lifelong connections at Harvard. I’m so glad my parents ended up seeing the light.”

Myra Marx Ferree, PhD '76

ADVANCING
THE STUDY
OF GENDER

AS THE ONLY ONE OF SEVEN SIBLINGS

to graduate from college, Myra Marx Ferree didn’t get much guidance from her family on an academic career. Luckily, she encountered mentors at every turn who were instrumental in helping her chart her path. The first was the director of financial aid at St. Peter’s College in Jersey City, where she worked during high school. He encouraged her to apply to other schools secure in the knowledge that she’d have a “free ride” at St. Peter’s. She ended up at Bryn Mawr, where she studied political science. Her advisor there suggested she apply to law school as a backup, but also that she apply to PhD programs to continue learning and “explore the greater world.” When she was accepted by both Harvard Law School and Harvard Griffin GSAS she enrolled at the latter to pursue her interest in social sciences.

At Harvard, Ferree found a new mentor in Thomas Pettigrew, PhD '56, a social psychologist in the department who promoted a broad view of disciplines as complementary. “His primary focus was on race,” she says, “but he had put together a dataset that included questions on voting for a woman for president. He knew I was interested in what were then called sex roles, so he suggested I write about that.” Her article was accepted without revision in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, which cemented her confidence that she could not only learn but also contribute to scholarship at the highest level.

As her adviser, Pettigrew greenlighted Ferree’s dissertation topic on working-class feminists—not a popular theme at the time. “It just goes to show how much the study of gender in academia has advanced,” Ferree says. “We’ve gone from ‘that stuff is not interesting’ to the point where it has become institutionalized. I was fortunate that Tom took me seriously.”



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**GENDER SCHOLARSHIP WASN'T
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LOOK INTO THIS.'**

—Christine Bose, Professor Emeritus of Sociology,
State University of New York at Albany

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Ferree went on to contribute extensively not only to the sociology of gender but also to interdisciplinary scholarship on family, social movements, political discourse, work and organizations, and the comparative study of feminism. And she honored her early guides in academia by becoming a legendary mentor herself.

“Myra really helped shape the field of sociology of gender by opening new areas of scholarship and bringing people into them,” says Christine Bose, a professor emeritus of sociology at the State University of New York at Albany. “Gender scholarship wasn’t legitimate when she and I started writing about it. She helped lead the way for people to say, ‘We need to look into this.’”

Not only was Ferree a key mentor for a generation of scholars, including Aili Tripp, the Vilas Research Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where Ferree taught for many years, but “she also played a tremendous role in community building,” says Tripp, creating long-lasting scholarly platforms by serving on national committees, establishing awards, networking internationally, and holding editorial positions on a raft of journals. “Her real talent is collaboration.”

Ferree focused on intersectionality before the word was coined, trying time and again to show how gender, class, and race had to be understood together for social scientists to get any of them right. “I found it hard to limit myself by discipline or topic,” she says. “When I started out, every question was wide open. We feminists knew the old answers that assumed only men mattered were wrong, but lacked good research on women. It replicated stereotypes over and over again, and I wanted a fresh look at all of it. I never thought I’d be recognized for helping to transform social science research, but yes, that is what I was aiming for.”



Joan Steitz, PhD '68

SERENDIPITY IN SCIENCE

“IT’S ABOUT TIME,” said Nancy Hopkins, PhD '71, when told Joan Steitz had been nominated for the Centennial Medal. “She should have won it years ago.”

Hopkins, the Amgen Professor of Biology Emerita at MIT, was an undergraduate at Harvard when she first became aware of Steitz, then a graduate student. “I was kind of in awe of her,” Hopkins recalls. “At the time, people were asking, ‘Can women be great scientists?’ and it wasn’t long before Joan became one of the first to clearly show that, boy, could they ever.”

The work that so impressed Hopkins—and the rest of the scientific world—was on ribonucleic acid (RNA), which recently had a starring role in corralling the COVID-19 pandemic. Steitz’s many discoveries regarding the molecule helped to

clarify how proteins form in the body and laid the groundwork for the development of targeted therapeutics, particularly for cancer, autoimmune conditions, and infectious and neurodegenerative diseases.

But she almost didn't become a scientist. Now the Sterling Professor of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry at Yale and an investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, she says she initially intended to go to Harvard Medical School (HMS) to be a physician. "I knew a couple of women doctors," she says, "but I had never seen a woman professor of science or head of a lab and didn't think it was conceivable."

The summer before she was to start at HMS, she got a job in the University of Minnesota lab of the cell biologist Joseph Gall, who later went on to Yale and became known as a pioneer of cell biology. In Gall's lab, Steitz worked on tetrahymena, a type of single-celled organism that has a nucleus enclosed within membranes. It was there that she decided bench science was her true calling.

It was her second turn at lab work; under the work-study program at Antioch College, Steitz had spent several terms working in the lab of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) biophysicist Alexander Rich, where she learned about the molecular building block deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and met James Watson, its co-discoverer. After doing her PhD work with Watson at Harvard, she got a postdoctoral fellowship in Cambridge, England, with his collaborator, Francis Crick, and the molecular biologist Sidney

Brenner. "Crick suggested I find a project to do in the library," Steitz says. "But I wanted to do bench work. So I went around and talked to the other postdoctoral fellows, and found out about an exciting but challenging project—to figure out whether special signals helped bind ribosomes to messenger RNA. None of the male fellows would take this on because they needed something to show when they went back to the US, but as a woman, I figured I'd never have a job like that anyway. And it turned into my whole life in science."

"Joan predicted and proved how RNA-RNA interactions worked. These interactions play a crucial role in biological processes like protein production and gene regulation, so this set off the whole field," says Yale biochemist Susan Baserga, a postdoctoral fellow in Steitz's lab. "Her mind was always turning and thinking about the next big question. So her work really changed the world by showing how important RNA is to being human."

Another way Steitz changed the world, Baserga points out, is by being an outspoken advocate for women in science. "She has tried to give the same opportunities she had to as many women as she could reach," Baserga says.

It wasn't only her mentees who took something away from those interactions. "It's almost as much fun to share the joy of discovery with a younger colleague as to make the discovery yourself," says Steitz. "I got very lucky that I ended up in this place and that place and meeting this person and doing that. Serendipity is very important in science. You have to keep your eyes open for opportunities."

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—Nancy Hopkins, PhD '71, Amgen Professor of Biology Emerita, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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Arthur Wheelock, PhD '73

THE GOLD
STANDARD FOR
SCHOLARSHIP

ARTHUR WHELOCK'S LOVE AFFAIR with art started in his grandparents' basement, where his mother's women's group met to paint. In third grade, he joined them and found that the

creative act fed his soul and fired his imagination. But he never really considered a career in art until he was a young student at Williams College.

"My dad was the president of the family textile mill, the Stanley Woolen Company, in Uxbridge, Massachusetts," Wheelock says. "I worked in the mill every summer and looked forward to it. But one Christmas when I was in college, my parents said 'It's wonderful that you like working in the mill, but you should not feel any obligation to it. You should follow your heart.'"

Follow his heart he did, majoring in painting and art history at Williams, attending Harvard Griffin GSAS, and studying old masters in the Netherlands, particularly their use of the camera obscura.

A 1973 fellowship brought him to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, where his career would come to span

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THERE WAS A REMBRANDT ON OFFER AND HE DESCRIBED WHY HE LOVED IT IN SUCH A SOULFUL, DEEP, MOVING WAY THAT I BASICALLY FELL IN LOVE WITH ARTHUR RIGHT THERE.

—Thomas Kaplan, Businessman and Philanthropist

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more than four decades as curator of northern baroque and Dutch and Flemish painting, all while teaching art history at the University of Maryland.

Among the many exhibitions Wheelock brought to the gallery, the most spectacular and influential was *Johannes Vermeer*, in 1995. It brought together 23 of the 35 works Vermeer was known to have painted.

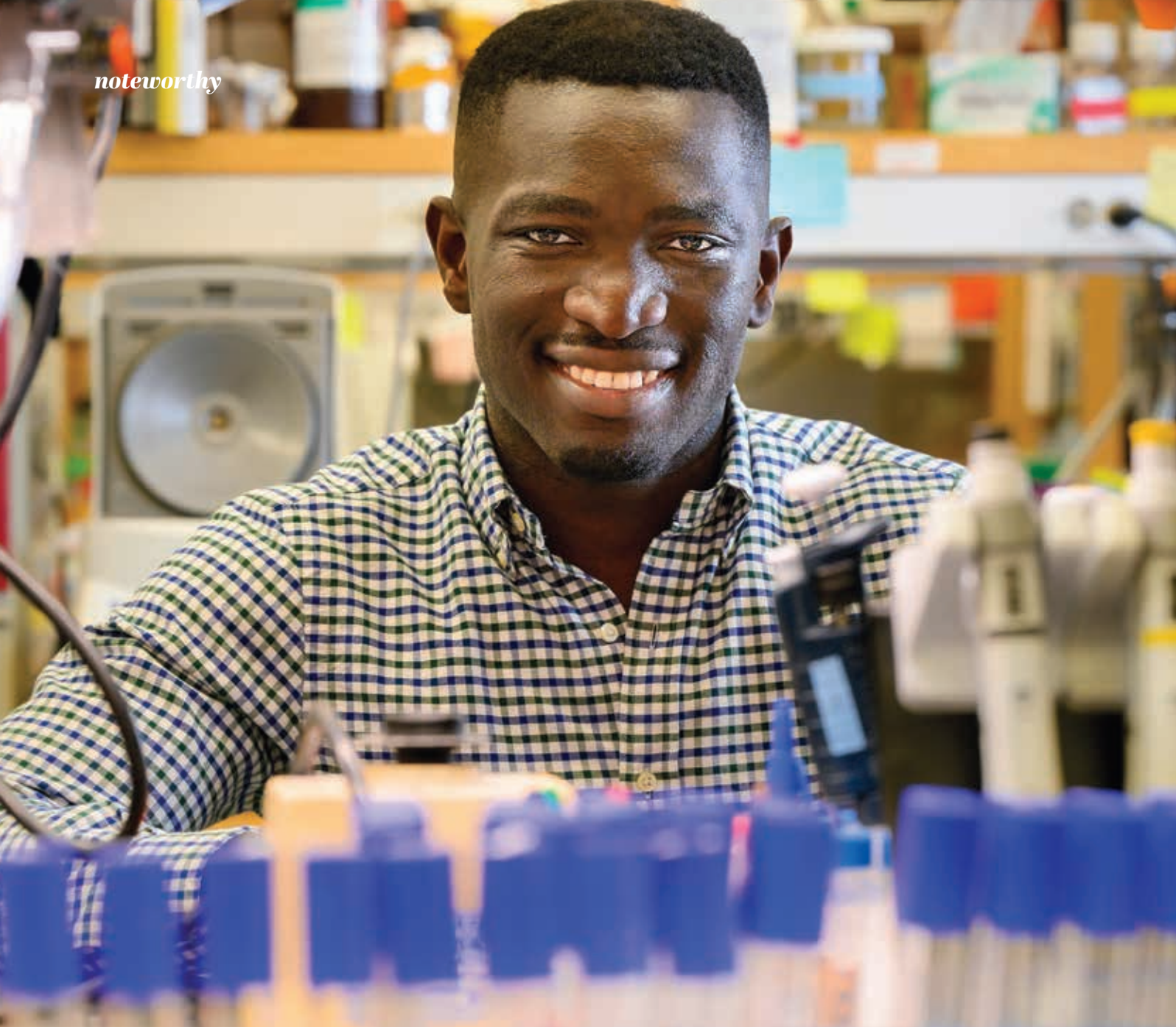
"There had never before been a Vermeer retrospective," says Earl Powell, who directed the gallery from 1992 to 2019. "It was an amazing achievement. It set Vermeer on a new trajectory and was a signal moment in the history of Dutch art."

Wheelock is humble about such accolades, recalling instead events like the years he spent teaching about art at a boarding school in western Massachusetts. "I was so impressed by what these eighth graders could see with their untrained eyes," he says. "That experience became the basis for all the teaching I have done throughout my career."

According to the businessman and philanthropist Thomas Kaplan, Wheelock has a special gift for imparting his vast knowledge of art and art history. "I met Arthur through a fellow collector at a dinner before a Sotheby's auction in 2005 or 2006," Kaplan says. "There was a Rembrandt on offer, and he described why he loved it in such a soulful, deep, moving way that I basically fell in love with Arthur right there."

Wheelock worked with Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, to create The Leiden Collection, one of the largest and most significant private collections of Dutch art in the world. "Arthur Wheelock is the gold standard in terms of scholarship regarding northern art," says Kaplan. "He has changed the entire field of old masters. He is iconic within the space."

"It's true that I helped bring greater attention and understanding to a very important time in the world of art," says Wheelock, "but what I feel most proud of in my career, as both a curator and a teacher, is that I helped transfer knowledge from one generation to another. I've been able to pass on the love of art, the emotional connection, and that has been very gratifying." 🍷



CHAMPION OF HEALTH EQUITY

Chidi Akusobi, PhD '20, biological and biomedical sciences, was named one of the “40 Under 40 Leaders in Minority Health for 2024” last March by the National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF). The award recognizes young health leaders from minoritized populations who are making significant strides in improving patient outcomes and fostering healthy communities. Since its inception in 2016, the

“40 Under 40” award has recognized clinicians, patient advocates, researchers, and policy influencers at the forefront of reducing health disparities. Akusobi, an internal medicine resident at Massachusetts General Hospital, and his fellow honorees were celebrated at the NMQF Leadership Summit on Health Disparities and Health Braintrust during National Minority Health Month last April.



Floor Broekgaarden, PhD '23, astronomy, received the Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin Doctoral Dissertation Award in Astro-physics from the American Physical Society. The award encourages effective written and oral presentation of research results, skills Broekgaarden honed as a Harvard Horizons Scholar in 2023.



Martha Bulyk, PhD '01, biophysics, was one of eight Harvard faculty named a 2023 fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), a distinguished lifetime honor within the scientific community. AAAS is one of the world's largest general scientific societies and publisher of the *Science* family of journals.



Adele Diamond, PhD '83, personality and developmental psychology, professor of developmental cognitive neuroscience at the University of British Columbia, was conferred a doctor of science honoris causa by the University of Cambridge, a distinction reserved for individuals of outstanding national and international achievement in their field.



Harvard Professor **Kosuke Imai**, PhD '03, political science, was named a 2024 Guggenheim Fellow based on his "prior career achievement and exceptional promise." The fellowship, which involved "a rigorous application and peer review process" was given in support of Imai's project proposal "Improving Statistical Methodology for Evaluating and Reducing Racial Disparities."



Luke Leafgren, PhD '12, comparative literature, was named the 2023 winner of the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation. The annual prize was awarded to Leafgren for his translation of *Mister N*, a novel by Lebanese writer Najwa Barakat. Leafgren is an assistant dean at Harvard College where he is also resident dean of Mather House.



A team led by Harvard Professor **Andrew Myers**, PhD '85, chemistry, reported in the journal *Science* that their synthetic compound, cresomycin, kills many strains of drug-resistant bacteria. Pathogenic bacterial strains like the ones cresomycin targets kill more than a million people each year, making the Myers team's discovery a potential new weapon in the war against "superbugs."



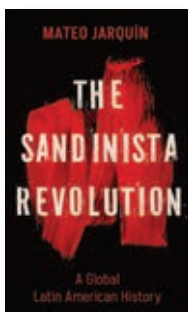
David Sadighian PhD '23, history of art and architecture, was appointed tenure-track assistant professor at the Yale School of Architecture. Sadighian teaches global histories of architecture, infrastructure, and material culture in the modern Atlantic world from 1750 to the present, and is also developing a book manuscript based on his Harvard PhD dissertation.



Jeremy M. Weinstein, PhD '03, political economy and government, was named dean of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government by interim President Alan M. Garber last spring. Weinstein comes from Stanford University where he helped develop cross-university initiatives and led efforts to advance the social sciences, global and area studies, and issues of ethics, technology, and public policy.

AUTHOR PROFILE

REVOLUTION REVISITED



Mateo Jarquín, PhD '19, describes his new book, *The Sandinista Revolution*, as “a history of the Nicaraguan revolution truly told on Nicaraguan terms.” Based on his PhD dissertation and 2019 Harvard Horizons project, the book explores the years between 1979 and 1990 not only from the perspective of his Nicaraguan compatriots but also in the context of the country’s outsized influence on global politics. A better understanding of the Nicaraguan revolution, he asserts, yields new insights about the Cold War and the mark it left on Latin America.

You come from Nicaragua. Your family was involved in the revolution—sometimes on different sides. What influence did that history have on this book?

After the fall of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, the Nicaraguan society was divided. Sandinista leaders embarked on a crusade to remake the country and sweep away all vestiges of the old regime. You were either for the revolution or against it.

My family didn’t fit neatly into those boxes. Both of my parents were members of the Sandinista government. Both had siblings in the US-backed opposition. After the revolution, we experienced a sort of tense reconciliation, as did many Nicaraguan families. It exemplified what happened at the national level.

My book isn’t about this personal history, but my research was shaped by it in countless ways. I started this work with the intuition and conviction that an account of this time in Nicaragua had to allow for complexity and messiness. It had to be skeptical of the broad categories and concepts scholars use to make sense of revolutions in general.

What does it mean to tell the story of the Sandinista revolution on Nicaraguan terms, as you try to do in the book?

President Ronald Reagan’s decision to fund anti-Sandinista insurgents known as the Contras in the 1980s ignited

intense political debates, culminating in the Iran-Contra scandal. Consequently, most scholarship at the time reflected that US-based discourse. Even today, some of the richest and most widely read accounts of the revolution tend to be written from an American perspective and center on the motivations, consequences, and justification of US military intervention in Central America.

Of course, the way that Nicaraguans remember the revolution couldn’t be more different. For better or worse, they don’t think of Ronald Reagan and Oliver



It’s important to tell [the story of the Nicaraguan revolution] in a way that gives agency to the people who lived it, who had the greatest impact, and who had the most at stake.

North as major protagonists or antagonists; they are fundamentally focused on the struggles between Nicaraguans. While my book places the history of the revolution in an international context, the main characters are the leaders of the Sandinista government because it's important to tell this story in a way that gives agency to the people who lived it, who had the greatest impact, and who had the most at stake.

Nicaragua is a small country. It's not an economic, military, or geopolitical power. Why is it important to better understand the revolution there?

It was the last major revolution of the 20th century—a rapid, violent change of government that preceded a radical effort to remake the socioeconomic structure, institutions, and even values of a society. In that sense, it was an important milestone in the transition from the Cold War era, when the Global South was alive with revolutionary movements, to the present day. That's the global significance.

In Latin America, the Sandinista revolution was the first time—and last, it turned out—that the armed left managed to seize power after the Cuban revolution. The effect it had on regional politics was not unlike that of the Mexican and Cuban revolutions. Armed leftist organizations in other countries, especially in Central America, looked at what the Sandinistas did and said, “We can do that, too. That's a blueprint for our success.” The slogan became, “Si Nicaragua venció, El Salvador vencerá”—if Nicaragua vanquished, El Salvador shall vanquish as well. This sentiment also affected Guatemala.

The Sandinista victory inspired many peer organizations across the region but

also caused a huge backlash. Right-wing forces across Central America looked at what happened in Nicaragua and asked, “What do we need to do to avoid suffering the same fate as Somoza?” The ideological and geopolitical dimensions of the Cold War intensified these regional dynamics. The result was the most violent episode of Latin America's history during the Cold War, in which around 300,000 people died.

Finally, you say that the Sandinista revolution began as an effort to democratize Nicaragua socially and economically. Today, you describe Nicaragua as an authoritarian state ruled by the family of Daniel Ortega, the former Sandinista leader. So, what's the legacy of the revolution?

In the book, I resist the temptation to draw a direct line between the 1980s and today. Mr. Ortega and his wife claim to be carrying on the legacy of the revolution. Those from hardline anti-Sandinista backgrounds tend to agree, except they cast it in a very negative light. They argue that everything wrong with Nicaragua today is a direct consequence of 1979 and the policies of the 1980s. Still other Nicaraguans including many who supported the revolution, see Ortega as a usurper who betrayed the values of the original Sandinista project. They don't see continuity but rather a break with the past, and they think comparisons with the earlier Somoza regime are more instructive coming from a society that was born of revolution and counter-revolution, where people have Manichaeian outlooks driven by absolutes, I think what we need now is a little more room for unanswered questions and open-ended discussion. 🍷

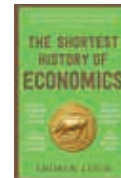
RECENTLY PUBLISHED



Rachel Gordan, PhD '11,
Study of Religion
*Postwar Stories:
How Books Made
Judaism American*
Oxford University Press, 2024



Sheryl Kaskowitz, PhD '11,
Music, *A Chance to
Harmonize: How FDR's
Hidden Music Unit Sought
to Save America from the
Great Depression—One Song
at a Time*, Pegasus, April 2024



Andrew Leigh, PhD '04,
Public Policy
*The Shortest History of
Economics*
Pan Macmillan
India, 2024



Lawrence F. Rhu, PhD '87,
Comparative Literature,
*Pre-owned Odysseys &
Rented Rooms*,
Main Street Rag, 2024



Keja Valens, PhD '04,
Comparative Literature
*Culinary Colonialism,
Caribbean Cookbooks, and
Recipes for National
Independence*, Rutgers
University Press, 2024

••• **Correction:** *The winter/spring 2024 issue of Colloquy incorrectly listed the field of study of author Carl B. Schmidt, PhD '73, as Near Eastern languages and civilizations. It is musicology. We regret the error.*



Reach for the Stars in London this Fall!

THE LIGHTEST ELEMENT, A PLAY BY STELLA FEEHILY
SEPTEMBER 5–OCTOBER 12, 2024, THE HAMPSTEAD THEATRE

Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, PhD '25, was the first woman to earn a PhD in astronomy at Harvard, to be promoted to full professor from within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and to head a department at the University. Despite her successes, she suffered numerous indignities including rejection of her groundbreaking dissertation. Eventually, the dissertation, which outlined the makeup of stellar atmospheres and proved the prevalence of hydrogen in the universe, was hailed by leading scientists as “undoubtedly the most brilliant PhD thesis ever written in astronomy.”

Now the life of this extraordinary Harvard Griffin GSAS alumna – one of the most eminent astronomers of the 20th century – is vividly portrayed in a new play, *The Lightest Element*, running this fall in London.

From the Hampstead Theatre's website:

Boston, 1956. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin is about to be appointed Chair of Astronomy and the first woman to head a Harvard department. Only two things stand in her way: a covert investigation aimed at exposing her as a communist sympathiser, and the entrenched conservatism of her male colleagues. When a student journalist asks to profile her it feels like an opportunity to control her own narrative—assuming, of course, that the invitation is actually what it seems . . .

Stella Feehily's taut drama explores how challenging social norms can be almost as difficult as overturning scientific orthodoxy.

●●● **Join Harvard Griffin GSAS at the Hampstead Theatre this fall for a special event on October 9**
(visit gsas.harvard.edu/calendar for details) or visit the venue's website for tickets during the play's run:
hampsteadtheatre.com/whats-on/2024the-lightest-element.

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gsas.harvard.edu/calendar

SAVE THE DATES!

Alumni Day, Cambridge
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**Harvard Horizons, Cambridge
and livestreamed**
April 8, 2025

**Centennial Medals:
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and livestreamed**
May 28, 2025

●●● **Be sure also to check out
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