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Inside: Meritocracy, Me Too, and More

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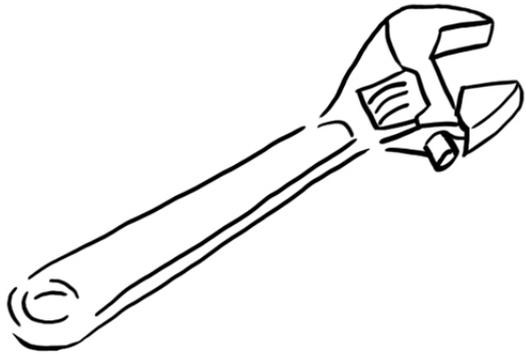
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Engi *queer* ing:

To Be SEAS but Not Heard

By HUNTER RICHARDS

Engineering is hard. Struggling with your identity is hard. Navigating how you fit into the engineering community as a whole is hard. Not relating to the majority of your classmates, professors, or leaders in your field because you can't find your background represented substantially is hard. Trying to graduate with an engineering degree when you've spent years struggling to believe you can be an engineer is hard. And, honestly, it's not getting any easier.

Although my mom always supported my interest in science and math growing up, I wasn't shielded from those around me expressing their disapproval. I was told as a rising senior that I was wasting my time studying engineering at MIT for the summer when I should be learning how to cook and sew left. Even as I headed off to Harvard, I was told by older members of my community that it was good that I got into a college where I could finally find a man smarter than I am. Rather than being congratulated on these triumphs and pursuits, I was reminded yet again that I was expected to become a wife and mother – not an engineer.

Even now, in classes filled with other engineers coming from a variety of different backgrounds, I don't always feel like the expectations of my abilities are the same as my peers.

Sitting in office hours working on problem sets, I've been ignored by the men sitting around me as they struggle to work out the application of an equation. I've had the right answer but told that I was likely misunderstanding the parameters being used. I've been talked over, only to have one of the men sitting near me repeat my exact words but in a louder tone and then congratulated on his idea. I've seen my male classmates mock me for taking the time to do my eyeliner

and do my nails even after pulling all-nighters for homework multiple times in a week. I've felt jealous of the other women in my engineering classes who fit in better than I do. I've sat in bathrooms frustrated that there are no women or minority professors teaching my classes this semester. I've watched male professors interrupt their female peers, even when these women are more advanced in the specific field being discussed at the time.

While I've loved my professors and advisors, not feeling like I can relate to their personal experiences distances me from engineering. Not seeing my own background reflected in the leaders of my field has caused me to reconsider my own abilities many times.

Harvard's Bachelor of Science (SB) degree for Engineering Sciences requires 20 courses. On top of these 20 courses, students must still complete their general education, first year Expos, and language requirements. With a Sophomore Forum that doesn't count for course credit and the yearlong Senior Tutorial only counting for one course credit, it's difficult to make time for extracurriculars and working outside of class. The required capstone project dominates most of Senior year and often begins at the end of Junior year. Much of my college experience has been surrounded by other engineers and engineering topics, yet I don't know if I believe the engineering community has become more representative of who I am.

The lack of female and minority role models to look up to when considering career paths discourages entrances into these fields. According to the National Science Foundation, less than 40% of full-time first-year students in 2016 pursuing engineering were non-white. The societal discriminatory perceptions and lack of opportunities faced by underrepresented groups continues to

prevent access to STEM fields. It's a cycle: underrepresented minorities aren't afforded opportunities in STEM, they won't see role models they relate to in STEM fields, and they'll feel discouraged to become a figure within these fields that could potentially be a role model to future generations.

MIT's Office of Engineering Outreach Programs work with middle and high school students coming from underrepresented backgrounds to prepare them to enter into engineering fields in college. I personally participated in one such program – MIT's Minority Introduction to Engineering and Sciences (MITES) – as a rising senior in high school. It was this opportunity to take college courses at MIT and the introduction to postsecondary education in general that helped me navigate Harvard's campus, courses, and culture. Without having drawn from MITES as a freshman, struggling to stay on track with my classmates in the core prerequisites for engineering while trying to make new friends and keep in touch with my family, I likely would not have continued at Harvard. It was not until attending 1vyG, the Ivy League first generation conference, in its first year at Brown that I bonded with others from similar backgrounds who validated my experiences. After attending the conference and feeling more confident in my ability to make myself proud of my own successes in overcoming obstacles, I no longer considered not graduating from Harvard. However, I still struggled to find mentorship that I could relate to at Harvard while pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Engineering.

According to Harvard's SEAS, its faculty is 14% and 18% tenured and tenure-track women,

Harvard and the Myth of Meritocracy

How meritocracy operates as an attractive illusion in American culture.

By SEGAN HELLE

It was December 12, 2016, around three o'clock in the afternoon. I was sitting in my dad's classroom – he was the only teacher for my high school's Theory of Knowledge course – which was a requirement for me to earn an International Baccalaureate Diploma. We were in the middle of presentation season and one of my friends was just ending the introduction to her topic material when a notification popped up on my phone: "One new message, Harvard College Admissions Office."

When I had learned that I had been accepted into one of the highest-ranking universities in the nation, I was obviously excited. It was the culmination of everything I had worked for throughout the course of my high school career and the embodiment of everything that my friends, teachers, and family had hoped for me.

But, excitement was quickly overtaken by fear. I did not come from an upper-class background. My dad attended state school and my mother had not finished college. I was a lower-middle class public school kid. I could not see how I would be able to fit in at a school comprised of both the brightest and wealthiest students around the world.

"You're a kid who busted their ass off to get in. You're a scholarship kid. You're there off of merit. You'll be fine."

I came to Harvard with my father's words in mind. I was here because I had worked hard. I deserved to be at Harvard. I was an underdog. It was not until I began to really take note of what advantages that my peers at Harvard and I had that I started to question my own narrative.

Meritocracy, at its core, is a system that is defined by people being rewarded for their talents. It is supposed to be a system that operates outside of the realm of the arbitrary, countering discrimination by solely evaluating people by their merit and what skills they have been able to cultivate, regardless of their personal identities. It assumes that everyone is born with some set of skills, and if you work hard enough you will be able to rise amongst the ranks and earn prestige and fortune.

The myth of meritocracy is easy to fall into because it is something in which you want to believe. It provides reassurance. It tells you that as long as you work hard enough, there is nothing keeping you from your ambitions.

Despite the fact that meritocracy is meant to avoid prejudice, aspects of personal identity become a huge factor in getting ahead.

It tells you that you are deserving; that everything you have achieved was solely the fruit of your labor. It tells you that you are better; that everything you earn over other people is a testament to your own superiority.

Meritocracy feeds your ego. That is what makes it so difficult of an idea to let go. But unfortunately, like most things that sound too good to be true, meritocracy is only a myth.

The issue is that meritocracy assumes an equal playing field that simply does not exist. It assumes that everyone has access to opportunities to cultivate merit and thus advance through the ranks. This cultivation is usually something that is most often acquired through education. You work hard in school to gain the skills to be able to earn a position in a well-paying career, and those that are the most meritorious will then be the most highly paid. Nonetheless, despite the fact that meritocracy is meant to avoid prejudice, aspects of personal identity become a huge factor in getting ahead.

Education is the gateway to competing in a meritocratic system. The failure of the system is quite obvious: individuals born into privilege, with economic resources or powerful social connections have greater access to educational opportunities that allow them to cultivate merit. Meanwhile, those born into lower-income classes face greater obstacles in accessing a decent quality education.

An article published in *The Atlantic* in February of last year, written by Janie Boschma and Ronald Brownstein, gives a picture as to why. Citing a study conducted by the *National Equity Atlas*, students in lower-income, predominantly minority communities, have significantly less access to quality schooling and have average graduation rates of around sixty-eight percent. The reasons for this relate to the economic conditions of their communities.

Poverty is intergenerational: it is passed down the same way wealth is passed down in the upper classes. Children who come from lower-income communities have access to schools with less funding, which makes it more difficult to attract high quality teachers or administrators. Meanwhile, parents of low-income families often also have lower levels of

Meritocracy Myth, continued.

education and less social capital. This makes it more difficult for children in lower-income communities to have guidance navigating through systems like college application processes and obtaining connections that may help them get into schools or jobs that middle or upper-middle class students have access to through their parents' social networks.

Already, a sizeable portion of the American population is locked out from any system that would allow them to cultivate the type of merit that allows for upward mobility within a meritocracy. But this is only one small part of what makes meritocracy impossible. Factors like disability, emotional trauma, family issues, or a mere lack of economically valuable social connections can similarly affect even economically well-off students, and entrenched systems of racism and prejudice can make it nearly impossible for minorities to advance in economic opportunity, even if they receive good schooling.

Looking to a more concrete example of how false structures of meritocracy are propped up, we need only look at Harvard. There have been many thought pieces published recently about how Harvard fails to deliver on its promise of a meritocratic admissions process. High competition for a small number of spots makes it appear that truly only the most talented will be admitted. Though Harvard touts its holistic admissions process as being the key to admitting only the most deserving of students, it is hard to believe that those who worked the hardest also just happen to be the richest in the nation. According to data published in *The New York Times* in January of this year, roughly sixty-seven percent of Harvard students come from the top twentieth percentile, with the median family income across the college being \$168,000 – more than double the national median income.

This makes sense. Activities and stats that look good on college resumes are often things that require money and know-how to access. Many students who are more economically advantaged have the ability to go to college prep

classes to boost their scores on standardized tests to fit college requirements. Those who come from well-funded schools are able to participate in more intensive extracurricular activities that look good on applications, or have access to well-trained counseling staffs that help students apply to colleges and often have connections to admissions officers in high-ranking universities. Those with parents who have earned degrees themselves have access to more social connections that may prove valuable in learning about schools before applying, or getting internships that make them more attractive applicants. And, of course, those who have family who have previously gone to Harvard have legacy status, and their applications are given extra consideration.

That is not to say that the majority of students who are currently attending Harvard did not work hard to get here, and this is not to diminish their accomplishments. It is to say, however, that hard work looks different across economic lines, and someone being rejected by Harvard does not necessarily mean they did not work as hard, or were not as talented as someone who was accepted.

I want to believe meritocracy exists. I want to believe that I got into Harvard because I, in some capacity, was simply a harder worker than other applicants. But, to cling to the ghost of Horatio Alger not only discounts the amount of luck I have had in my life (a supportive family, a father who understands the college application process, and the economic stability not to worry about my livelihood during high school), but continues a culture centered around a competition to which only a small number of people actually have access. It continues a culture in which we are encouraged to view people as deserving or undeserving, and where leaders can justify homelessness by grouping them into the latter category. Meritocracy perpetuates a culture in which I simply cannot be complicit.

Segan Helle (shelle@college.harvard.edu) hopes that everyone finds a way to involve themselves in conversations regarding their position at Harvard and challenge oppressive power structures.

SEAS but not Heard, continued.

respectively, with 21% tenured and 23% tenure-track Asian faculty members. The department boasts a minority population comprising 25.4% of Harvard's SEAS overall staff, due to efforts of the Human Resources Office to advocate for diversity. However, there are currently no tenured minority faculty members. With 27% of the 943 undergraduates studying engineering being women, the gender gap is wide. While only about 14% of engineers in the United States are women, Harvard still lags behind peer institutions. In 2016, Dartmouth College became the first to award more engineering degrees to women than men. On the other side of Cambridge, 28% of MIT's undergraduate engineering student body and 8% of the engineering faculty are identified as being an underrepresented minority.

I've struggled to see myself as an engineer after being reminded time and time again that society doesn't see me as an engineer. But the thing is – I am an engineer. Maybe I don't look like what the historical engineer is meant to be, but when I hold my degree in front of my full breasts with a hand on my large hip and toss my curled hair back over my shoulder revealing a contoured and rouged face to pose for graduation photos, I won't care. I've learned to love the body I was given and it's exhausting to be shamed for it, especially within the classroom. Having a masculine name, I've often been told while meeting professors or interviewers that they had expected to meet a man. Perhaps it's this that empowers me to keep surprising everyone by not being whom they expected.

Hunter Richards (hrichards@college.harvard.edu) is working towards saving the world, whether or not the people occupying it believe that she can.

Me, Too

Anonymous or not, I am a statistic. You know me: you see me at study breaks, you sit by me in the dining hall, you work on homework with me. But you don't know what I haven't told you, even as many of our peers come forward about their own history with sexual assault.

By ANONYMOUS

My rapist booty called me.

I woke up the first weekend back to campus to a text message asking how I was from the person who derailed my college experience. The person responsible for why I had to unlist myself from any campus information centers out of fear that he'd continue stalking me. The person who caused my final exam scores to drop well below the average I had done for all my courses the week after being attacked. The person who forced me to hide in my room recovering from the physical injuries they inflicted on me out of fear that someone would ask me what had happened.

I was lying in bed with my current boyfriend, who I've struggled to open up to after the trust issues and residual trauma related to being sexually assaulted. I saw the text and immediately turned my phone off, rolled over, and curled back up into my boyfriend's arms. Later, when we both woke up, I sat in the bathroom with my roommate as we brushed our teeth telling her what happened. I spoke quietly, nervous that my boyfriend might hear, and even more nervous that I might have to fully acknowledge the message still awaiting me when I turned my phone back on.



I have fewer anxiety attacks than I used to. I tell my friends that I'm fine, and I am for the most part. But even while crying into someone's arms after being triggered and brought back to the moment he assaulted me, I can't bring myself to admit what happened. I don't even like calling it rape, because sexual assault sounds more ambiguous and less daunting to me.

I'll never forget telling him I didn't feel good. I'll never forget him leaning in to kiss me, with one hand holding a cup of alcohol and the other one supporting the back of my head so I couldn't pull away. I'll never forget

how he spit alcohol into my mouth while holding me still. I'll never forget begging him to just let me go home, or pretending to be asleep hoping he wouldn't want an unconscious body, or telling him we couldn't have sex because I didn't have a condom.

I'll never forget him rushing me to get dressed quickly so that we could grab the shuttle (he made plans to go hang out with friends immediately after raping me). I walked to the shuttle stop with the person who had just taken advantage of me while he made small talk about "next time," accusing me of overreacting as I bitterly reminded

Me, Too, continued.

him that what he had just done was rape. He didn't sit next to me once we got on the shuttle, but he did text me as soon as I ran to my friend's room to say I was doing a great job with an organization I was in - "Keep up the great work!" The niceties felt like a mockery, but later I would realize this was gaslighting. Having friends tell me he was just a fuckboy or player when I began explaining my distrust or interactions with me stopped me from opening up about how his approach was more than flirtatious; it was predatory.

With the recent accusations against Harvey Weinstein and the allegations of sexual assault involving other members of media, some have remarked on the delayed reporting. Seeing my classmates and peers engaging in the conversation has left me feeling jolted back to that week after I was assaulted. It was painful, both physically and mentally. I'll never forget having to curl up into a tight ball to sob because the force of crying made the bruises start pounding all over my body. Even now, over a year after the first time I opened up about what happened, I can't talk about it without the protection of anonymity.

The first time I wrote about what happened, I used the word "attempted." I didn't admit that "committed" was a more valid term until months after that article was published. The first time I admitted I had been raped was during an emotional breakdown, as I collapsed into sobs in my common room with my roommate holding back my hair while I vomited and shrieked about how unfair it was.

I was raped after my winter house formal sophomore year. Two days later, I used the heaviest amount of concealer and makeup I could find to cover up the bruises on my body so that I could attend another formal. I've done plays and musicals that required less stage makeup. I got upset every time someone tried to take a photo with me because I felt disgusting and soiled. I didn't want anyone to look at me, let alone document me.

A few days later, I stopped by my rapist's room to pick up the necklace he had ripped from my neck while holding me down. He had offered to bring it to my room but I vomited thinking about him coming to where I lived.

I began constantly surrounding myself with friends, in case he did try to stop by. After convincing him that I was hardly ever in my room, which became true out of necessity, he told me I could grab it from the bin attached to his door. When I arrived, I found a tattered envelope with the broken golden string inside (the charm - a key, ironically - was long gone, along with my sense of safety and trust). I heard him moving inside of his room as I hurriedly shoved the envelope into my backpack and didn't stop walking until I was back inside a friend's room. I don't know why I needed it back - the chain could never be reconnected. But knowing he still had it made my stomach turn over and twist. I didn't want to imagine him keeping it as a trophy.

Walking in and out of Maxwell Dworkin, I run into him. He avoids eye contact and looks a little scared when he sees me now. While walking through the Square, I cross paths with him running with his team during practices and my smile from waving at another friend in the group quickly dissolves into a shadowed expression. I pass him in public and am angry because the the world has betrayed me by allowing him to share previously safe spaces with me. I can't sit through class without knowing he's likely down the hall studying, or walk through the square without wondering if I'm going down the right street to avoid him, or worrying about going to parties in case he'll be there staring at me uncomfortably from some corner with his friends.

I didn't report the assault. I should have sought medical treatment for my injuries. I should have tried going to counseling much sooner than I had. The first time I told anyone was after running into him again for the first time since he took time off from Harvard following the incident. I hadn't filed any charges but at least part of me would like to believe that his leave of absence had to do with his guilt for attacking me. While he was off campus, it was easy for me to convince myself that I was fine. It was after seeing him again, as if nothing in his life had changed while I am constantly looking over my shoulder or keeping my head down or refusing alcoholic drinks or lying about my sophomore year experience, that I crumbled.

That night, everything I had been holding back for so long finally poured out as I told my roommates how cruel it felt of him to come back to campus and take up spaces in the few areas on campus I felt safe.

I haven't come forward with what happened to more than a few friends and counselors. I can't even say with confidence that my rapist knows that he's a rapist, but I can't keep being the one tasked with convincing him and other men to stop assaulting and harassing women. When I was attacked, I felt my identity and agency taken away from me. Now, even if it's anonymous, I've gotten my voice back. After struggling to regain a feeling of control over my life, all I can ask is that others understand why pressuring victims of sexual harassment and assault to come forward begins to shift agency again.

The Harvard Independent (editorinchief@harvardindependent.com) hopes this article might continue progress and dialogue on our campus.

Readers, please do not hesitate to reach out to us or OSAPR (office: 617-496-5636 hotline: 617-495-9100) regarding any questions or reactions to this article.

Redoubling Efforts

ICAMS organization buckles down for a new year after successful spring conference.

By CAROLINE CRONIN

Last spring, senior Diana Sheedy organized the Intercollegiate Coalition Against Modern Slavery (ICAMS) and hosted a conference here at Harvard to address and break down the horrors of modern slavery and exploitation. This year, Sheedy's dedicated group redoubles their efforts with the new tools and ideas with which the conference provided them.

Sheedy states, "The greatest accomplishment of the ICAMS conference really is the diversity of thought leadership and expertise we were able to unite in one gathering. With approximately 50 attendees, we had 11 incredible schools present and facilitators representing numerous sectors/industries. Ultimately, we essentially created a unified effort that is far more powerful than any group on its own - and this is what has inspired us to shift toward formalizing the network through a software program so that we can leverage the network to a much greater degree."

However, there is much still to be built on after a few inadequacies of the inaugural conference. Sheedy notes, "There were actually two things we learned we were missing from the conference. First, we realized we could have done a much better job integrating the perspectives and expertise of survivors. We had representatives in the workshops but I believe a much larger shift that needs to continue to happen in the field

overall is to value the ideas and insights from survivors as the leading experts in the same way we value scholars and practitioners with fancy degrees and labels. Second, it would have been great to bring in more innovative solutions that don't directly have 'modern slavery' or 'human trafficking' labels. While it is incredible to showcase the work being done in the anti-modern slavery field currently, a lot of long-term and systemic solutions will likely not have this label. For example, international development efforts and the creation of economic stability is just as important to tackle these issues as legal work or social services for human trafficking survivors."

While Sheedy and others are as ever committed to "reinvigorate a focus on the specific types of modern slavery issues such as labor exploitation and sex trafficking - those are the egregious human rights violations that need to end and we will always keep our eyes on that mission," they still want to adapt and grow with a changing landscape of collaboration to push, "forward to more of an ecosystem approach and that will require an intersectionality framework."

The ICAMS group has continued their work with this framework in mind over the summer and fall months while still looking forward to the spring conference. ICAMS intends to reincorporate as a non-profit by the end of the year and therefore has continued to ask the question: why are students uniquely positioned to contribute? ICAMS has also continued to host a number of events through the Carr Center at the Kennedy School such as "How Many Are Enslaved Today? A Conversation about the Statistical Credibility of Global Measurements on Modern Slavery," and were a part of the UN world premiere of Siddharth Kara's new movie, "Trafficked."

According to Sheedy, "One of the most exciting opportunities that have recently come up was the chance to present at the AASHE Conference in San Antonio, Texas. It was a conference on sustainability in

university systems and we were able to present our work under the title, 'Social Sustainability: University Procurement and Ethical Labor Standards.'"

With this recent privilege bestowed on Harvard's ICAMS group, they return to campus to work in three main categories: "implementing procurement policies for ethical labor standards, developing the intercollegiate network (through the platform and regional events), and hosting community engagement events (panels, book talks, coursework and research opportunities, etc.)."

Sheedy admits that despite the hard work involved, she is excited to plan and host, "three regional events for the ICAMS Conference and we are currently planning for San Diego, New York City, and Washington, D.C." ICAMS is emphasizing the importance of human, IT, and financial capital to further their endeavors through impassioned and skilled individuals in a number of fields. They hope to bring partners in this work together through these conferences and make connections that can make the most difference.

Sheedy concludes, "We need to empirically and quantitatively prove concrete models of change in any of the anti-trafficking work we are looking to see (such as the difference a vendor code of conduct could make with regards to labor standards) and can always use brilliant people offering ideas and resources to make that happen."

Interested individuals are encouraged to reach out to dsheedy@college.harvard.edu or icams.network@gmail.com, or Facebook for Harvard or the ICAMS Network. As Sheedy has exhibited, a single student can make a wide impact and more are sure to follow in her footsteps.

Caroline Cronin (ccronin01@college.harvard.edu) is once again reinvigorated by Sheedy and others whose passion refuses to allow causes of crucial importance fall to the wayside on our campus.



Courtesy of Daria Kobayashi Ritch
/ Teen Vogue

Speaking with exuberant energy and a measured musicality, Amanda Gorman rifles through her latest journal, a treasure trove of what she considers “delicious” words. It’s one among the others she has collected for each year since the second grade, that detail both “the pettiness and the poetry” of her life. Angulate, veins, sprawl, thighs, droop, inches, and drag are among the words Gorman limns in her “word boxes,” selections from poems she reads that eventually serve as fodder for her own.

Her own exploration of language is motivated by a democratic spirit. “What I’m really drawn to are poems that resurrect words that are on the fringes of language. And I don’t even necessarily mean words that are particularly elegant and long; I’m talking about words like ‘plum’ or ‘mollusk’[...]these are not words I use in my day-to-day English language, but they hit you as simple as stones – now I’m doing a poem,” she trails off, laughing.

In composing her poems, she thinks expansively about her role as a national

A Fearless Female

A short feature on America’s first National Youth Poet Laureate and Harvard sophomore, Amanda Gorman.

By CLAIRE PARK

figure. As she wrote “American Lyric,” which she performed at the Library of Congress, she “wanted it to feel like an American poem, meaning it was something that could be understood from a wide array of cultures and also a wide array of geopolitical moments.”

Gorman’s activism never blossomed apart from her development of language; from a young age, her mom would demand that she make feminist and diversity arguments for movies she wanted to watch, like *The Cheetah Girls*. And her fearless inquisitiveness about the world’s social politics was further nurtured in the “wackadoozy, liberal-experimental” elementary, middle, and high schools she attended in her native Los Angeles, where one final assignment prompted her to “change the world.” She launched her precociously singular literary ambition in the third grade, after being struck by the magic of metaphors in Ray Bradbury’s *Dandelion Wine*. And this interest in the plurality of words manifests in the way she talks about reconciling a speech impediment with spoken-word poetry.

“I would have to change what I really wanted to say because I couldn’t say the words that fit the poem the best,” she says.

On campus, she invests completely in the present moment, mining her life’s every corner for beauty and wonder. Asked if her world became smaller after settling in Cambridge, she vehemently asserts the opposite.

Cambridge is “an oyster of intellectual and artistic thought, throughout history,” she marvels. “I am always brimming with gratitude for being in that space. My world

has gotten so much bigger. I look up at the sky and this openness is what it feels like to be here.”

She marvels, “I am literally passing over the land and the hills that were some of our nation’s battlegrounds. So being physically and mentally in this space that has constructed our country, it is impossible for me not to feel that the possibilities are endless.”

She pauses in joyous reflection, and then launches into a joke about Annenberg’s imposing and nearly indistinguishable statues of important white men, and her goal to return to Harvard later with enough clout to contribute to that stately community, or at least to champion the inclusion of more people of color and LGBTQ figures.

Gorman leads with her insatiable passion for learning; as the first Youth Poet Laureate, she revels in the freedom to more or less tailor her campaign to involve more public discussions than performances. She wants to be, “the one who’s being educated. I want the country to speak to me as much as, if not more, than I’m speaking to the country.”

She particularly enjoys speaking with middle school girls of color, weighing in on their travails with self-consciousness and “misguided, unwanted attention.” They don’t ask so much about Harvard or her accomplishments, as much as about how she became so confident in herself and her own beauty.

“I hope that through workshops, one poem at a time, I can help girls begin on that journey of truly understanding their own priceless,” she says.

INDY ARTS

Youth Poet Laureate, continued.

Gorman connects with students through Instagram, and has already uplifted so many, but humbly jokes about her own petty concerns and anxieties about school. Yet she seems to constantly think beyond herself, believing fiercely in the colorful possibilities of the general human community.

“The poets who are existing now, the people who have come before me, and the people who will come after me – I imagine them as this swath of people rooting for me to manifest goodness.”

The National Youth Poet Laureate Program is an initiative of Urban Word, an award-winning youth literary arts and youth development organization, in collaboration with local youth literary arts organizations across the country; and championed by the leading national literary organizations, including the President’s Committee on the Arts & Humanities, the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, PEN Center USA, Cave Canem, and the Library of Congress. See more at www.youthlaureate.org

Claire Park (claire_park@college.harvard.edu) admires Amanda Gorman for her buoyant charisma.

the best part

By JASPER FU

I always loved the best part of travelling to San Francisco
of bouncing impatiently in a rattling SUV
down a rattling highway
a child eager and in search of the pastel houses
and twisting streets
are we there yet, Dad
that mark the City.

Perhaps it has not the cobblestone gravitas of the Old World
the spiraling modernity of Tokyo
the cozy warmth of brick buildings blanketed in Northeastern snow
the storied glory of Rome or Greece
still, it has its own charm.

Here the fog rolls in to make day brisk
for all the efforts of the California sun
as we run rampant through shops and stores
as my parents try to contain us.

But it is nights that lay bare the beauty of the city
cold nights spent bundled up
colder still for me
who has never seen snow
never heard hail.

The view from Coit Tower
or Twin Peaks
is all the more glorious for the climb
my dad proud he has dragged us three children up
as we cover reddened noses with numbing hands
as we scramble with fingers that can hardly feel it
for a quarter to slip into the slot of a rusty telescope
an eagle’s eye on demand.

Giving up and pulling away
revelling in the view
streets strung with stars shimmering so far away
blurry but beaming but blaring in the distance.

For all that, the best part is yet to come
because the best part is waiting
after I clamber into the car
after miles weaving through winding roads
Miles Davis playing through the contented silence
after a day well spent.

The best part is waiting
as we pull into the driveway
as we walk through the doorway
as we climb up stairs as daunting as any mountain
our leaden legs refusing to move
for all that we had just climbed one.

The best part is falling into bed
because I am too tired to lower myself
because I do not want to move another step
because I can’t, Dad

because the best part is always coming home.

Jasper Fu (jasperfu@college.harvard.edu)
is a long way from home.



The Women's Lightweight team on the water.
Abigail Koerner '21

Degrees of Perfection

Rowing on the Charles.

By ABIGAIL KOERNER

I want to remember this moment forever: the sun setting over water like melting icecream dripping down the side of the perfect cone. It is so sweet to be here as the wind blows through the tiny hairs abandoned by my ponytail holder and left to dangle there at the nape of my neck. My legs take off underneath me to this rhythm that takes us further. Our bodies fold up, wind up, and *boom* — extend out again. Like this, we row along. Bridge to bridge, wall to wall, and around each bend... I would do anything to go a little further.

Names for family members escape my lips as I cry out! Blood pumps through my veins to the heart which confuses the connection of our bodies with connections made by blood. But it is not blood which binds us. It is every

breath, every inch of space where we move and which we move. I'm falling in love with this moment and I'm ever closer to pure bliss. This rhythm, this speed, this moment is everlasting.

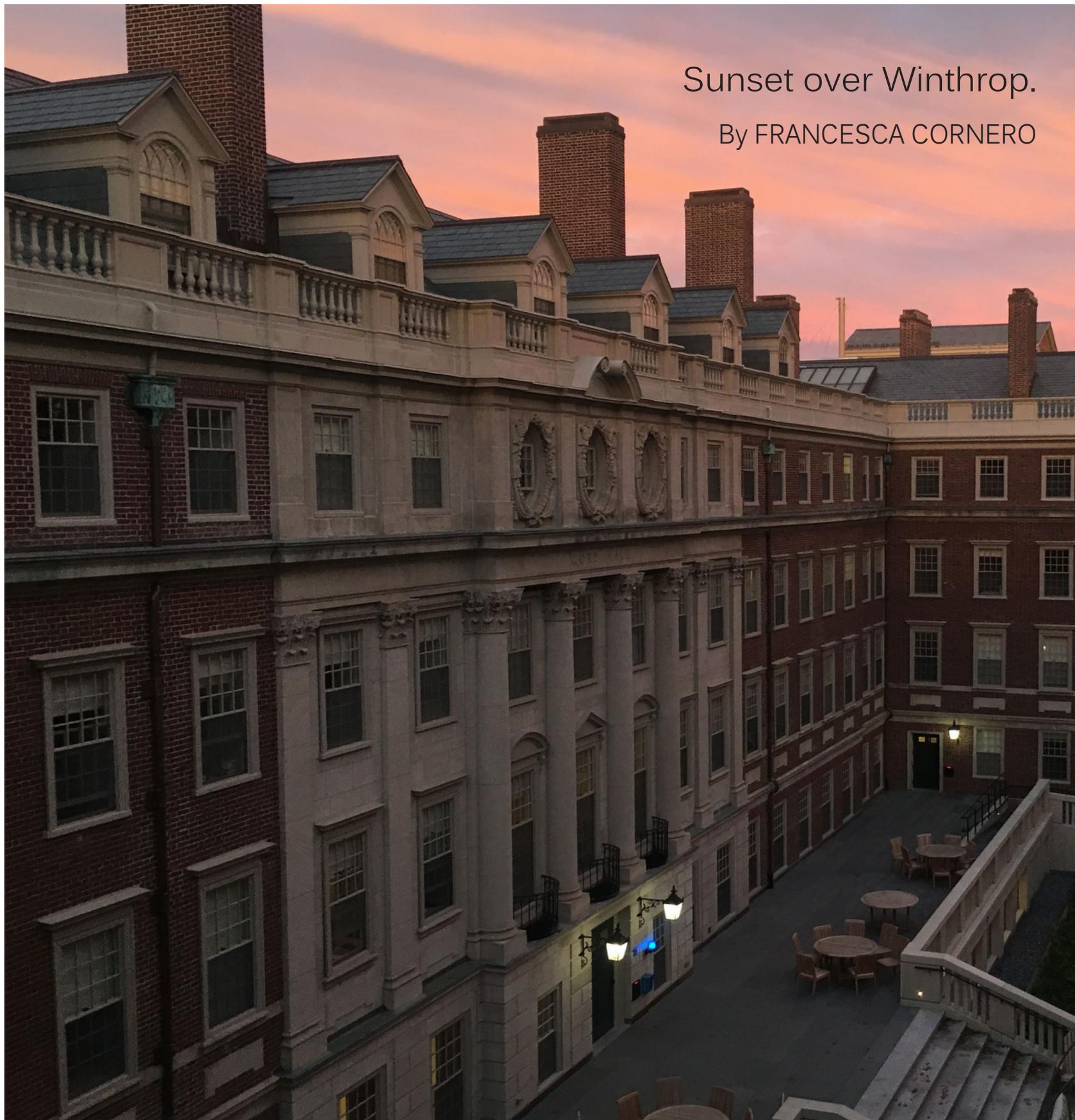
Moments like these are frightening. When the sky is so blue, air is crisp, and sunglasses shade the face from the heat and intensity of the sun, I fear the end. Perfection is bliss and too perfect strikes primal fear in my brain. My brain which no longer has control of my body. My body whose limbs latch on to tiny bodies crammed into one long boat. The sound of movement creeps into muscle memory. Legs remember — arms, and ears. Each stroke like the sound of doors that open and close, clocks that ding and dong. Rowing backwards, moving forwards... this paradox is my ecstasy.

Someone once told me the story of a species of bees. Bees who were constantly threatened by wasps who would attack their hive. Bees

who died at one-hundred-two degrees. Wasps who died at one-hundred-one. In an attack, the bees would flap their wings to reach one degree before death and the hive would prevail. Wings would slow to some cadence some bee would set as they saved themselves and each other. Wings beat like one single organ. One degree before death. One more sunset to paint the sky red before we can't go on any longer! But these sunsets take my breath away and each time the sun goes down forever, I long to see it again. These perfect moments melt into perfect endings to perfect days. There is no running, no hiding, and all I can do is hold on tight while we float — not fly — far, far away in quest of perfection.

Abigail Koerner (ajkoerner@college.harvard.edu) writes short fiction, but when she isn't, she's rowing on the Charles with the Lightweight Women's rowing team — an epic group of amazing women.

captured and shot



Sunset over Winthrop.

By FRANCESCA CORNERO