



LEARNING TO BE CIVIC

HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT LIFE, 1890-1940

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All studies of American civic life identify the years between 1890 and 1940 as the high tide of civic engagement: the period in which voluntary associations and other formal organizations, for profit and nonprofit, proliferated rapidly, in which citizens participated in unprecedented numbers (Skocpol, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Gamm, 1999; Hall, 1999).

A variety of forces and collective experiences have been offered to explain this phenomenon: the unifying and paradoxically civilized impact of war; efforts to overcome the atomizing effects of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization; the enactment of laws facilitating corporate and associational activity; efforts by religious and economic conservative activists to privatize religion and culture.

While all of these factors undoubtedly played significant roles in teaching Americans how to pool and collectively govern private resources for public purposes, none have addressed either the extent to which civic values and skills were selectively distributed, or—the concern of this essay—how these competencies were imparted. Of the major recent studies of civic engagement, only Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s *Voice and Equality* offered any insight into the venues in which Americans acquired civic competency—highlighting not only the general role of religion, but the fact that some religious communities were far more effective than others in doing so.

The selective distribution of civic competencies and preferences is evident in these incontrovertible facts:

- the concentration of corporations—proprietary and eleemosynary—in the Northeast and upper Midwest, evident from the beginning of the nineteenth century and persisting through the first half of the twentieth (Hall, 1982, 2000; Bowen, 1994);
- the preference of states in the South and West for the provision of public goods through government rather than private corporations, especially evident in the field of higher education;
- the continuing significance of education and income as predictors of organizational participation and civic engagement (Warner & Lunt, 1941; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1994).

The legal capacity to form associations and to pool resources has been available to all Americans. But it appears that the willingness of citizens to exercise this capacity has depended on where they were located geographically, on their wealth and education, and on their religious inclinations. Even if citizens were inclined to associational action, they often lacked the knowledge of how to organize and conduct the deliberative processes that lie at the heart of the associational process. It was exactly such ignorance that led Henry M. Robert (1837-1923) to write his famous *Rules of Order*. As an army officer, Robert was assigned to posts in Washington State, California, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin. Everywhere he went—except Massachusetts—he found “virtual parliamentary anarchy” (Robert, 2000). First published in 1876, Robert’s manual of procedure became an essential text for Americans as, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, they were swept up in a tidal wave of association building.

At the conclusion of *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam points to the “social capital deficit—crime waves, degradation in the cities, inadequate education, a widening gap between rich and poor, and what one contemporary called a ‘Saturnalia’ of political corruption” resulting from “Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and massive waves of immigration,” which transformed American communities at the end of the nineteenth century (368). “A quickening sense of crisis, coupled with inspired grassroots and national

leadership,” Putnam argues, “produced an extraordinary burst of social inventiveness and political reform,” recreating community institutions that would endure through most of the next century.

There seems no reason to doubt that massive civic reeducation of Americans occurred between 1890 and 1930—though there is considerable room for debate about how this happened, whose interests it served, and by whom it was initiated. Warner and Lunt’s study of associational life in “Yankee City” (Newburyport, Massachusetts) in the 1930s suggests not only that participation varied significantly by income, education, and religious affiliation, but also that not all associations were equally civic: that Roman Catholics and conservative Protestants, for example, were far more likely to participate in associations that served only their own co-religionists than in ones that were more broadly inclusive. By the same token, liberal Protestants and Jews were far more likely not only to participate in inclusive civic organizations, but to organize their economic enterprises as corporations and to capitalize them from public rather than private sources (Warner & Lunt, 1941).

The point of this paper is not to caricature civil society as an elite scheme. It is, rather, to investigate one of the ways in which civic values and competencies were imparted to a group of particular importance in a society where educated expertise was becoming increasingly central to every aspect of economic, political, and cultural activity: the graduates of two elite universities—Harvard and Yale—which, during the period under study, proclaimed themselves to be national institutions. There is some merit to these claims, although, as this paper will suggest, the term “national” meant rather different things to each.

HARVARD, YALE, AND TWO ETHICS OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In his *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* (1858), Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes had celebrated Boston as the “hub of the solar system,” a place that could “drain a large watershed of intellect, and will not itself be drained” (1957, 119-20). This notion of national leadership based on the capacity of a city to draw to itself the promising young authors, rising lawyers, large capitalists, and prettiest girls of other cities is peculiarly metropolitan and elitist, suggesting that national leadership consisted of preeminence rather than pervasiveness.

This conception was echoed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in his introduction to the *Harvard Memorial Biographies* (1866), the necrology of Harvard graduates who had fallen in the war. “If there is any one inference to be fairly drawn from these memoirs, as a whole, it is this,” Higginson wrote, “that there is no class of men in this republic from whom the response of patriotism [v] comes more promptly and surely than from its most highly educated class” (1866, iv-v). Members of a class “which would elsewhere form an aristocracy,” these young men, “favored by worldly fortune,” “threw themselves promptly and heartily into the war” not out of bravado or ambition, but “evidently governed, above all things else, by solid conviction and the absolute law of conscience” (v). Higginson’s second conclusion was

that our system of collegiate education must be on the whole healthy and sound, when it sends forth a race of young men who are prepared, at the most sudden summons, to transfer their energies to a new and alien sphere, and to prove the worth of their training in wholly unexpected applications. So readily have the Harvard graduates done this, and with such noble and unquestioned success, that I do not see how any one can read these memoirs without being left with fresh confidence in our institutions, in the American people, and in human nature itself. Either there was a most rare and exceptional combination in the lives which Harvard University gave to the nation, or else—if they fairly represent their

race and their time—then the work and the traditions of our fathers are safe in the hands of their descendants (v-vi).

The Brahmins' vision of the Civil War not only as a vindication of the educated elite it had endeavored to create, but also—specifically—as a vindication of Harvard as an educator of a national elite was carried over into the triumphal rhetoric used by Charles W. Eliot as he began to transform Harvard from a provincial college to a great research institution. “The American people are fighting a wilderness, physical and moral, on the one hand, and on the other are struggling to work out the awful problem of self-government,” he declared at the beginning of the 1869 essay, “The New Education,” in which he set forth the rationale for a revolution in higher education. “For this fight they must be trained and armed” (1869a, 203). In his inaugural address as president of Harvard some months later, he would again forcefully assert the notion of the indispensability of a national elite. “As a people, we do not apply to mental activities the principle of division of labor; and we have but a halting faith in special training for high professional employments,” he declared.

The vulgar conceit that a Yankee can turn his hand to anything we insensibly carry into high places, where it is preposterous and criminal. We are accustomed to seeing men leap from farm or shop to court-room or pulpit, and we half believe that common men can safely use the seven-league boots of genius. What amount of knowledge and experience do we habitually demand of our lawgivers? What special training do we ordinarily think necessary for our diplomatists?—although in great emergencies the nation has known where to turn. Only after years of the bitterest experience did we come to believe the professional training of a soldier to be of value in war. This lack of faith in the prophecy of a natural bent, and in the value of a discipline concentrated upon a single object, amounts to a national danger (1869b, 11-12).

Yale viewed the Civil War very differently. It issued no self-congratulatory necrologies, though many graduates had given their lives (and 19% of living graduates had served on one side or another). No equivalent of Harvard's lavish Memorial Hall was built on the Yale campus—and, indeed, no war memorial of any kind would be built there until the early twentieth century, when the names of those who fell in the Civil War would be inscribed along with the names of graduates who had died in all the nation's conflicts, from the Revolution to the First World War.

Yale also defined national leadership in a very different way. Rather than seeking to expand New Haven's “suction range” (to use Holmes's phrase), it sought, as its faculty wrote in the famous Yale Report of 1828, to provide its students—nearly half of whom by 1830 were born beyond the borders of Connecticut—with “the *discipline* and the *furniture* of the mind”; to provide students with the values, the “balance of character,” that would enable them not only to successfully pursue their occupations, but to fulfill a broad range of duties “to his family, to his fellow citizens, to his country” in ways enabling “to diffuse the light of science among all classes of the community.”

“Our republican form of government renders it highly important,” the Report concluded, evoking a peculiarly democratic and egalitarian conception of leadership, “that great numbers should enjoy the advantage of a thorough education.”

In this country, where offices are accessible to all who are qualified, the superior intellectual attainments ought not to be confined to any description of persons. Merchants, manufacturers, and farmers, as well as professional gentlemen, take their places in our public councils.

A thorough education ought therefore to be extended to all these classes. It is not sufficient that they be men of sound judgment, who can decide correctly, and give a silent vote, on great national questions. Their influence upon the minds of others is needed; an influence to be produced by extent of knowledge, and the force of eloquence. Ought the speaking in our deliberative assemblies be confined to a single profession? If it is knowledge, which gives us the command of physical agents and instruments, much more is it that which enables us to control the combinations of moral and physical machinery....

For Yale's leaders, the goal was not only to make higher education accessible, but to make it broadly influential. "The active, enterprising character of our population," the Report concluded,

renders it highly important, that this bustle and energy should be directed by sound intelligence, the result of deep thought and early discipline. The greater the impulse to action, the greater is the need of wise and skillful guidance. When nearly all the ship's crew are aloft, setting the topsails, and catching the breezes, it is necessary there should be a steady hand at the helm. Light and moderate learning is but poorly fitted to direct the energies of a nation, so widely extended, so intelligent, so powerful in resources, so rapidly advancing in population, strength, and opulence. Where a free government gives full liberty to the human intellect to expand and operate, education should be proportionally liberal and ample....

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Thus, while Harvard sought national leadership by drawing to it the best and the brightest, Yale determined to recruit its students nationally and to send them out to towns and cities everywhere—“*Merchants, manufacturers, and farmers, as well as professional gentlemen, take their places in our public councils.*” The College seems to have been as good as its word: for graduating classes between 1830 and 1860, fewer than a third of Yale's alumni resided in New England, while a third settled in the Middle Atlantic region, with the balance split between the South and West. (In contrast, during the same period, two-thirds of Harvard's students came from New England, the majority from within a hundred miles of Boston. And not until the 1930s would the majority settle outside the Northeast.)

The leadership ideals articulated in the Yale Report of 1828 not only persisted into the post-Civil War era, but were reaffirmed in the late 1860s, when wealthy and powerful alumni attempted to wrest control of the college from the Connecticut clergy who continued to comprise its governing body and to implement the kind of academic revolution that Eliot had initiated at Harvard. The opening guns were fired in the spring of 1870, when W.W. Phelps, a lawyer and entrepreneur who had graduated from the college in 1860, gave an address to assembled alumni in which he declared that they—the “lawyers and clergymen, physicians and capitalists, judges and editors, representing all the interests of the varied civilization, from whose fiercest current we step for the moment aside”—were “not satisfied with the management of the college.” “The college wants a living connection with the world without,” Phelps exclaimed,

an infusion of some of the new blood which throbs in every vein of this mighty Republic—a knowledge of what is wanted in the scenes for which Yale educates her children—this living connection with the outer world—this knowledge of the people's wants, can be acquired only from those who are in the people, and of the people.

“Don’t let Harvard, our great rival, alone have the benefit of it,” Phelps pled.

Let Yale condescend to be worldly wise. The son of a President is a young gentleman about to enter college. Yale says—it is worldly to secure him. We will make no effort to secure him. Sainly Yale folds her arms in true dignity of saintliness, and young Vicksburg [the son of General Ulysses S. Grant] goes to Harvard. The press, in a telegram carries the fact to hamlet and prairie, and the fame of Harvard enters a thousand households, for the first time. It is commencement time; Yale says—learning, not festivity, is the true object of a college. We will not cater to the weaknesses of alumni, by offering other attractions than the philosophical orations of its graduating class. Five hundred Yalensians, needing a very little impetus to gather them[selves] under the old trees, find nothing, and stay away. Five hundred Harvard men, needing the same impulse, pack their portmanteaus and go to Cambridge, because Lord Lacklaw, and the Hon. Mr. Blower, the distinguished Senator from Alaska, will be on the platform. Harvard takes great poets and historians to fill its vacant professorships—Yale takes boys, who have proved their qualifications by getting their windows broken as tutors (Phelps, 1870).

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Ironically, it appears that Yale had succeeded all too well. It had indeed furnished “*Merchants, manufacturers, and farmers*” and “professional gentlemen” with leadership skills sufficient not only to enable them to become wealthy and influential, but also ready to demand the places on the college’s governing body to which they believed their eminence entitled them.

Yale’s faculty fought back, not only reiterating the conceptions of leadership set forth in the Yale Report, but reframing them in terms of the rampant political corruption and economic predation that were already becoming familiar aspects of American public life. Moral philosopher Noah Porter’s “*American Colleges and the America Public*” (1869) offered a prescient and outspoken critique of the marketization of culture and the need to protect the higher learning from economic and political influence. At the same time, he defended Yale’s continuing embrace of a curriculum that emphasized values and character education—the “discipline and furniture of the mind”—over the vocationalism of Eliot’s elective curriculum, which allowed students to freely chose their courses.

The struggle for control of Yale attracted national attention, with front-page stories in the New York papers and feature articles and seemingly endless letters in prominent monthly journals of opinion like the *Atlantic* and the *Nation*. Clearly more than the parochial question of university governance was at stake: the real issue was, as Eliot had defined it, the training of national leaders for a future that seemed likely to be increasingly challenging.

THE EXTRACURRICULUM AT YALE AND HARVARD

Interestingly, while proponents and opponents of higher education reform traded blows over curriculum, pedagogy, student discipline, and the public role of colleges and universities, the most significant difference between Yale and Harvard went largely unmentioned, the organization and activities of student life—the *extracurriculum* of athletic teams, clubs, publications, and student musical and literary societies.

Yale was noted for—and criticized for—the extraordinary importance of its extracurriculum, which, according to reformers, threatened to eclipse academic life. But in defending it, graduates like Lyman Hotchkiss Bagg, whose *Four Years at Yale*—published in the midst of the controversy over the College’s government—were unembarrassed in defending it as integral to the educational vision first articulated in the Yale Report. “The chief value of a college course lies not in the scholarship or absolute knowledge with which it supplies a man,” Bagg wrote,

but rather in that intangible thing called culture, or discipline, or mental balance, which only its possessor can appreciate, and which he cannot describe, certainly no one can say that the peculiar life and customs which the students themselves adopt form an unimportant, even though it be an unrecognized, part of that course. Exactly how important this part is I will not attempt to determine, but this I will say, that were it possible for it to be removed, I think the value of the curriculum would thereby be diminished by at least one half (Bagg, 1870, 702).

Given the relatively undemanding pace of the college’s prescribed classical curriculum, through which undergraduates moved in lock step through group recitations, it may well be that the rich possibilities of the extracurriculum had as much or more to offer than its official counterpart.

Certainly, if Bagg’s detailed description of the extracurriculum is to be believed, the complex “society system” of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior clubs, “society institutions” (literary societies like Phi Beta Kappa and Linonia and Brothers in Unity, which had their own libraries), publications (the college newspaper, literary magazine, and class book), and dramatic and musical organizations, as well as the intricate unifying rituals of the classes and the college, not only served to powerfully communicate shared values, but also taught invaluable lessons in self-government.

As can well be imagined, the power of students in such a setting was extraordinary—and sometimes broke out into murderous violence, riotous encounters between Town and Gown, and cheating scandals (Bagg’s table of contents includes such entries as “The Fight of the Bully against the President,” “The Firemen’s Riot of 1841,” “The Riot of 1854,” “The High Street Fracas of 1858,” “The Stafford Homicide of 1860,” and “The Knock Down of 1870”). But the students’ extraordinary autonomy—which frequently placed them at odds not only with college and municipal authorities, but also with one another in inter-class and inter-society rivalries—elicited practical skills in negotiation and compromise of a sort that could not be taught in a classroom.

Before Eliot and the transformation of Harvard into a research university, Harvard’s student life apparently resembled Yale’s—at least superficially. It boasted an array of clubs and teams for underclassmen, as well as a prestigious group of “final” clubs. Student life, at least before President Quincy began to exert his influence in the 1829, was rowdy—but, with so many students’ families living nearby, infinitely less so than Yale’s. Harvard’s student body was a great deal more homogenous than Yale’s, overwhelmingly from eastern Massachusetts and, after the college turned Unitarian, less likely to include the older, poorer, and less well-prepared matriculates attending Yale and the newer Congregationalist institutions—including Williams (1793), Bowdoin (1794), Middlebury (1800), Colby (1813), and Amherst (1821)—a tendency enhanced by the increasing cost of attending Harvard, which priced it out of the reach for students of more humble origins (Story, 1981).

According to Henry Adams, who graduated in the 1850s, Harvard’s classical curriculum succeeded in creating “a type but not a will,” an “autobiographical blank on which only a watermark had been stamped”—something like the character education on which Yale prided itself. But, if the halting careers of

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antebellum graduates like Henry Lee Higginson, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Charles Francis Adams, and Henry Adams himself are any evidence, the Unitarian and Emersonian idealism paralyzed rather than liberated Harvard’s best and brightest. George Frederickson has described their situation with great accuracy. Charles Russell Lowell, who addressed his 1854 Harvard valedictory oration to Emerson’s “American Scholar,” which called for a union of “man thinking” with a life of action, typified his generation’s frustrations: “How was he both to develop an inner life and play an ‘heroic’ role in the world? His problem was compounded by the fact that America seemed to deny heroic roles to members of Lowell’s

social class” (Frederickson, 1965, 30). After four years of drifting and semi-invalidism, Lowell went to Iowa to work on one of the Boston-controlled western railroads. “But in 1860, Lowell had still not found a vocation which combined self-culture with an active life” (30). Lowell’s cousin, Henry Lee Higginson, faced a similar predicament. After dropping out of Harvard and concluding that “trade was not satisfying to the inner man for a life-occupation,” he drifted to Europe to study music (31). “He was desperate for a profession,” Frederickson writes. “Emerson’s demand for a high life had unfitted some young Brahmins for the ‘natural’ social roles, but had opened no alternatives” (31).

While most Harvard graduates stolidly marched down to law offices and counting houses on Boston’s State Street, others drifted around Europe’s cultural capitals yearning to find their callings. The war, as Frederickson has persuasively argued, solved the problem by enabling disenchanting elements of the elite to find in combat opportunities for acting on their highest ideals.

Eliot’s educational vision incorporated important elements of Unitarian and Emersonian ideas about character development while continuing to embrace centralizing metropolitan conceptions of leadership. His concern in “The New Education” was not curriculum, but the ultimate utility of education. A college education could enable a student to make intelligent choices, but should not attempt to provide specialized vocational or technical training. Although technical training should be more explicitly vocational, it should also include instruction in history, languages, and political economy, as well as provide a broad knowledge of science and mathematics. Only by differentiating the two levels of the educational process and making each as comprehensive as possible could higher education hope to prepare students to cope with the rapid pace of technological, economic, and political change. A truly useful education, in Eliot’s view, included a commitment to public service, specialized training, and a capacity to change and adapt.

Although his methods were pragmatic, Eliot’s ultimate goal, like those of the secularized Puritanism of the Boston elite, was a spiritual one. The spiritual desideratum was not otherworldly. It was embedded in the material world and consisted of measurable progress of the human spirit towards mastery of human intelligence over nature—the “moral and spiritual wilderness.” While this mastery depended on each individual fully realizing his capacities, it was ultimately a collective achievement and the product of institutions that established the conditions both for individual and collective achievement. Like the Union victory in the Civil War, triumph over the moral and physical wilderness and the establishment of mastery required a joining of industrial and cultural forces.

While Eliot’s reforms proposed the reform of professional schools, the development of research faculties, and, in general, a huge broadening of the curriculum, his proposals for undergraduate education in crucial ways preserved—and even enhanced—its traditional spiritual and character education functions. Echoing Emerson, Eliot believed that every individual mind had “its own peculiar constitution.” The

problem, both in terms of fully developing an individual's capacities and in maximizing his social utility, was to present him with a course of study sufficiently representative so as "to reveal to him, or at least to his teachers and parents, his capacities and tastes." An informed choice once made, the individual might pursue whatever specialized branch of knowledge he found congenial.

But Eliot's goal went well beyond Emersonian self-actualization for its own sake. Framed by the higher purposes of a research university in the service of the nation, specialized expertise could be harnessed to public purposes. "When the revelation of his own peculiar taste and capacity comes to a young man, let him reverently give it welcome, thank God, and take courage," Eliot declared in his inaugural address.

Thereafter he knows his way to happy, enthusiastic work, and, God willing, to usefulness and success. The civilization of a people may be inferred from the variety of its tools. There are thousands of years between the stone hatchet and the machine-shop. As tools multiply, each is more ingeniously adapted to its own exclusive purpose. So with the men that make the State. For the individual, concentration, and the highest development of his own peculiar faculty, is the only prudence. But for the State, it is variety, not uniformity, of intellectual product, which is needful. (1869b, 12-13)

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Eliot endeavored to broaden the base of Harvard's applicant pool by administering entrance examinations in major cities around the country (beginning in the 1880s), by promoting the growth of national alumni groups (through the publication of the *Graduates Magazine* and the establishment of Harvard clubs in New York, Chicago, and other cities), and through his participation in groups like the College Entrance Examining Board. Nonetheless, Harvard, although it did recruit many scions of new industrial and commercial wealth beyond New England, continued to admit the vast majority of its students from the Northeast, drawing particularly on old elite boarding schools like Phillips Andover and Exeter, newer ones like St. Paul's (1855) Groton (1884), St. Mark's (1865), Choate (1896), and Middlesex (1901), and a host of select Boston-area day schools (Boston Latin, Brimmer and May, Brown and Nichols, Milton, Volkman's) that prided themselves as "feeders" to Harvard (on this, see McLachlan, 1970). As late as 1940, nearly 80% of Harvard College matriculants were from North Atlantic states—most of these from New England, two-thirds of whom were private school graduates. Though the broadening of the applicant pool was almost indiscernible, the change by the 1870s was sufficient to enable Henry Adams to report the response of a student of whom he'd inquired his reasons for coming to Cambridge: "the degree of Harvard College is worth money to me in Chicago" (Adams, 1918, 305-306).

Harvard's extracurriculum had never remotely been as various or autonomous as Yale's, and Eliot made every effort to further diminish its importance. He discouraged the founding of "Greek letter" fraternities and barely tolerated intercollegiate athletics, which, to his distress, increasing numbers of alumni regarded favorably, but never accorded them the prominence they achieved at Yale. There, Walter Camp (Class of 1880) elevated them to a form of "muscular Christianity" and class leaders served simultaneously as stars of football and of Dwight Hall, the student Young Men's Christian Association.

Writing before the 1940s, when James Bryant Conant's efforts to transform Harvard into a genuinely national institution began to erode the old mores, Samuel Eliot Morison wrote with brutal candor about the exclusiveness of the university's student life. Preoccupied with building the intellectual side of Harvard, Eliot paid little attention to the extracurriculum and left the students to fend for themselves as far as living

arrangements were concerned. The result was that traditional student housing in the Yard retained an eighteenth-century primitiveness, while private developers, recognizing that the affluent scions of new industrial wealth desired such amenities as flush toilets and running water, began building luxurious private dormitories—the “Gold Coast”—along Mount Auburn Street. This produced a social cleavage between the affluent undergraduates, usually products of the new boarding schools, and middle class students, usually the products of rural academies and public schools. This cleavage was reinforced by relationships that developed between undergraduates and elite Boston families “as the Boston mammas suddenly became aware that Harvard contained many appetizing young gentlemen from New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere” (Morison, 1936, 420). “Divisions of wealth and breeding are not made conspicuous at Yale as at Harvard by the neighborhood of a city with well-marked social sets, the most fashionable of which sends all its boys to the College,” observed Harvard professor George Santayana. “These boys...form the most conspicuous masculine contingent of Boston Society, and the necessity falls upon them of determining which of their college friends are socially presentable” (quoted in Morison, 420-21).

“Obviously,” Morison noted, writing in the present tense for Harvard’s tercentennial history,

you could not room with a man in College or be very intimate with those you could not well ask to meet your sister, and naturally you got your friends into your club in preference to others. ...The social sets of metropolitan Boston became increasingly the dictators of social sets in Cambridge. This has balked all attempts to make Harvard a social democracy (421).

“Since 1890,” he continued,

it has been almost necessary for a Harvard student with social ambition to enter from a “right” sort of school and be popular there, to room on the “Gold Coast” and be accepted by Boston society his freshman year, in order to be on the right side of the social chasm. Family and race did not matter: an Irish-American, Jew, Italian, or Cuban was not regarded as such if he went to the right school and adopted the mores of his fellows; conversely, a lad of Mayflower and Porcellian ancestry who entered from a high school was as much “out of it” as a ghetto Jew (422).

The effect of this dynamic was evident not only on Harvard’s student clubs, which became far more exclusive than they had ever been—by the end of the century only 12% of the three upper classes were admitted to “final” clubs (425)—but this exclusiveness affected access of the average student, however talented, to the student publications and teams. John P. Marquand (Class of 1915), a Newbury (Massachusetts) High School product and scholarship student who later went on to become a best-selling novelist and Pulitzer prizewinner, was denied election to the staff of the *Crimson*, the undergraduate daily, because, in the words of its editorial board, “he does not know how to write” (Bell, 1979, 59-60). (Marquand did make the *Lampoon*, the humor magazine, which seems to have been a rare refuge for the otherwise unclubbable.)

The exclusive and elite ethos of Harvard’s major teams and clubs did not prevent students from forming a wide assortment of groups. Morison notes that in

the real college life of the period, where originality and individualism were formed, small congenial groups were easily formed and dissolved, and all manner of societies flourished for every possible taste, from trap-shooting to art-collecting. For this larger college world there was no

pressure to conform, no stand mould; the genius of the place...was to encourage each individual to develop his peculiar tastes and talents (Morison, 1936, 428).

For Morison, this freedom for like-minded students to form associations served to defend the university from the charge of elitism (something very much on the mind of Old Harvard as it confronted the challenge represented by meritocrat James Bryant Conant, whose brainchild, the Educational Testing Service, would soon revolutionize American higher education). The fact that the extracurriculum, for most Harvard students, enabled them to hone their individualism may not have been particularly efficacious in imparting civic values and skills. And because these organizations were likely to be short-lived, they did not serve as anchors for the kinds of postgraduate networks that proved to be such an important aspect of the Yale clubs and associations.

STUDENT LIFE AND THE ETHOS OF LEADERSHIP

The quintessential characterization of Yale student life when the extracurriculum was at the peak of its influence is Owen Johnson's 1911 novel, *Stover at Yale*. From its opening lines, which describe "Dink Stover, freshman" on his way to New Haven to begin "four glorious years" (Johnson, 1911, 13), civic themes are iterated and reiterated. As the train rumbles along, Stover reflects on his days as a "big man at a small school" (Lawrenceville), recalling in particular an incident in which

he had stood between the school and its tyrants. He had arrayed himself in circumstantial attire—boiled shirt, high collar, and carefully dusted derby—and appeared before the faculty with solemn, responsible face no less than three separate times, to voice the protest of four hundred future American citizens; first, at the insidious and alarming repetition of an abhorrent article of winter food...; second, to urge the overwhelming necessity of a second sleighing holiday; and, third and most important, firmly to assure the powers that be that the school viewed with indignation and would resist to despair the sudden increase in the already staggering burden of the curriculum.

The middle-aged faculty had listened gravely to the grave expounder of such grave demands [and] had promised reform.... (2-3)

Stover was subsequently taken into the confidence of the headmaster, who consulted with him on issues of student discipline. Looking back on his Lawrenceville years, Stover concludes that

he had held up an honest standard, he had played hard but square, disdained petty offenses, seen to the rigorous bringing up of the younger boys, and, as men of property must lend their support to the church, he had even publicly advised a moderate attention to the long classic route which leads to college. (3)

Stover is a student leader, Johnson tells us, not to call attention to himself, but to advocate for and uphold the civic order of the school.

On the train, Stover befriends a sophomore, Le Baron, who becomes his guide to the mysteries of student life. In response to Stover's question about "the society system," Le Baron instructs:

“You’ll hear a good deal of talk inside the college, and out of it too, about the system. It has its faults. But it’s the best system there is, and it makes Yale what it is today. It makes fellows get out and work; it gives them ambitions, stops loafing and going to seed, and keeps a pretty good, clean, temperate atmosphere about the place. (25)

“The college is made up of all sorts of elements,” Le Baron explains,

and it is not easy to run it. Now, in every class there are just a small number of fellows who are able to do it and who will do it. They form the real crowd. All the rest don’t count.... You are going to be judged by your friends, and it is just as easy to know the right crowd as the wrong:” (26)

In response to Stover’s question about “the right crowd,”

“The right crowd?” said LeBaron, a little perplexed to define so simple a thing. “Why the crowd that is doing things, working for Yale; the crowd –”

“That the class ahead picks to lead us,” said Stover abruptly.

“Yes,” said LeBaron frankly; “and it won’t be a bad judgment. Money alone won’t land a man in it, and there’ll be some in it who work their way through college. On the whole, it’s about the crowd you’ll want to know your whole life.

“Remember,” Le Baron cautioned, “you’re going to be watched from now on.”

“Watched?” said Stover, frowning.

“Yes; everything you do, everything you say—that’s how you [will be judged].” (28)

While Harvard freshmen may have been subject to similar surveillance, the fact that nearly half of Yale’s 1910 matriculants were graduates of public high schools (as opposed to Harvard’s 30%) and that nearly a third came from outside the Northeast (as opposed to Harvard’s 9%) meant that Yale’s students, as a far more heterogeneous group, would be held to very different standards than Harvard’s. Further, where Harvard’s criteria for social acceptability were, as Morison and Santayana suggest, dictated by Boston’s elite, at Yale—remote from any dominant metropolitan center—they were set by the students themselves.

Johnson’s suggestion that admission to the inner circles of Yale leadership was more driven by merit and energy than by money and pedigree is confirmed by the fact that of 179 members of the Class of 1910, 107 (60%) were members of major teams, editorial boards of student publications, or senior or junior societies. To be sure, this high level of engagement declined as the size of Yale’s student body increased (it would double in size between 1890 and 1920) and when, after 1930, the residential colleges brought upperclassmen out of the fraternities and back onto campus. Even so, Yale’s senior societies were far more heterogeneous than their Harvard’s final clubs: while graduates of St. Paul’s and Andover were overrepresented in Skull and Bones, membership was geographically diverse and included alumni of schools from outside the “St. Grottlesex” orbit, like Boston’s Roxbury Latin, New York’s Columbia Institute, and Cleveland’s University School; graduates of the top boarding schools were even less likely to be found in Scroll and Key, whose membership in 1911 included graduates of New Haven High School, Louisville (Kentucky) High School, Auburn (New York) High School, and the Cincinnati Educational Institute (Dana, 1911).

TABLE 1 GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS OF ENTERING STUDENTS AT HARVARD AND YALE, 1890-1940.

HARVARD						
	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
NEW ENGLAND		75.3	80.9	69.3	55.5	48.4
NORTH ATLANTIC <small>INCLUDING NEW ENGLAND</small>		88.3	91.5	86.3	80.3	77.3
SOUTH ATLANTIC		2.0	.09	2.5	3.0	3.8
WESTERN		1.0	.09	2.3	1.2	2.4
NORTH CENTRAL		7.2	5.0	7.3	11.9	4.0
SOUTH CENTRAL		1.0	.01	5.0	1.5	1.4
FOREIGN		.05	.01	4.0	.01	2.0
NUMBER IN CLASS	369	572	733	852	986	1053
YALE						
NEW ENGLAND	40.9	43.4	44.1	44.0	37.2	34.4
NORTH ATLANTIC <small>INCLUDING NEW ENGLAND</small>	75.4	76.8	73.2	71.3	69.7	69.7
SOUTH ATLANTIC	3.0	3.7	4.0	4.7	6.1	6.0
WESTERN	1.6	1.3	2.0	2.4	3.1	4.0
NORTH CENTRAL	16.6	14.2	15.8	17.0	15.1	14.9
SOUTH CENTRAL	1.5	1.8	1.7	1.6	2.9	2.9
FOREIGN	2.1	2.3	2.7	2.8	3.1	2.5
NUMBER IN CLASS	179	358	315	316	577	849

Sources: Harvard University, *Report of the President* (respective years); George W. Pierson, *A Yale Book of Numbers* (1983).

In contrast, Harvard student life grew steadily less democratic: just as the proportion of matriculants from public schools dropped from 38% to 23% between 1870 and 1890, so the proportion of students admitted to the Institute of 1770, traditionally Harvard's most inclusive social organization, dropped from 40% of sophomores for the class of 1888 to 16% for the class of 1906 (Morison, 1936, 421, 423). Membership in its final clubs was closely restricted to the wealthiest and most pedigreed scions of Northeastern families—and, as Franklin Roosevelt (Class of 1904) discovered to his dismay, at times neither wealth, pedigree, nor kinship were guarantees of election.

As Table 1 suggests, Harvard's undergraduates were overwhelmingly recruited from the Northeast, primarily New England, until 1940. In contrast, fewer than half of Yale's entering undergraduates came from New England during the period under study. While most of Yale's students continued to come from the North Atlantic region, the College accepted roughly twice the percentage of students from the Midwest and three times the percentage from the South. Yale's student organizations appear to have reflected rather than resisted this heterogeneity.

STUDENT LIFE AND ALUMNI CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The pronounced differences between Harvard and Yale in opportunities for organizational participation as well as the value attached to such participation by students themselves and by university faculty and administrators appears to have measurably different outcomes in terms of levels, types, and intensities of participation in civic life after graduation.

“The interesting question is why two groups that were superficially so similar should have displayed such different inclinations towards and styles of leadership.”

For the purposes of this study, membership on the governing boards of business corporations, nonprofit organizations (alumni associations, charitable, civic, clubs, religious, professional, and trade associations), and non-elective public boards and commissions (federal, state, and municipal), is used as a proxy for civic engagement. The selection of this variable is not arbitrary but is based on the premise that among the prerequisites for civic engagement are: 1) *values* that lead individuals to act in public arenas, working with others to achieve common ends; 2) *skills* that enable individuals to act effectively in concert with others.

The population under study—members of the Harvard and Yale classes of 1890, 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1940—were all privileged as civic actors, not only because they were far better educated than the vast majority of their contemporaries, but because the institutions by which they were educated, each in its own way, enjoined them to be leaders. The interesting question is why two groups that were superficially so similar should have displayed such different inclinations towards and styles of leadership.

The hypothesis offered by this study is that the two institutions, while both proclaiming themselves educators of national leaders, offered two very different conceptions of leadership and, based on those conceptions, two very different kinds of student life as arenas in which the values and skills of leadership could be learned. The demographics of the student body played an important role, and not coincidentally, since the ways in which each institution defined leadership inevitably influenced its selection of students in terms of class and geographical origins and in terms of what each deemed proper academic preparation.

Harvard’s conception of leadership was based on the idea of expanding Boston’s national influence through its economic and cultural institutions—and doing so by recruiting the best and the brightest from New England, who, imbued with the values of the emergent Brahminate, could be entrusted with the task of creating a national institutional culture on Boston’s terms. Within the framework of Eliot’s “new education,” Harvard’s curriculum became a mechanism for leading students to discover specialized callings that would enable them to become “commissioned officers of the army of industry” who would take their places in enterprises created and controlled on State Street (Eliot, 1869a, 202). “We need engineers who thoroughly understand what is already known at home and abroad about mining, road and bridge building, railways, canals, water-powers, and steam machinery,” Eliot proclaimed,

architects who have thoroughly studied their art; builders who can at least construct buildings which will not fall down; chemists and metallurgists who will know what the world has done and is doing in the chemical arts, and in the extraction and working of metals; manufacturers who appreciate what science and technical skill can do for the works which they superintend. (1869a, 366)

Eliot stressed that mere technical competence was not enough. The careers of graduates would be “no mercenary service.” “Other fields of labor attract them more and would reward them better, but they are filled with the noble ambition to deserve well of the republic” (1869b). Combining the highest levels of expertise with the highest values of public service, the university’s graduates, as Eliot’s protégé, Herbert Croly (Class of 1889) would put it forty years later, “perfect themselves as instruments for the fulfillment of the American national promise” (1909, 438).

In contrast to Harvard’s metropolitan centralizing model, Yale’s model of leadership, in line with its evangelical roots, was egalitarian and decentralizing, seeking to influence the nation by recruiting its students nationally and, once equipped with the “discipline and furniture of the mind,” sending them back to the towns and cities from which they had come. Rather than transforming its students into “commissioned officers of the army of industry,” as Eliot had put it in his inaugural, Yale sought to imbue them with convictions that enabled them, whether they were businessmen, lawyers, physicians, teachers, or farmers, to regard their callings as ministries and themselves as moral agents empowered by their faith to influence their neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens wherever they happened to find themselves. Beyond this notion of spiritualized leadership, the body of ideas developed by the “New Haven Theologians” of the ante bellum decades stressed the importance of voluntary associations as instruments of collective moral agency—a fact expressed not only in the extraordinarily high levels of associational engagement by Yale graduates, but also in the intensely associational character of student life, which evidently served as a school for learning civic values and organizational skills (on this, see Hall, in press).

The outcome of these two understandings of leadership is evident in the patterns of board membership of Harvard’s and Yale’s graduates. As Table 2 shows, between 1890 and 1920, Yale graduates were roughly twice as likely to serve on corporate, nonprofit, or non-elective public boards and commissions than their Harvard counterparts.

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE OF MEMBERS OF HARVARD AND YALE CLASSES OF 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, AND 1940 SERVING ON CORPORATE, NONPROFIT, AND NON-ELECTIVE PUBLIC BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.

CLASS YEAR	HARVARD	YALE
1890	26%	42%
1900	25%	39%
1910	28%	60%
1920	42%	54%
1930	42%	40%
1940	55%	49%

Source: Harvard and Yale class reports.

By 1930, the differences between the two groups had largely disappeared, with the level of Yale graduates serving on boards declining and that of Harvard graduates increasing to a level commensurate with Yale's. The primary reasons for this appear to involve changes in national educational demographics, in the demographics of Harvard's and Yale's student bodies, and in the nature of student life in the two institutions.

Before 1900, few American communities maintained high schools and only a small fraction of young men attended school beyond the primary level; in fact, the proportion of 17-year-olds attending high school did not surpass 50% until 1942—and did not even reach 10% until 1913 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1976, 379). Even when high school education was available, its quality varied enormously: a handful of public institutions like New Haven High School and Boston Latin prepared their students so superbly that they were among the leading feeder schools to Yale and Harvard.

But, as statistics prepared by Harvard's faculty early in the twentieth century suggest, most public high school graduates were poorly prepared to pass the university's rigorous entrance examinations, which required not only high levels of numeracy and literacy, but also working knowledge of Latin and Greek. Before the First World War, a significant number of students at private schools like New Haven's venerable Hopkins Grammar were graduates of public high schools taking postgraduate studies in order to prepare for Yale's entrance examinations. By the early years of the twentieth century, some Harvard administrators and faculty were beginning to worry about the consequences of the university's narrow dependence on matriculants from elite preparatory schools. "A system which operates in such a way as to confine our choice of students to those who live in New England or to those who though their homes are outside New England can afford to come to New England schools cannot fail to have consequences with respect to scholarship in Harvard College," wrote John Goddard Hart, chair of the Committee on Admission, in his 1909-1910 report to the president of the university (Harvard University, 1910, 255). Hart was particularly worried that the prep schools, because of their single-minded devotion to getting their charges admitted to Ivy League institutions, were producing graduates who lacked interest in intellectual pursuits while, on the other hand, denying admission to students of real merit.

To support his point, Hart compared two applicants, one from an elite prep school, the other from a public high school. The first, "a boy who attended a school whose curriculum had always been determined by our requirements for admission," despite earning "unsatisfactory grades—he had no grade higher than C, and only three C's out of ten grades" was "easily admitted without conditions" (Hart, 1910, 257-58). To illustrate the case of the second, Hart began by quoting a letter he had received from the head of a school:

I am enclosing at your request an outline of the work pursued by the most brilliant pupil in our graduating class this year. You will observe that his course would not permit him to enter Harvard College. ... This young man is the brightest mathematician I have known during my twenty-five years in high schools. As an illustration of his ability, during the past year he has read by himself, as recreation, most of the Differential and Integral Calculus; and he has also done reading in Analytical Geometry. He has done what would be regarded as advanced work in collect chemistry.... (259).

"It is hard to say what this student could have done if he had wished to come to Harvard," Hart wrote.

By our examinations, he could hardly have made a record of more than sixteen points, not because he has not done more work, but because our system would give him barely a chance to show what he has done in languages, and no chance at all to show wherein he is strongest. If by some lucky chance the Committee on Admission got an opportunity to pilot him through the shoals and bars of our admission requirements they would have been obliged to admit him under conditions which would stamp him as inferior to dull boys (259).

“Our regulations for admission,” Hart concluded, “cut us off, and operate in favor of dull and indifferent students” (259).

Hart’s warnings would be resisted, but couldn’t be ignored. Although the proportion of matriculants from the Northeast remained high, it did drop from 80% in 1910 to slightly less than 50% by 1940. Not until the presidency of scientist James Byrant Conant, the first non-Brahmin to lead Harvard in more than a century, would the university, through Conant’s leadership in the establishment of a genuinely national system of educational testing, make a serious move towards meritocratic admissions (Lemann, 1998).

Changes in the national education system, however, served to broaden the applicant pool for both Harvard and Yale. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, American public schools were transformed as business and civic leaders came to understand the crucial importance of educated workers and consumers to the future of American capitalism. Huge investments were made in reorganizing public school systems, which were placed under the authority of administrators trained at elite institutions like Columbia, Yale, and Harvard. This enormously increased the number of students entering and graduating from high school (the number of seventeen-year-olds in high school increased from 6.3% in 1900 to 28.8% by 1930), as well as the quality of high school curricula and teachers (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1976, 379). Thus, even though admissions requirements were slow to change, more students were being prepared to meet them. As Table 1 shows, between 1910 and 1930, the percentage of Harvard matriculants from outside New England, most of whom were public school graduates, increased by nearly 20%.

At Yale there was little significant change because the college had been recruiting its students nationally since the early nineteenth century: by the 1830s, fewer than a third of its graduates were Connecticut natives (Hall, 1982, 310). Ironically, as Harvard became more meritocratic in its admissions during the 1930s, Yale became less so, as the college drew an increasing proportion of its matriculants from a handful of elite prep schools. This was to a significant degree an artifact of the increasing prosperity of its alumni. Before the turn of the century, it was not uncommon for the children of Midwestern alumni to send their children to New Haven’s Hopkins Grammar School to put the final touches on their preparation for Yale’s admissions examinations. By the turn of the century, they were increasingly likely to resort to one or another of a host of new boarding schools—St. Paul’s, Groton, Middlesex, St. Mark’s, Choate, Taft, and Pomfret—whose curricula were designed to teach their charges what they needed to know to pass.

“During the first three decades of the twentieth century, American public schools were transformed as business and civic leaders came to understand the crucial importance of educated workers and consumers to the future of American capitalism.”

Student life at Harvard and Yale also underwent significant changes after 1920. Determined to counteract the increasing gap between the wealthy and privileged and the mass of students, Harvard’s administration initiated a series of interventions intended to democratize student life. The first of these was the construction of the Harvard Union, a place where the “unclubbed” could partake of many of the amenities enjoyed by their more fortunate classmates, including a library and dining and meeting rooms for student organizations. By 1904, only three years after its completion, more than two-thirds of undergraduates were members and it was hosting some three dozen student organizations and nineteen “entertainments” concerts, plays, and public lectures (Daniels, Foster & Sanger, 1904, 92-98).

Harvard’s acceptance of Yale alumnus Stephen Harkness’s multimillion-dollar gift to implement the “house plan”—a new system of housing that would bring students together in lavishly-appointed dormitories—had an especially powerful effect on student life. Before the construction of the houses, most Harvard undergraduates had lived in private accommodations in Cambridge—the wealthy in luxurious apartments on a section of Mount Auburn Street that came to be known as the “Gold Coast,” the rest in boarding houses and rented rooms of varying degrees of disrepute and disrepair. Though the final clubs continued to hold their own as elite bastions, they no longer enjoyed a monopoly on social and academic prestige. By the 1930s, Harvard had, in effect, co-opted the extracurriculum and institutionalized student life as part of its larger educational purpose. More to the point, the houses and the Union, in democratizing opportunities for organizational participation, had expanded opportunities for undergraduates to learn the skills and values associated with civic engagement, which would seem to account for the increase in board service by graduates after 1930.

TABLE 3 ENROLLMENT IN HARVARD COLLEGE AND YALE COLLEGE, BY ACADEMIC YEAR.

	HARVARD COLLEGE	YALE COLLEGE
1886-87	1077	570
1889-90		832
1899-1900		1190
1908-09	2238	1273
1909-10		1229
1919-20	2534	997
1929-30		1680
1935-36	3726	1519
1939-40		1520

Sources: Harvard University, *Report of the President* (respective years); George W. Pierson, *A Yale Book of Numbers* (1983).

Yale followed a similar pattern, but at a different pace and for somewhat different reasons. After two decades of struggle between clergy and laity, the latter had finally gotten control of the institution and promptly elected railroad economist Arthur Twining Hadley as president. Looking forward to Yale's second century—and to the swelling fortunes of the college's alumni—Hadley intended to initiate Yale's long-delayed transformation into a research university on a par with Harvard. The first steps were taken in the 1890s, when Yale began constructing new dormitories—with the intention of bringing all undergraduates onto the campus. (As at Harvard, most undergraduates had been living in private off-campus accommodations). Under Hadley's leadership Yale also began aggressively increasing the size of its undergraduate body, which by 1900 was twice what it had been fifteen years earlier and which would be triple its 1887 size by 1930. The expansion of dormitories could not keep pace with the growth in the number of students and, by the mid-1920s, the situation was desperate. As George W. Pierson wrote:

By 1924 the College, in spite of the subtraction of Freshmen, was unable to house some hundred of its upperclassmen. As for its dining facilities, they were nonexistent. So all Sheff men, and all College men who failed in election to the Junior fraternities, had to eat around in boarding houses, restaurants, lunch counters, diners, and drugstores...with the inevitable hazard of malnutrition or contamination. Trench mouth and indigestion were never listed as causes for the Quadrangle Plan, but the need for better living and dining conditions unquestionably figured (Pierson, 1955, 210).

More seriously, the inability to house and feed students threatened to undermine the educational process:

Freshmen had to be accommodated in rooming houses, badly designed and scattered hither and yon. When James Rowland Angell [who became Yale's president in 1921] had had a chance to study the situation it seemed to him that many of them were almost literally "on the streets," and on the streets where no students should be found, least of all Freshmen. The moral values of the Freshman Year were being neutralized. A fine teaching project was going to waste (210-11).

Even if Yale had possessed the resources to build all the dormitories it needed, the mere expansion of facilities would not have solved the central problem: the growing impersonality of student life and the widening gap between the wealthy and privileged who could afford to live in fraternities or the private apartments that were the equivalent of Harvard's Gold Coast. As evidence for this, Pierson relates an anecdote about James Gamble Rogers, the Class of 1889 graduate who would go on to design most of Yale's great construction projects of the 1920s and 30s:

in the late spring of 1926 Rogers had an accidental shock. He found that a Freshman of his acquaintance didn't know the men on the Freshman crew or even who they were. Evidently the old Class pride and intimacy were gone. Also his young friend seemed in poor physical shape—which turned out to be nothing more than improper feeding, from eating on the run in coffee shops and the like. So Rogers's enthusiasm was enlisted for better housing, homelike atmosphere, and good food (216).

As a close friend and golfing companion of philanthropist Stephen Harkness, Rogers was in a good position to influence his wealthy friend in helping Yale with its housing and social problems. Pierson speculates that Harkness's own unhappy experience as a fat and shy midwesterner who had spent a lonely freshman year in an unattractive rooming house (before being rescued by a socially connected upper-classman), inclined him to understand the unenviable situation of the "average men" in Yale College and to join in the effort to reorganize student life at his alma mater.

Like the “house plan” at Harvard, Yale’s construction of residential colleges (the “Quadrangle Plan”) would do much to restore democracy and intimacy to student life—though, as at Harvard, it would be very different from the tumultuous student-run extracurriculum of earlier days. The colleges would largely—but not entirely—bridge the gap between the privileged “preppies” and the earnest products of public schools. Still, most “townie” undergraduates continued to live at home and—though assigned college affiliations, were constantly reminded of their inferiority. And Yale’s pervasive anti-Semitism—which was so pronounced that nearly every Jewish member of the Class of 1921 anglicized his name—erected social and academic barriers to students who didn’t match the emerging WASP ideal. (On anti-Semitism at Yale, see Oren, 1985.)

If the rising proportion of Harvard graduates serving on boards by 1930 was an indication of the democratization of student life at the university, the falling proportion of service by Yale graduates is probably an indication of Yale’s increasingly undemocratic character. The first residential college was not completed until 1932—too late to have a significant impact on the population under study—and the growing size of the student body, impersonality of relations between students and faculty, and the fragmentation of student life resulting from the dismantling of the society system undermined the old extracurriculum. Yale built no equivalent to the Harvard Union, so disintegration of residential life during the 1920s had no institutional counterpoise. Once rich in opportunities for learning the skills of self-government, Yale by the twenties had less to offer students in terms of opportunities to cultivate relationships and acquire civic skills than it had had half a century earlier.

At this point, I have only fragmentary—but nonetheless tantalizing—data on the linkages between extracurricular involvement and post-baccalaureate civic participation.

Table 4 breaks down members and non-members of student organizations and activities in the Yale classes of 1890, 1910, 1920, and 1940 and shows whether or not they served on at least one board after graduation. For all classes, the effects are striking: student organization participants were consistently far more likely to serve on boards than non-participants. The only major difference among the classes is the decline in overall board service by members of the Class of 1940.

Given the anecdotal evidence about the growing exclusiveness of Harvard student organizations in the first forty years of the twentieth century, it seems likely that the rate of organizational participation by Harvard students is likely to be a good deal lower than Yale’s. If the Harvard data can be shown to mirror Yale’s, the case for the significance of the extracurriculum as a primary source of civic skills and values will be established beyond question.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement varied between Harvard and Yale graduates not only in the proportion of alumni serving on boards, but also in the types and intensities of organizational involvement. The data not only illustrate the differences between alumni of the two colleges, but also of the impact of institutional changes and shifting student demographics on student life and postgraduate civic engagement.

Table 5 indicates that for most of the period under study, the intensity of civic engagement, as measured by the proportion of alumni directors serving on more than one board, is generally greater for Yale than for Harvard through 1920. The declining intensity of board service by Yale alumni and the commensurate increase by Harvard alumni at the end of the period can probably be attributed to the changing char-

TABLE 4 MEMBERSHIP IN STUDENT CLUBS, TEAMS, PUBLICATIONS, AND OTHER ACTIVITIES AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION AFTER GRADUATION, YALE ALUMNI, BY CLASS YEAR.

YALE 1890			
	BOARD	NO BOARD	TOTAL
CLUB	63	54	117
NO CLUB	6	24	30
TOTAL	69	78	147
80% of class members belonged to at least one club, team, publication, or student activity. 47% of all members of class sat on at least one board. 54% of all members of clubs sat on at least one board. 20% of the unclubbed sat on at least one board.			
YALE 1910			
	BOARD	NO BOARD	TOTAL
CLUB	130	88	218
NO CLUB	12	31	43
TOTAL	142	119	261
84% of class members belonged to at least one club, team, publication, or student activity. 54% of all members of class sat on at least one board. 60% members of clubs sat on at least one board. 28% of the unclubbed sat on at least one board.			
YALE 1920			
	BOARD	NO-BOARD	TOTAL
CLUB	146	74	220
NO-CLUB	15	31	46
TOTAL	161	105	266
83% of all class members belonged to at least one club, team, publication, or student activity. 61% of all members of class sat on at least one board. 66% off members of clubs sat on at least one board. 33% of the unclubbed sat on at least one board.			
YALE 1940			
	BOARD	NO-BOARD	TOTAL
CLUB	352	296	684
NO-CLUB	40	84	124
TOTAL	392	380	772
84% of all class members belonged to at least one club, team, publication, or student activity. 49% of all members of class sat on at least one board. 54% of all members of clubs sat on at least one board. 32% of the unclubbed sat on at least one board.			

Sources: Yale class reports (respective years).

TABLE 5 PERCENTAGE OF HARVARD AND YALE COLLEGE ALUMNI DIRECTORS SERVING ONE, THREE OR MORE, AND FIVE OR MORE BOARDS, BY CLASS YEAR.

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
TOTAL % ALUMNI SERVING ON BOARDS						
HARVARD	26%	25%	28%	42%	42%	55%
YALE	41%	38%	60%	54%	40%	49%
% DIRECTORS SERVING ON 3 OR MORE BOARDS						
HARVARD	12%	20%	24%	30%	39%	64%
YALE	25%	30%	21%	53%	25%	57%
% DIRECTORS SERVING ON 5 OR MORE BOARDS						
HARVARD	3%	5%	7%	13%	14%	35%
YALE	11%	12%	12%	17%	10%	28%

Sources: Harvard and Yale class reports (respective years).

acter of student life in the two institutions and to the increasing heterogeneity of the applicant pools out of which they were recruiting their students.

Table 6 shows the occupations followed by Harvard and Yale graduates in classes 1890-1940. Yale graduates were far more likely to enter business than their Harvard counterparts, although by the Class of 1930, these differences disappear. The return of the gap for the Class of 1940 is, evidently, an anomaly. Postwar Harvard and Yale graduates alike turned away from business careers: by the mid-1940s, only 38% of Harvard graduates became businessmen; by the mid-1950s, the level had fallen below 25%. Less than a third of Yale's graduates chose business occupations after 1945. Put another way, the occupational profiles of Yale and Harvard alumni came to resemble one another in the second half of the century.

Table 7 shows the relationship between occupation and intensity of civic engagement. It shows that among graduates of both Harvard and Yale, businessmen are significantly overrepresented among those who serve on three or more boards. For the earlier classes, lawyer alumni of both institutions are also overrepresented, though this tendency disappears for classes graduating after 1930. For all other occupations, not only is the rate of service on multiple boards very low, there is generally an inverse relationship between board service of any kind and a likelihood of serving on more than one board.

I do not yet have complete data on service on multiple types of boards. This information would reveal the relative role of occupational groups as linkers of various areas of social, economic, and political activity. The fragmentary data I have suggests that businessmen appear to be far more likely than any other occupational group to serve across a range of boards—charitable, public, civic, religious, trade association, and social/athletic. Professionals, on the other hand, when they serve on multiple boards, appear to restrict their commitment to corporations, associations, or agencies related to their professional interests rather than being broadly involved in civic life.

TABLE 6 HARVARD AND YALE COLLEGE ALUMNI SERVING ON THREE OR MORE BOARDS, BY OCCUPATION AND CLASS YEAR.

	1890		1900		1910		1920		1930		1940	
	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale
BUSINESS	46%	42%	54%	64%	60%	59%	61%	54%	47%	46%	52%	65%
LAW	27%	47%	22%	22%	14%	21%	16%	33%	11%	7%	19%	5%
MEDICINE	0	5%	0	0	4%	3	1%	0	8%	10%	9%	16%
CLERGY	0	0	0	0	6%	3%	4%	2%	1%	1%	0	0
EDUCATION	9%	0	16%	7%	6%	10%	5%	4%	11%	6%	7%	8%
OTHER	18%	6%	9%	7%	10%	4%	13%	7%	22%	30%	13%	6%

Sources: Harvard and Yale class reports (respective years).

TABLE 7 PERCENTAGE OF HARVARD AND YALE COLLEGE ALUMNI ENTERING MAJOR OCCUPATIONS AND PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI SERVING ON THREE OR MORE BOARDS, BY CLASS YEAR.

	1890		1900		1910		1920		1930		1940	
	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale	Harvard	Yale
BUSINESS	0.28	0.42	0.33	0.49	0.47	0.57	0.45	0.54	0.47	0.46	0.33	0.53
% BUSINESS ON 3 BOARDS	0.46	0.42	0.54	0.64	0.6	0.59	0.61	0.54	0.47	0.46	0.52	0.65
LAW	0.21	0.25	0.14	0.16	0.1	0.1	0.11	0.16	0.11	0.07	0.09	0.11
% LAW ON 3 BOARDS	0.27	0.47	0.22	0.22	0.14	0.21	0.16	0.33	0.11	0.07	0.19	0.05
MEDICINE	0.1	0.09	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.08	0.1	0.11	0.06
% MEDICINE ON 3 BOARDS	0	0.05	0	0	0.04	0.03	0.01	0	0.08	0.1	0.09	0.16
CLERGY	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0	0
% CLERGY ON 3 BOARDS	0	0	0	0	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.01	0	0
EDUCATION	0.11	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.1	0	0.09	0.06	0.11	0.06	0.14	0.08
% EDUCATION ON 3 BOARDS	0.09	0	0.16	0.07	0.06	0.1	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.08
OTHER	0.26	0.14	0.31	0.17	0.26	0.26	0.3	0.14	0.22	0.3	0.33	0.22
% OTHER ON 3 BOARDS	0.18	0.06	0.09	0.07	0.1	0.04	0.13	0.07	0.22	0.3	0.13	0.06

Sources: Harvard and Yale class reports (respective years).

The breadth and intensity of board service by businessmen is suggestive as regards the sources of what Robert Putnam has described as “the extraordinary burst of social inventiveness and political reform” that “made America civic” in the early decades of the twentieth century (Putnam, 2000, 384). Educators, journalists, and political reformers may have articulated the ideas that helped to renew community and national life, but the businessmen, in both national and local arenas, seem to have been the most active group in carrying out this organizational revolution.

“It should be noted, however, that Yale’s primary leadership contributions were largely local, whereas Harvard’s seem to have been national.”

This fact adds substance to the efforts of leaders like Herbert Hoover, whose 1922 book, *American Individualism*, issued a clarion call to Americans to deal with the issues of progress, prosperity, and economic and social justice through voluntary associations. Hoover urged the establishment of “organizations for advancement of ideas in the community for mutual cooperation and economic objectives—the chambers of commerce, trade associations, labor unions, bankers, farmers, propaganda associations, and what not.... Each group is a realization of greater mutuality of interest, each contains some element of public service and each is a school of public responsibility” (Hoover 1922, 41-43).

Hoover envisioned a society self-governed by dense networks of associations working in partnership with government, in which organizations promoting economic cooperation would work in connection with other kinds of “voluntary organizations for altruistic purposes”—associations for advancement of public welfare, improvement, morals, charity, public opinion, health, the clubs and societies for recreation and intellectual advancement—to combine self-interested pursuits with the higher values of cooperation and public service (on this, see Hawley, 1973). Hoover was hardly alone in sharing this vision. Both membership in and the number of associations peaked in the 1920s, as Americans flocked to join athletic, fraternal/sororal, patriotic, professional, service, social, trade, and other groups.

Colleges and universities played central roles in this “recivilizing” process. They trained not only the school teachers and administrators who replicated the extracurriculum of clubs, teams, and activities in the nation’s ever more comprehensive public school systems, but also the businessmen who served on local boards of education and whose sympathetic interest in school reform made possible the financial support that made the achievement possible. Businessmen also played leading roles in establishing the civic infrastructure of fraternal organizations, service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, and chambers of commerce), trade associations, and federated charities (including the Community Chest, the welfare federations, and the community foundations). Harvard and Yale graduates were enthusiastic participants in all of these initiatives.

In assessing the relative contributions of Harvard and Yale to the recivilizing process, Yale—with its willingness to recruit students nationally and the propensity of its alumni to distribute themselves widely—undoubtedly had a greater influence than Harvard, whose students were preponderantly New Englanders and who, at least before the Second World War, seldom settled outside the Northeast. Yale’s egalitarian leadership ethos also served to increase the institution’s impact, since alumni who had become accustomed to dealing with a rich and varied associational environment—and who, through Yale’s inclusive extracurriculum, had enjoyed abundant opportunities to learn the skills of self-government—were far more likely to join and lead local organizations than alumni, like Harvard’s, who had not.

It should be noted, however, that Yale’s primary leadership contributions were largely local, whereas Harvard’s seem to have been national. Harvard could take pride in the Roosevelts and the Kennedys, while Yale could take credit only for the rather modest accomplishments of the Tafts and the Bushes. On the other hand, Yale could glory in having had a key role in creating the civic infrastructures of countless towns and cities—to which Harvard contributed relatively little.

CONCLUSION: VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS, NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE CHALLENGE OF CIVIC LITERACY

This paper is a first pass through the remarkably rich body of data represented by Harvard and Yale class books, the volumes published by graduating classes at five-year intervals. These chronicle the lives, careers, and opinions of alumni, usually in their own words.

Although the data is still incomplete and the analysis unrefined, my preliminary findings, in affirming Robert Putnam's observations about the twentieth century's high levels of civic engagement as a product of a concerted effort to teach Americans how democracy works, call on us to think more broadly about the educational process. In particular, they suggest the need for educators at all levels to consider seriously the notion, advanced by the Yale Report of 1828, that the most important aspects of education involve not what students learn, but how they learn it—that substantive course content may be less important than the skills of expression and deliberation essential to life in communities. Few students—except perhaps in professional schools—learn much from courses that is applicable to the circumstances of their lives and jobs; but most of what they know about how communities work they learn from the extracurriculum—from which they learn the values and skills necessary for self-government.

One of the subsidiary arguments in the civic engagement debate has involved the question of whether the late-twentieth-century proliferation of charitable tax-exempt nonprofit organizations represents a continuation of earlier trends of civic participation or—because these entities are increasingly professionally managed and supported by government subsidy and/or earned income—actually serve to erode civic vitality (on this, see Hall, 1999, 211-248; Putnam, 2000, 148-180). Although participation in nonprofits may, as Peter Drucker suggests, create spheres of effective citizenship in which individuals “exercise influence, discharge responsibility, and make decisions,” there is considerable evidence to suggest that participants in nonprofits—especially members of governing boards—are less competent than their predecessors in conducting the business of deliberation and collective decision making (Drucker, 1989, 205).

The last quarter of the twentieth century has been punctuated both by major charity scandals traceable to the failure of boards to understand and effectively exercise their responsibilities and by unusually high levels of conflict within boards—a phenomenon that has given rise to a substantial industry of board consultants and a huge literature on board governance (on this, see Hall, 1997). Evidence suggests that even if Americans are as civic as they have ever been, the average citizen today is far less likely to possess the skills needed to preside over a deliberative process. Indeed, the common experience of board members today is of “virtual parliamentary anarchy.” Few boards today bother to share with their members copies of charters and bylaws; fewer still have any familiarity with the rules of order that assure minorities a voice or enable public and nonprofit boards and commissions to be anything but sounding boards for special interests (Fiorina, 1999).

Effective and representative democracy involves far more than building dense networks based on face-to-face relations. It requires knowledge of technologies of governance that can come only from experience. Unless educators make an effort to acquaint students with these technologies—not as abstractions, but as experiences—hopes for the efficacy of civic re-education are likely to be futile gestures.

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