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CHAPTER 7

Blacklisted and Blue

On Theory and Practice at Yale

Corey Robin

> And this is it—this is Yale, he said reverently, with a little tightening of breath.
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> —Owen Johnson, *Stover at Yale*

On December 7, 1995, graduate student teaching assistants at Yale University voted to go on strike. If Yale did not recognize their union, the TAs would not hand in their final semester grades. Since its beginning in 1990, the fledgling union had been a periodic irritant to the university, jabbing the campus with short strikes and mass demonstrations, extracting discrete concessions, but never winning full union recognition. From its long history of opposition to organized labor, the university had learned that the best strategy to counter unions was to affect a posture of Olympian disregard.[1] Like a great Saint Bernard lumbering through the alpine snow, Yale fixed on its distant goals—a $1.5 billion fund-raising drive and a gradual reduction of full-time faculty and staff—never appearing to cast a sidelong glance at the passing protest or occasional picket. In fact, so indifferent to student unrest did the university seem that the union's greatest fear going into the grade strike was that the administration would not respond at all.

The TAs miscalculated. Awakened to the possibility that graduate students might at last establish a union on campus, the university vowed to crush the strike. Faculty and administrators threatened to block striking TAs from ever again teaching at Yale. The administration announced that

faculty advisors should feel free to use students' strike participation against them in letters of recommendation. The university brought three union leaders up on disciplinary charges, which carried the possible penalty of expulsion; since two of the three activists were foreign students, this meant probable deportation. Almost immediately, the strike began to collapse, and on January 14, the day the university had set as its final deadline for the TAs to hand in their grades, the union ended the strike.

Both the grade strike and the university's response to it have since been overtaken by subsequent events, particularly the successful and near-successful graduate student organizing drives at NYU, Columbia, Brown, and other universities.[2] But for participants in the grade strike—I was the lead organizer of the union at the time, having taken a leave from my graduate work in the political science department—and for those who worry about academic freedom, Yale's efforts to defeat the strike, particularly its threat of negative letters of recommendation, remain something of a mystery. How was it that a university renowned throughout the world for its traditions of liberal learning, humane politics, and thoughtful interchange could have resorted to blacklisting? How could French professors Denis Hollier and Chris Miller, literary critics who have written sympathetically about poststructuralism and postcolonialism, have signed and sent a letter to their students stating that strike participation "could legitimately be taken into account in faculty evaluations of a student's aptitude for an eventual academic career"? How was it possible for teachers and scholars to violate basic academic norms, outlined most clearly in a 1970 statement of the American Association of University Professors: "Evaluation of students . . . must be based on academic performance professionally judged and not on matters irrelevant to that performance, whether personality, race, religion, degree of political activism, or personal belief"?

Not only did the Yale professoriat break all the rules of academic fair play, but it also threw off the stylistic strictures that normally govern academic conduct in the Ivy League. Literary scholars and intellectual historians who pride themselves on their detachment and individualism, on their good taste and idiosyncratic sensibilities, rushed to join the militant ranks of union busters. Shy bookworms turned into holy warriors, quiet skeptics into defenders of the faith. Though the response to the grade strike certainly had its rational components—the TAs, after all, were threatening the university with an unprecedented challenge—there was something emotive, almost unbalanced, about the faculty's actions. Theirs was no mere effort to stop a strike; it was a playground crusade by men and women who in other

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The faculty believed their reaction to the strike was entirely justified, a legitimate response to a tactic that was, in the words of one political science professor, an "abomination." The grade strike, they claimed, denied undergraduates their right to a grade, earned through hard work and tuition payments. Unlike a regular teaching strike, the grade strike held the university hostage to a "terrorist act," in the words of another professor. It was not a strike at all (few professors or administrators made this argument at the time, but this was how the university later defended its actions in court); it was an act of theft, a piece of perhaps brilliant but undeniably vicious industrial sabotage. One didn't argue with terrorists; one defeated them.

And yet, however deeply felt, this assessment of the grade strike's illegitimacy does not fully explain the faculty's actions. Besides the fact that few professors made such a claim during the strike itself, it doesn't quite jibe with what everyone in academia knows about the normal practice of grading. As the TAs pointed out at the time, professors usually pay little attention to grading and recommend that their TAs not waste their time doing it. One professor in my department told his TA to read only the first page of her students' papers, while another expressed to me his surprise that I spent much time grading at all. Grading is a burden happily relinquished by the faculty, which is why TAs invariably do it. Moreover, during the strike itself, several professors coped with the sudden shortage of hands by making up their students' grades. Some professors handed out three-by-five cards in lectures, asking students to write down the grade they thought they deserved, which professors then assigned as final grades. Other professors assessed students solely on the basis of their midterm grades. Given this long-standing and makeshift cynicism about grades, why was the Yale faculty so exercised about the strike, particularly when the administration could have easily solved the problem by simply recognizing the union?

But if the faculty's reaction to the grade strike cannot be explained by their heartfelt opposition to an unsavory tactic, was it merely, as some have suggested, a defense of their material privileges, an altogether predictable response of the powerful to the powerless? Isn't Yale just another company in a company town, doing what corporations always do in the face of strikes? Every year there is a strike somewhere in America broken by illegal and illiberal means. When menaced by the concerted action of their employees, what employers don't resort to desperate, often invidious, measures? Why should we expect Yale to act any differently from a textile mill in North Carolina or a hotel in Las Vegas?

But whatever their similarities, a university is not, in the end, a factory or a hotel; it may be obsessed with money and power, but it is also obsessed with Joyce, Eliot, and Pound. Like so many elite universities, Yale claims to represent something higher, nobler—its motto is *lux et veritas*, light and truth—and the preferred instruments of a plant manager in Ohio somehow seem out of place amid the translucent marble of the Beinecke Library, which houses everything from a Gutenberg Bible to the letters of Langston Hughes.

And yet, perhaps it is the very presence of these relics of high culture at Yale that ultimately explains the university's response to the grade strike. Imagining themselves the beneficiaries and custodians of a cultural patrimony extending back to ancient Greece, the Yale faculty believed that they were not merely defending their power against an upstart union. They thought they were engaged in a pitched battle between Western civilization and its enemies. In ways the TAs never quite appreciated, the grade strike was more than a clash about contracts, hours, and benefits; it was a struggle over Yale's grandiose self-conception, its fantasy of the relationship between itself and high culture. The striking TAs were telling the world that learning and civilization depend upon the tedious work of low-paid, often dissatisfied employees, while the university insisted that higher education—at least at Yale—was a sacred vocation that did not partake of the grubby or the profane. Persuading anyone, including a Yale professor, to give up his romance is never easy, but when that romance mixes power and pedigree with imagination and ideology, things can get downright nasty.

Yale's response to the grade strike, then, is not a story of individual mean-spiritedness or even conservative fanaticism. It is a story of how a devotion to the highest ideals of learned civilization was fused with a devotion to elitism and privilege, and how a challenge to the second seemed, in the minds of the university's defenders, to spell the inevitable doom of the first. The grade strike was in fact an ordinary strike, but it was an ordinary strike that occurred in an extraordinary place.

The Romance of Yale

Despite the admission of women and a century of other social transformations, Yale in 2002 remains, in one critical respect, little different from Yale in 1902. It is still a gentleman's college, a learned estate where youthful minds amble among the colonnades of Western civilization. Small colleges dotting the campus evoke that medieval fellowship of students and scholars forged long ago at Oxford and Cambridge, while letters of Latin and He-

brew carved into the facades of campus buildings suggest to one and all that even the gods of ancient Rome and Israel went to Yale.

Admissions brochures at Yale offer snapshots of thoughtful intimacy between students and professors, deftly portraying the university's marriage of promised power to inherited culture. Every June, students graduate from Yale, ready to embark on their journey to the commanding heights of the international political economy. But before they go, they must be certified as fully trained in the liberal arts by a Yale professor. Yale is this communion of privilege and poesy, a stately mansion where the professor stands proudly at the apex of the knowledge class, while the student stirs hopefully on the threshold of the ruling class.

There is just one problem with this picture: It isn't true. As at most universities throughout the United States, Yale undergraduates are taught, by and large, not by senior or even junior faculty but by TAs and adjunct instructors. The nation's future power elite no longer encounters Western civilization in the cozy office or cramped seminar room of a learned scholar. Instead, they acquire Shakespeare, physics, and Plato from an overworked, underpaid trainee.

Of course, it's hardly news that professors don't teach. But at Yale, the truth is not easily admitted. In 1995, the TA union published a study demonstrating that TAs and adjuncts were performing roughly two-thirds of the teaching to the faculty's one-third. In response, an English professor posted the report's cover in the department lounge with the title—*True Blue*—scratched out and the words "Untrue Blue" angrily scrawled across it. Yale president Richard Levin simply denied its conclusions, claiming that graduate students were responsible for only 3 percent of the teaching; in the face of all the evidence, he blithely declared his numbers fact, the union's fiction.

Yale wants to claim that the brightest still train the best, but it can attract the brightest only by promising them that they won't spend much time doing so. So it is forced to juggle, often unsuccessfully, the imperatives of a modern research university with an upstairs, downstairs self-image. It's a difficult act, resulting in the occasionally hilarious spectacle of Yale administrators and faculty dressing up mediocrity as pedagogical innovation and finding in the bottom line a wellspring of education reform.

Not long before I arrived at Yale, for instance, a graduate school administrator by the name of Chip Long recommended that TAs could save time performing their duties if they didn't reread books assigned to their students that they had read in college and if professors demanded fewer writing assignments. Long's muse was accounting, but his rhetoric was Arnoldian:

"It would surprise me," he reflected, "if there weren't courses out there which could fruitfully, usefully, responsibly reduce the amount of writing they require from students." On another occasion, the English faculty decided to assign twice as many students to each of the sections of the department's much lauded composition course, which had produced the likes of William F. Buckley and Peter Matthiesen. The faculty claimed that the TAs could do twice as much work in the same amount of time if they merely stopped providing written comments on student essays. When the TAs complained that the department was trying to provide education on the cheap, the faculty insisted that the cutbacks were not about saving money. Not writing anything on a student's paper, they explained, would better "sustain the student's desire to write."

The grade strike threatened Yale for the same reason teaching assistants threaten Yale: It reminded the university that the great chain of being linking Plato to professor to student had been broken, that the undergraduate's main point of entry to Western civilization was no longer a tweedy scholar but a financially strapped graduate student. Former Yale president Benno Schmidt has admitted that "graduate students have never been treated as a proud or enriching part of undergraduate education." Indeed, other university administrators have compared graduate students to gypsies and rats, the classic unwelcome guests of Europe. With its overtones of Old World hostility, this dark iconography reveals just how distasteful some of Yale's leaders find TAs. For not only do TAs force the university to fess up to its own accounting needs, but they prod the institution to remember that education is not just the transmission of knowledge but real work, that it must be paid, that it takes time and energy, that it is more than an exercise in breathless self-improvement. That was the message of the grade strike, and it was not particularly welcome.

The Romance Fades

On December 5, just two days before the TAs voted to strike, two graduate students publicly revealed that they had been blacklisted by their professors. A Ph.D. candidate in the English department discovered that Richard Brodhead, a beloved English professor who also happened to be dean of Yale College, had spoken negatively of her union activity in a letter of recommendation. Brodhead praised her abilities as a teacher and scholar, but criticized her union involvement in a lengthy paragraph. She was an enthusiastic union member, he wrote. Perhaps too enthusiastic. She was "a poor listener" on the question of unionization, lacking those skills of diplomatic

accommodation and tactful silence that academics so prize. She had "shown poor judgment in the choice of means" that she—and the union—had used to push for reform. (Two years earlier, she had led the campaign to inform alumni donors about the previously mentioned changes in the English department's composition course.) The picture was clear: though intellectually qualified, this student was uncooperative and unprofessional, a troublemaker who would only raise a fuss in an otherwise tranquil academic setting.

The second graduate student was in the classics department. In 1992, he had served as a TA for Donald Kagan's course on ancient Greece, and Kagan was his advisor. At the time, Kagan was also dean of Yale College. A strike was called that spring, and this student informed Kagan that he would honor the picket line. As Kagan later recalled to the undergraduate newspaper, "I told him that [striking] was his right, but that if he didn't meet his classroom responsibilities I would advise him to think twice about asking me for a recommendation." The student refused to change his position, and as promised, Kagan refused—three years later—to write on his behalf. The student was never able to get a university position and wound up teaching high school in Philadelphia.

These revelations on the eve of the grade strike provoked an agonized discussion at Yale. With two out of three successive deans of Yale College outed as blacklisters, professors and administrators were forced to confront the ugly fact that violations of academic freedom were not quirky aberrations, irrational recriminations of a rogue professor, but an institutional practice. When I asked Jim Ponet, a rabbi at Yale whom I consider a friend and occasional mentor, to speak out publicly against these incidents, he asked me a series of sharp questions: What was the relationship between Brodhead and the student? Had he informed her that he would write a negative letter? (He had.) Did he owe her a letter of recommendation? These questions weren't surprising; Jim delighted in acrobatic moral deliberation. But in this case, all the Talmudic back-and-forth was merely preparatory to his decision to remain silent. After thinking it through, Ponet explained to me, he had decided that Brodhead and Kagan were acting within their rights. These students had the right to speak out against the university and even to strike, he said, but the deans had their rights too: to speak their minds—or, presumably, not to speak their minds (Kagan after all refused to write a letter)—and to evaluate their students as candidly and honestly as possible. Brodhead was evaluating the student as a citizen of the university, and that was a legitimate topic for a recommendation. Was it not dangerous to insist that professors write recommendations in a certain way? Would that not constitute a form of censorship as chilling as the one I was decrying?

I didn't say anything at the time. I was too stunned. But in retrospect, I see that there is so much wrong with Ponet's argument that I wonder now how he could have made it. It's a well-recognized principle of moral philosophy—and of common sense—that if someone has a right to something, the rest of us have an obligation to honor that right. If students have the right to speak out against the university or to strike, which Ponet acknowledged they did, then the faculty have a duty to honor those rights, not to do anything that would abridge their exercise. How was it possible to claim that the English student had the right to speak out against department practices, and then claim that Brodhead had the right to respond by ruining her career?

But, for Ponet, this argument only begged a second question: Why was Brodhead's letter not a form of expression, a form of pure speech, rather than an act of blacklisting? After all, Brodhead had merely written a letter offering his opinion. Was that letter not just as much protected speech as the student's letter? What Ponet was forgetting was all those cases of pure speech—perjury, libel, harassment—that society rightly has decided are forms of actionable harm. A negative letter of recommendation is more than mere expression. It's a harmful act, a form of retaliation whose only function, in this case, is to silence speech that a professor finds threatening.

Ponet is an extremely intelligent man who is committed to academic freedom and dissent. He even supports unions. But like so many other liberal faculty, Ponet believes in Yale. He loves it. He went there as an undergraduate. He fondly remembers radical young professors maturing to middle-aged skepticism and tenure. He welcomed the ascension of President Levin and Dean Brodhead because they promised to restore Yale to its former liberal greatness, to the days when President Kingman Brewster stood up for the rights of African Americans by publicly declaring that Bobby Seale could not receive a fair trial in New Haven. Ponet marvels at the wonderful collections in Beinecke Library, debates with other faculty whether that literary splendor justifies Yale's sizable endowment and consequent stinginess toward the city of New Haven, and then concludes that it is the very raising of such heterodox questions that makes Yale such an exalted place. How could Ponet believe in Brodhead-the-blacklister and Yale at the same time?

What was so difficult for Ponet and other Yale professors to understand in December 1995 was perfectly clear to academics around the country. Around this time, more than three hundred faculty from around the country signed a petition addressed to President Levin stating that "graduate students' choice of how or whether to participate in the unionization drive should have no bearing on their treatment in class grading, qualifying

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exams, TA hiring decisions, letters of recommendation for job candidates, or any other aspect of the academic relationship between graduate students and faculty or administrators." A few of Yale's most liberal faculty signed the petition—Michael Holquist in comparative literature, Sara Suleri-Goodyear in English, Ian Shapiro in political science. Each of these individuals would eventually help break the strike, some using the very means proscribed by the petition.

The Romance Ends

As soon as the graduate students voted to strike, the administration leaped to action, threatening students with blacklisting, loss of employment, and worse. Almost as quickly, the national academic community rallied to the union's cause. A group of influential law professors at Harvard and elsewhere issued a statement condemning "the Administration's invitation to individual professors to terrorize their advisees." They warned the faculty that their actions would "teach a lesson of subservience to illegitimate authority that is the antithesis of what institutions like Yale purport to stand for." Eric Foner, a leading American historian at Columbia, spoke out against the administration's measures in a personal letter to President Levin. "As a longtime friend of Yale," Foner began, "I am extremely distressed by the impasse that seems to have developed between the administration and the graduate teaching assistants." Of particular concern, he noted, was the "developing atmosphere of anger and fear" at Yale, "sparked by threats of reprisal directed against teaching assistants." He then concluded:

> I wonder if you are fully aware of the damage this dispute is doing to Yale's reputation as a citadel of academic freedom and educational leadership. Surely, a university is more than a business corporation and ought to adopt a more enlightened approach to dealing with its employees than is currently the norm in the business world. And in an era when Israelis and Palestinians, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, the British government and the IRA, have found it possible to engage in fruitful discussions after years of intransigent refusal to negotiate, it is difficult to understand why Yale's administration cannot meet with representatives of the teaching assistants.

Foner's letter played a critical role during the grade strike. The faculty took him seriously; his books on the Civil War and Reconstruction are required reading at Yale. But more important, Foner is a historian, and at the

time, a particularly tense confrontation in the Yale history department was spinning out of control. The incident involved teaching assistant Diana Paton, a British graduate student who was poised to write a dissertation on the transition in Jamaica from slavery to free labor, and historian David Brion Davis. A renowned scholar of slavery, Davis has written pathbreaking studies, earning him the Pulitzer Prize and a much-coveted slot as a frequent writer at the *New York Review of Books*. He represents the best traditions of humanistic learning, bringing to his work a moral sensitivity that few academics possess. Paton was his student and, that fall, his TA.

When Paton informed Davis that she intended to strike, he accused her of betraying him. Convinced that Davis would not support her academic career in the future—he had told her in an unrelated discussion a few weeks prior that he would never give his professional backing to any student who he believed had betrayed him—Paton nevertheless stood her ground. Davis reported her to the graduate school dean for disciplinary action and had his secretary instruct Paton not to appear at the final exam. In his letter to the dean, Davis wrote that Paton's actions were "outrageous, irresponsible to the students . . . and totally disloyal." The day of the final, Paton showed up at the exam room. As she explains it, she wanted to demonstrate to Davis that she would not be intimidated by him, that she would not obey his orders. Davis, meanwhile, had learned of Paton's plan to attend the exam and somehow concluded that she intended to steal the exams. So he had the door locked and two security guards stand beside it.

Though assertive, Paton is soft-spoken and reserved. She is also small. The thought of her rushing into the exam room, scooping up her students' papers, engaging perhaps in a physical tussle with the delicate Davis, and then racing out the door—the whole idea is absurd. Yet Davis clearly believed it wasn't absurd. What's more, he convinced the administration that it wasn't absurd, for it was the administration that had dispatched the security detail. How this scenario could have been dreamed up by a historian with the nation's most prestigious literary prizes under his belt—and with the full backing of one of the most renowned universities in the world—requires some explanation.

Oddly enough, it is Davis himself who provides it. Like something out of *Hansel and Gretel*, Davis left a set of clues, going back some forty years, to his paranoid behavior during the grade strike. In a pioneering 1960 article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," Davis set out to understand how dominant groups in nineteenth-century America were gripped by fears of disloyalty,

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treachery, subversion, and betrayal. Many Americans feared Catholics, Freemasons, and Mormons because, it was believed, they belonged to "a machine-like organization" that sought "to abolish free society" and "to overthrow divine principles of law and justice." Members of these groups were dangerous because they professed an "unconditional loyalty to an autonomous body" like the pope. They took their marching orders from afar, and so were untrustworthy, duplicitous, and dangerous.[3]

Davis was clearly disturbed by the authoritarian logic of the countersubversive, but that was in 1960 and he was writing about the nineteenth century. In 1995, confronting the rebellion of his own student, the logic made all the sense in the world. It didn't matter that Paton was a longtime student of his, that she had had many discussions with Davis about her academic work, and that he knew her well. As soon as she announced her commitment to the union's course of action, she became a stranger, an alien marching on behalf of a foreign power.

Davis was hardly alone in voicing these concerns. Other respected members of the Yale faculty dipped into the same well of historical imagery. In January 1996, at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, several historians presented a motion to censure Yale for its retaliation against the striking TAs. During the debate on the motion, Nancy Cott—one of the foremost scholars of women's history in the country who was on the Yale faculty at the time but has since gone on to Harvard—defended the administration, pointing out that the TA union was affiliated with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. Historians at the meeting say that Cott placed a special emphasis on the word "international." The TAs, in other words, were carrying out the orders of union bosses in Washington. The graduate students did not care about their own colleagues, they were not loyal to their own. Not unlike the Masons and Catholics of old. It did not seem to faze Cott that she was speaking to an audience filled with labor historians, all of whom would have recognized these charges as classic antiunion rhetoric.

One of the reasons Cott embraced this vocabulary so unselfconsciously was that it was a virtual commonplace among the Yale faculty at the time. At a mid-December faculty meeting, which one professor compared to a Nuremberg rally, President Levin warned the faculty of the ties between the TAs and outside unions. The meeting was rife with lurid images of union heavies dictating how the faculty should run their classrooms. It never seemed to occur to these professors, who pride themselves on their independent judgment and intellectual perspicacity, that they were uncritically accepting some of the ugliest and most unfounded prejudices about

unions, that they sounded more like the Jay Goulds and Andrew Carnegies of the late nineteenth century than the careful scholars and skeptical minds of the late twentieth. All they knew was their fear—that a conspiracy was afoot, that they were being forced to cede their authority to disagreeable powers outside of Yale.

Cott, Levin, and the rest of the faculty were also in the grip of a raging class anxiety, which English professor Annabel Patterson spelled out in a letter to the Modern Language Association. The TA union, Patterson wrote, "has always been a wing of Locals 34 and 35 [two other campus unions] . . . who draw their membership from the dining workers in colleges and other support staff." Why did Patterson single out cafeteria employees in her description of Locals 34 and 35? After all, these unions represent thousands of white- and blue-collar workers, everyone from skilled electricians and carpenters to research laboratory technicians, copy editors, and graphic designers. Perhaps it was that Patterson viewed dishwashers and plastic-gloved servers of institutional food as the most distasteful sector of the Yale workforce. Perhaps she thought that her audience would agree with her, and that a subtle appeal to their delicate, presumably shared, sensibilities would be enough to convince other professors that the TA union ought to be denied a role in the university. The professor-student relationship was the critical link in a chain designed to keep dirty people out. What if the TAs and their friends in the dining halls decided that professors should wash the dishes and plumbers should teach classes? Hadn't that happened during the Cultural Revolution? Hadn't the faculty themselves imagined such delightful utopias as young student radicals during the 1960s? Recognizing the TA union would only open Yale to a rougher, less refined element, and every professor, even the most liberal, had something at stake in keeping that element out.

In his article, Davis concluded with these sentences about the nineteenth-century countersubversive:

> By focusing his attention on the imaginary threat of a secret conspiracy, he found an outlet for many irrational impulses, yet professed his loyalty to the ideals of equal rights and government by law. He paid lip service to the doctrine of laissez-faire individualism, but preached selfless dedication to a transcendent cause. The imposing threat of subversion justified a group loyalty and subordination of the individual that would otherwise have been unacceptable. In a rootless environment shaken by bewildering social change the nativist found unity and meaning by conspiring against imaginary conspiracies.

Though I don't think Davis's psychologizing holds much promise for understanding the Yale faculty's response to the grade strike—the strike, after all, did pose a real threat to the faculty's intuitions about both the place of graduate students in the university and the obligations of teachers; nor did the faculty seem, at least to me, to be on a desperate quest for meaning—he did manage to capture, long before the fact, the faculty's fear that their tiered world of privileges and orders, so critical to the enterprise of civilization, was under assault. So did Davis envision the grotesque sense of fellowship that the faculty would derive from attacking their own students. The faculty's outsized rhetoric of loyalty and disloyalty, of intimacy (Dean Brodhead called the parties to the conflict a "dysfunctional family") betrayed, may have fit uneasily with their avowed professions of individualism and intellectual independence. But it did give them the opportunity to enjoy, at least for a moment, that strange euphoria—the thrilling release from dull routine, the delightful, newfound solidarity with fellow elites—that every reactionary from Edmund Burke to Augusto Pinochet has experienced upon confronting an organized challenge from below.

Paton's relationship with Davis was ended. Luckily, she was able to find another advisor at Yale, Emilia Viotti da Costa, a Latin American historian who was also an expert on slavery. Da Costa, it turns out, had been a supporter of the student movement in Brazil some thirty years before and was persecuted by the military there. Forced to flee the country, she found in Yale a welcome refuge from repression.

Where Did All the Romance Go?

Eloise Pasachoff arrived at Yale in the fall of 1995, fresh out of college, to begin her Ph.D. in English. A first-rate student, she excelled in the classroom, particularly in Annabel Patterson's seminar that fall on John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and John Locke. In her final evaluation of Pasachoff's work, Patterson wrote, "An almost unqualified series of H[onors] papers is no small achievement, given the continuous demands of this pattern of assignments." Patterson also commended Pasachoff for "the close attention you pay to textual details, and the energy and naturalness with which you ask questions, especially in class." She then paid what she probably assumed was the ultimate compliment to the young graduate student: "For what it's worth," Patterson wrote, "these are the symptoms that one would remember in guessing that you would be a good teacher, and passing the message on to prospective employers."

Had Patterson's evaluation ended there, it would have seemed no more than a bit of generous encouragement to a promising student. But it went on, and as it continued, Patterson's praise began to disclose a darker intent. For Pasachoff was not only an excellent student. She was also a union activist who organized support for the grade strike among her fellow first-year students in the English department. After Patterson expressed her willingness, when the time came, to "remember" Pasachoff to future employers, she appended the following paragraph:

> All these things being so, it would be cowardly of me if I did not add that I truly hope you will neither have a return of Miltonic vocation doubt [Pasachoff had earlier confessed to Patterson her uncertainty about pursuing an academic career] . . . nor get caught up in campus politics to your own detriment. If you would like to talk about the issues of involvement in early January, just give me a call. My sense is that Milton, Marvell and Locke would all have been dubious about acting in these circumstances.

Having just promised to put in a good word for Pasachoff, Patterson now advised her not to continue her involvement with the union. Patterson's breezy suggestion that Pasachoff call her to discuss "issues of involvement" intimated a kind of deal: You, Pasachoff, give up your agitation, and I, Patterson, will see to it that you are taken care of. It was perhaps not the crassest exchange of vows, but it did recall that famous opening scene in *The Godfather* where Vito Corleone agrees to beat up the attackers of an undertaker's daughter in return for a "service" that Corleone says "some day" he may "call upon" the undertaker to perform. Even at this most sordid of moments, Patterson felt the need to invoke the great men of Western civilization—Locke, Milton, Marvell. At Yale, Plato meets Puzo, and neither is worse for the wear.

Or perhaps not. For Locke was a great defender of natural rights who argued on behalf of religious toleration, participated in a failed assassination plot against a repressive king, organized an unsuccessful rebellion, and generally made life uncomfortable for himself—all for the sake of conscience. Milton, author of *Aeropagitica*, one of the most beautiful defenses of the independent imagination in the English language, thought there was nothing more distasteful than the spoon-fed mind, the flabby intellect that went unchallenged. Intelligence was made muscular by hardship and adversity; the most dangerous threat to a thinking person was comfort, ease, and all the promises of the good life that Patterson was now so bent on peddling. As Milton famously wrote:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity and much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.

Patterson is a noted scholar of Milton's work. That she could invoke the author of these words to justify political retreat for the sake of personal advance cannot be explained away as ignorance. Not even cynicism or hypocrisy accounts for such a stunning piece of advice. Something more mundane is at work here, revealing the bizarre nexus of ideas and power, theory and practice, that is Yale—that is, indeed, the practice of higher education at so many elite universities around the country.

With the exception of David Brion Davis and Donald Kagan, all of the faculty discussed here came of age during the 1960s or just afterwards. Their work demonstrates the influence of progressive intellectual currents, including feminism, poststructuralism, even Marxism. Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters*, a collection of critical essays about nineteenth-century American literature, is clearly inspired by multiculturalism and modish sensibilities about race and gender. Brodhead draws liberally from the work of Foucault, and his discussions unite figures of high culture such as Henry James with less celebrated women and African-American writers. Denis Hollier, one of the authors of the infamous French department memo mentioned earlier, travels within radical French literary circles; postmodern luminary Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote the introduction to Hollier's book on Sartre. Nancy Cott is a pioneering figure in women's history who has inspired generations of feminist historians. Annabel Patterson is most explicit about the influence of the 1960s on her work. In *Reading between the Lines*, she discusses at length the formative role that decade played in her development as a critic and scholar. Although she now suggests that we should "break away" from the 1960s, she insists that her desire to do so is "trivial in comparison" to the "larger sense of empowerment" she received from the political struggles of that era.

The faculty at Yale who crushed the grade strike juggle two heartfelt commitments: a devotion to high-minded liberal principles and an equally strong devotion to Yale. Although they see themselves as the bearers of an exalted tradition of humane learning—which envisions in education an

ameliorative path to freedom and progress—they are ineluctably pulled by a not-so-exalted tradition of elitism. Knowledge and privilege are, for them, necessarily fused; one cannot have the one without the other. And so, despite their best intentions, the faculty float every day further and further from the spirit of Socrates, Mill, and Freud. It's not that they don't care about ideas. It's just that for them a job at Yale is an idea.