# OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

BRUNELLA TIPISMANA

## The classroom is not the problem

Last Wednesday — an hour before the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education released its 58-page report calling for sweeping reforms — my history class discussed an essay written in Berlin back in 1807, during an earlier crisis in higher education. At the time, the university seemed like a pitiful relic, threatened by political crisis and the perceived decadence of national elites. In response, the Prussian government asked public servants and intellectuals to come up with solutions to academia's existential crisis.

One response came from philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who submitted a proposal for a new university in Berlin — and, it turns out, a foundational manifesto for what became the first modern research university. This school would shed the academy's medieval habits. It would raise scholars committed to the public sphere. It would also be a refuge. Insulated from an increasingly commercial world and uncompromised by crude professionalism, young people would cultivate a new art of learning. This could only happen under specific material conditions, Fichte wrote: The university needed "to cover [students'] current expenses and provide a guarantee of appropriate support in the future." To do otherwise was to subordinate the pursuit of knowledge to the desire for profit — and, in the process, to ensure that students learned nothing.

As we discussed these passages in class, we all burst out laughing. Yes, we acknowledged one after another: pre-professional culture — pointless coffee chats, club meetings, evenings spent tinkering with Workday applications — cannibalizes the university's academic core. But it also seems impossible to graduate into a semi-secure future without giving in to it.

Indeed, I can only sit down to write this piece because I am no longer sinking 30 hours a week applying to internships and other resume-stuffers. To be clear, I didn't spend my sophomore and junior years like this for fun. I would have much preferred to spend that time poring over essays or doing the optional readings. No: I did it because I am a low-income student and I knew I'd have to care for myself and my family soon after graduation. And while this pre-professional emphasis did get me a job, it also seems obvious to me that it was the single most destructive force in my undergraduate education.

So, as I read the Committee's report after class, I was surprised to see only a passing mention of this side of student life. It calls on Yale to focus on its austerely rewritten goal, "to preserve, create, and share knowledge," through measures like a no-device policy (a good idea) and grade deflation (a more controversial one). But in its attempt to "re-center the classroom," the Committee misses what pushed it aside in the first place: not the students, but the conditions they were embedded in and the choices their university made in response. So I believe, as Fichte did, that nothing would bring classrooms back to the fore more effectively than a reimagining of what Yale owes its students.

For current undergraduates, the Buckley Institute arranges internships at the National Review and the Manhattan Institute, and the Block Family Foundation funds highly competitive fellowships in local journalism. Yale should radically expand post-graduate support for similar public service initiatives. Freed from spending the years before graduation chasing the spring program that leads to the internship that leads to the job offer, students could "re-center the classroom" secure in the knowledge that a cushion of time explicitly devoted to kickstarting their careers awaits them after graduation.

As the report rightly acknowledges, the administration must also steer students' considerable privileges — inherited from their families or acquired here upon admission — toward braver pursuits than editing PowerPoints for health insurers. Consulting and finance have excelled at selling themselves as the natural next step for any competitive undergraduate; Yale must use its resources just as directly to raise the status of public service careers, at least within its own walls.

My proposals might seem obvious, yet the university's approach to its current budget shortfall suggests otherwise. In addition to shrinking summer activity funds and low-income student stipends, the administration has cut the contracts of contingent faculty, the instructors most directly tasked with supporting our education. For Yale to implement this report as it erodes the tangible foundations of intellectual life is like giving a blood transfusion to a patient whose wounds haven't been stitched shut: You'll end up with a corpse anyway.

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To be fair, the Committee's report does nod at expanding public service fellowships. And because responsibility for recent cuts lies with the Office of the Provost and the Board of Trustees, it also rightly calls for a stronger faculty voice in university governance. It must ask for more. To focus on academic excellence means putting pressure not just on students' grades, but on an unaccountable administration often more concerned with cultivating donors than knowledge. It might also mean contending with the failure of the university when run as a corporation.

To restore public trust, it isn't enough to simply strike out the word diversity from our mission statement and make vague allusions to intellectual renewal. Let us remember that the choice between those faddish changes and the real material conditions needed for the cultivation of thought is not new. In fact, it's the same Fichte wrote about in 1807: today, the university "must justify itself, or perish."

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GUEST COLUMNIST

JEAN-CLAUDE PIERRE III

## Why so scared to talk Black?

It is frustrating that three years since the end of race-conscious admissions, one year after the first-ever election of an all-Black Yale College Council ticket and in the midst of an intense anti-DEI campaign against universities across the nation, there is little to no journalism that explicitly and substantively regards race on this campus.

This is troublesome because the stakes of comprehensiveness in our journalism are high, especially in a democratic society. The dissemination of information vitalizes our perception of the world, in turn informing our actions within it. Race-blind journalism builds limited perceptions, which — often, unknowingly — motivate the construction of flawed realities. This is problematic in the context of any race, but I'd like to focus on the need for change specifically in relation to blackness at Yale.

First and foremost, we need better representation of Black journalists within our publications. While it may seem at a glance that the Yale Daily News' racial demographics are generally reflective of that of broader Yale, representation dwindles in more influential positions. In the past 20 years, the News has had 65 managing editors and editors in chief, including in the incoming board. Four have been Black; none of the four have been editor in chief. I wouldn't be surprised if this trend is reflected in most of Yale journalism.

Throughout American history, Black journalists have played an important role in intervening on prevailing narratives within American discourse. Ida B. Wells pioneered data-driven investigative journalism to disprove misleading portrayals of lynching. It was the Black-owned Jet magazine that spread the tragic photo of Emmett Till and lit an urgent fire within the Civil Rights Movement. Ta-Nehisi Coates has repeatedly countered comfortable distortions of America's racial reality that white liberal journalists so easily fall into.

The reason for this is simple: The uniqueness of the Black experience leverages Black journalists to have different perspectives on key issues. This is most true while directly reporting on race — white journalists have often been allowed to take for granted what have been matters of life and death for Black journalists, instantiating a strong bias — but it remains true for all topics of discussion, primarily because race is so fundamental to our society that it affects every realm of our existence.

This is not to say that a Black food journalist needs to infuse their racial experience into their reportage on, say, the taste of a meal, but rather that their lived experience has been significantly affected by their race in one way or another, and that lived experience often will affect how they taste and interact with said meal.

Where it often fails to be monolithic, the Black experience on Yale campus remains undeniably unique. Whether it be from The House's Black oasis or knee-deep in the whiteness of Sigma Nu-turned-Knox Club, we as Black Yalies see this campus differently, and that matters — it is extremely consequential to the type of journalism we can and want to produce.

But even more importantly, there is a need for what I call Black journalism. By this, I mean journalism — by journalists of all races — that concerns itself with the intricacies of Black life on this campus. This can be applied to Yale-wide topics: What were attitudes about race in regards to the YCC election of Andrew Boanoh '27 and Jalen Bradley '27? We love talking about Yale dating, so how is it affected by race?

Or this can be focused within Yale's Black community: Did the affirmative action ruling have an effect on the Black community that was not captured by the demographic percentage? How do Black people feel about the Black community here at Yale? While some pieces have discussed race, Yale publications have not approached these questions with the nuance and depth they deserve — to ask beyond the "what" of the matter, and inquire at length about "why" and "how" things are the way they are.

These types of questions are not just a means to an end of more comprehensive journalism. Journalism that asks these questions has a pragmatic benefit to campus life. We are in desperate need of a more robust archive of Black life on this campus. There are repeated conversations of issues of all types we wish we could improve upon, but once we learn enough about Yale life to have any sort of solution, we are on our way out and too old, jaded, busy and tired to do much about it. Black journalism highlights and archives meaningful discussions about problems and solutions relevant to the Black experience here at Yale. Data collection, wide-ranging interviews and well thought-out reportage and analysis are far more helpful to present and future Yalies than the insular dialogue we currently rely on.

Thus, Black journalists and Black journalism are both critically important to our Yale community. They contribute to our journalism by building new knowledge and new pathways to action. With better information, it becomes easier to rally, easier to make change — the type of change that makes Yale a better place. This isn't new. It's what my ancestors have been doing in America, in Haiti and around the world for centuries. And they've been able to do it because they and the world were aware of their race.

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STAFF COLUMNIST

ZACHARY CLIFTON

## A report worth reading

Last year, on a warm April Fools' Day, I stood on the sidewalk outside Schwarzman Center, where Prospect Street becomes College Street, and watched President Maurie McInnis drive what I would later call a Harvard-hued, Musk-manufactured car. I obviously don't care what car she drives. But I was a first-year student, and I was angry: the institution was old and enormous, and in light of the second Trump administration, suddenly seemed small.

That observation on College Street, and what I felt it represented, became an essay. Then that essay became a series. I wrote that what was happening at Yale was Orwellian. I wrote about the university's poor judgment in allowing itself to become a passthrough for a donor sending funds to the Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces. And, only days ago, I wrote about what I called the Summer Storage Wars — an unarmed conflict with an endowed chair of history calling Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis "arrogant" for comments he made about "stuff."

But now, I'm putting the series aside.

Last week's "Report on Trust in Higher Education" was written by a committee co-chaired by Professors Julia Adams and Beverly Gage '94, and it is the best and boldest set of recommendations to come out of Yale since I've been a student here. My favorite idea in the report is that a minimum standardized test score should be set for applicants. The implication is important: Yale is not the right school for all of the students in its enormous applicant pool. Yale should not try to be everything for everyone — and pretending otherwise serves neither the institution nor the students it misleads. It is only the right school for an infinitesimal number of them. There's no reason for Yale to leave ambiguous whether a student with an 1180 on the SAT or a 26 on the ACT will be admitted. That ambiguity is institutional dishonesty. Yale should be too academically rigorous for a student with those scores to succeed here. That is what rigor means — or, at least, what it used to mean.

There may be a Yale student reading this who has an 1180. That student is probably thinking about how their grades are pretty good and about the stupidity of my argument — and that student is not entirely wrong. Yale has grade inflation, and grade inflation has made their thinking reasonable. I explain my department, political science, the same way to every student taking their first course. "Let me tell you about the grading scale," I say. "It runs from A to A-minus, and one B-plus is reserved for the worst student in the class — the one the professor has inevitably decided is beyond saving." Then I tell them that my explanation is a joke. It is, mostly.

I don't intend to insult students who have received a B. But the mediocrity that ambiguous admissions standards and grade inflation creates is real, and artificial intelligence has made it worse. Students can now absorb course content without attending lecture, without thinking and without being present in any meaningful way. I think all of this has made exceptional students worse, and I don't necessarily exclude myself from the students who are slouching toward mediocrity. I have suffered from many of these same impulses — not going to class and using AI, among them. But unfortunately, in many departments, the worst penalty that students risk for these infractions is an A-minus.

I think the report was written with this intuition. It was written by faculty who still believe academics should mean something — faculty who are serious about Yale being serious. Professors Adams and Gage, who co-chaired the committee have, in the past, signed letters calling for change and accountability from the university's administration. They are exactly the kind of leaders our university needs. That is a different kind of leadership than what I've been writing about for a little more than a year, and it's coming from those who are actually in the classroom.

Whether any of this will restore public trust in Yale, I don't know. I'm not sure public trust is something Yale should want, particularly if the American public now distrusts institutions by default. There is no practical argument for chasing the trust of someone with no interest in reconsidering it. But there is a different argument — for Yale getting serious about serious students. Yale's faculty, at least, seems to understand what the university's reputation is built on.

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