OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

EMILY HETTINGER

Consider our legacy

We made it. After four years of essays, problem sets and a million choices to make about extracurriculars and internships and social groups, all that's left is to design quirky hats and enjoy the momentous occasion of our commencement with our friends and family. But in the midst of all this joy, I think we should make one final commitment. We need to grapple with the fact that we are the beneficiaries of a deeply broken and unequal system. And as the class of 2026, we must use the privileges of our education to do something about it.

It needs to be said: Yale has a wealth problem, uncomfortable as it may be to acknowledge. According to the New York Times, Yale accepts more students from the top one percent of the United States' income distribution than the entire bottom sixty percent combined. Daniel Markovits '91 LAW '00 says it well in his 2019 book, The Meritocracy Trap: The wealth-based admissions system we have concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a small few, at the expense of political unity, upward social mobility for most Americans and the life satisfaction of even the most successful among us.

But, to me, the deeper risk is that the disproportionate wealth at Yale denigrates the very idea of the liberal arts education. There are many reasons to choose a liberal arts education, but probably the main value of the liberal arts, especially in this moment, is that they can, allegedly, prepare citizens to be critical thinkers. In her 1963 book, Eichmann in Jerusalem, philosopher Hannah Arendt describes evil as banal, that most people who do evil things are not evil people but just people following orders. Critical thinkers, in my view, are the ones who say no to banal orders to do evil things. Or at the very least, stand up for what is right, even when it is easy to stay silent. For a school that claims a devotion to the liberal arts, I am concerned by our acceptance of the banal orders we are confronted with. Yale sends a disproportionate number of its students into fields that bring wealth and prestige to their workers, often at the expense of the common good. Places where it is someone's job to cut costs in United States detention centers, turbocharge opioid sales and invest in fossil fuels. Is this how we want to be remembered?

I think things would be different if we reimagined who a Yale education was for. For middle and working class students, a college education, much less an elite college education, is not inevitable. Paying for a school like Yale as a middle class family usually means pinching every penny for years, often to end up in serious debt. And coming to Yale from an underfunded public school often means being the only person from your high school at Yale, which can be an incredibly lonely and daunting experience. Taken together, the opportunity cost to attend Yale for non-wealthy students is quite high.

As such, the very choice to attend a fancy school where life is put on hold for four years, just to think and grow, is grounded in the critical thought that the liberal arts are meant to cultivate. For these students, a Yale education is a service to something much larger than themselves, an undertaking on behalf of the community that sacrificed much to make the dream possible. If we had more students for whom this education carried a strong sense of community responsibility, maybe more people would dedicate themselves to the many problems in our world that need solving.

We, as a generation of Yalies, have the power to change the definition of a Yale student, to utterly transform our admissions system into one that prioritizes the public good over wealth. But in order to do that, we need to acknowledge that regardless of how we all arrived at Yale, we leave with far more to personally gain from the status quo than we ever will from a reformed system. All of us will have access to opportunities that very few are afforded, simply because of our Yale diploma. All of us who choose to have children will be the parents of Yale legacies who will have an explicit advantage in the Yale admissions process. And even if legacy preference goes away, our kids will have disproportionate access to fancy private schools, music and sports lessons, test prep and all sorts of other things that will look good on college applications. If we change the system, we directly jeopardize our own children's chances of following in our footsteps at Yale.

So, to my peers in the class of 2026, what do we want our legacy to be? Though it will involve personal sacrifice, I think we ought to lead a transformation of Yale's culture to prioritize the public over the self. We can do better than agnostically educating a disproportionately wealthy student body to develop skills used for personal benefit instead of the public good. In a country with increasing distrust in elites, it is our duty to do better.

As my parting contribution to the News, I ask the class of 2026 to do one thing: Pull the ladder up behind you. Reject the structures that we will soon benefit from and call for something better, even though it may cost your future children the opportunity to study at Yale. Commit to organizing against legacy admissions at our university, reinvest the thousands of dollars you might have spent on private school tuition into your local community, surround yourself with people who did not receive an Ivy League education and demand that Yale serve the public good over its own interests. If we succeed, we will be remembered for something much more than clever hats on Class Day.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

MANU ANPALAGAN

The view from Yale isn't the view from America

When I arrived at Yale, something was missing.

There was no Republican group at one of the most prestigious and influential universities in the country. At an institution that trains future leaders of government, business and culture, there was no organized home for students who believed in the principles of the America First movement. So I started one.

Serving as the founding president of Yale College Republicans for the last two-and-a-half years has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my time here. But our group's very existence raises an uncomfortable question: How did Yale go so long without a Republican organization in the first place? The answer points to a deeper concern.

Too many students and faculty at Yale live in a bubble — one that is intellectually insulated and socially detached from the realities facing the 340 million Americans living outside of our campus boundaries. Conversations here often assume that the dominant ideological viewpoints at Yale are representative of the country at large. They are not. And when our nation's future leaders forget that, the consequences are real.

For decades, elite institutions like Yale helped produce the architects of policies that devastated American communities. The bipartisan consensus around free trade hollowed out American manufacturing and shipped jobs overseas. The architects of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, many of them attendees of elite universities, committed our nation to two decades of costly conflict with nothing to show for it. These decisions were shaped by a worldview that prioritized abstract global theories over the lived realities of working Americans.

When I looked around Yale, I saw no home for a different kind of conservatism — one that put the American people first. Instead, what existed were organizations that echoed the same outdated, failed neoconservative ideas that had already led the country astray. They championed globalism, catered to elite interests and aligned themselves with Wall Street over Main Street.

That is why I founded Yale College Republicans.

I wanted to build a space for students who believe that conservatism should serve the American people — not multinational corporations, not foreign policy abstractions and not elite consensus. A space for what is known as America First conservatism.

The future of the Republican Party will not be defined by figures like Nikki Haley or Mitch McConnell, who represent an out-of-touch establishment. It will be shaped by visionary leaders like Vice President JD Vance LAW '13 and Senator Josh Hawley LAW '06, who are willing to challenge both parties' orthodoxies and fight for American workers, families and communities.

At Yale, this divide is especially clear. There exists not just liberal elitism, but also a conservative elitism — an unholy union of a bipartisan establishment that advances policies disconnected from the needs of ordinary Americans. We must reject that.

As students at Yale, we have a responsibility that goes beyond our own success. We are being prepared to lead institutions that will shape the future of this country. That means we must think beyond the narrow confines of campus life and consider the well being of all Americans, not just those who share our classrooms or our zip codes. Yale College Republicans, at its core, is an attempt to bridge that gap. It is a community rooted in the belief that conservatism should reflect the views, concerns and aspirations of everyday Americans.

Lastly, to my fellow students, regardless of political affiliation: Step outside the Yale bubble. Engage with the country you are preparing to lead. Listen to people whose lives look nothing like yours. Because the strength of our nation depends on our ability to see, and serve, all of it.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

MICHAEL NDUBISI

On Rights and Responsibilities

Later this month, on Old Campus, the University's president will stand before the graduating class for the 325th time and admit them, by tradition, to "all the rights and responsibilities of their degrees." Some version of those words will be spoken at thousands of commencements across the country, but Yale's carries particular weight. Where 133 miles north, Harvard will welcome its graduates into "the fellowship of educated men and women," Yale's conferral reflects a distinction once made to elevate the obligations of learning and has since diffused into the shared ceremonial language of American commencements. It is a small but telling example of how Yale has long set the terms for American higher education.

This April, in another attempt to shape the landscape of higher learning, Yale released a 58-page report on why public trust in universities has collapsed. It identifies real failures in costs that have made elite education a luxury and admissions processes that perform meritocracy while, in reality, rewarding wealth. To its credit, the committee that wrote the report confronts the crisis of higher education with unusual candor. But what it cannot bring itself to examine is the role Yale played in spreading those failures everywhere else. Nor can it reckon with what has become of the graduates it sends into the world.

Yale's career infrastructure delivers 46% of its work-bound graduates into finance, consulting and technology. That pipeline concentrates them in five cities across four coastal states. They work in industries that have done more than almost any other to narrow the geography of American opportunity, to hollow out the places they came from and to make the kind of upward mobility Yale claims to represent harder for everyone else. For the rural or first-generation student whose family sacrificed for the degree, that pipeline is not a promise kept. For the country that subsidizes Yale's tax exemption, it is a negative return on its investment. For the faculty who came to contribute to something larger than credential production, it is a quiet embarrassment. And the trust report does not mention any of this.

Yale's report was still circulating when emails obtained from San Francisco's mayor's office revealed that the University's engineering dean had been developing a business plan for a satellite campus in the Bay Area. Yale's spokesperson says there are no current plans. The emails suggest the conversation is further along than that. The move would follow Vanderbilt's recent acquisition of the financially insolvent California College of the Arts, in what one Atlantic writer called the national-chain model of undergraduate education. The schools with the resources to expand are doing so toward the cities where talent and capital have already concentrated. While Yale measures its national impact on a state-by-state map, counting clinical trials and patents, its expansion strategy points in the same direction as its graduates.

Just days after the trust report's release, Yale quietly revised its mission statement, excising its commitment to improving the world and educating aspiring leaders. What remains is the preservation and dissemination of "knowledge," in a narrowed ambition that happens to position the University perfectly to become a national leader in artificial intelligence. Researchers writing in this year's Business and Society journal warned that generative AI threatens to degrade our collective knowledge ecosystem through what they call "epistemic pollution" or the dissemination of low-quality, misleading and fabricated information at scale. And the University that just committed itself to preserving knowledge is racing toward the industry most likely to corrupt it.

The report identifies Yale's predicament as a trust problem, but it is more precisely a resentment problem. Americans increasingly see elite universities and their graduates as participants in a system designed to concentrate wealth and opportunity for a small class of people who already possess most of both at their expense. A university that has revised its mission to withdraw its vision from the world beyond its walls, tracks its impact in patents while half its graduates funnel into extractive industries and is considering expanding toward the same coastal cities those graduates already cluster in is not answering that resentment; it is confirming it.

Most of us will leave Old Campus for the last time after commencement with some sadness. There will be tears for the end of our shortest, gladdest years of life. But the conferral of our rights and responsibilities is not a farewell. It is a beginning. Gone are the days of the University for God and for country. But a University that exists only for Yale is not much use to the country that sustains it. So if the institution no longer takes the obligations embedded in the words of our commencement ceremony seriously, then we must.

We know the rights: Yale clubs, library access, reunions, The Game and others. The responsibilities are real, too, and they are ours now as well.

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Valley Publishing Co, Derby, CT

DIGITAL ARCHIVE
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