OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

JEAN-CLAUDE PIERRE III

What is fair and true

I am writing to respond to an article written by Hannah Owens Pierre '28. In it, she calls for Yale to reform its admissions standards to match with settled law. I recommend you read it. I appreciate the input Owens Pierre offers to this conversation, and hope to respectfully offer some counterpoints.

First, some arguments in the article are misleading. Owens Pierre uses a hypothetical case of male applicants receiving preferential treatment to remedy women's overrepresentation in medical school admissions to argue against race-conscious admissions. This is a bad analogy. Gender is not generationally passed within family units in the way that race is, nor are men systemically disadvantaged in the way people of color are. Bolstering male admissions would not be the same as bolstering admissions for students of color.

She also alludes to the recently studied post-affirmative action cascading effect to argue that "Ending preferential treatment in admissions doesn't mean that there will be no minority doctors, it simply means that they will be placed in medical schools that match their test scores." This argument is scarily comfortable with the notion of relegating doctors of color to "inferior" schools. Equally important, it isn't necessarily true. Being able to attend a more competitive medical school is helpful towards obtaining strong residency placement opportunities, which is connected to how often a doctor goes from medical school to a position in the most sought-after specializations.

Furthermore, Owens Pierre's hypothetical comparison between a presumably white or Asian student with a "4.0 and 36 on the ACT" and a presumably Black or Latine student with a "3.90 and a 31" is harmfully narrow. There are far more people qualified to attend Yale School of Medicine than are admitted each year. Focusing solely on comparative scores obscures this fact by making a harmful implication that the 3.9 GPA student is not qualified to be there at all, and ignores how race — and the diversity of thought and experience it creates — can positively contribute to an applicant's qualification.

More broadly, I'd like to put aside the question of settled law and focus on ethics, since a case against settlement on legal grounds has already been written. In a history where constitutional interpretation has repeatedly been weaponized against Black Americans, it is crucial to emphasize how morality often lies beyond the boundaries of our settled law. Owens Pierre doesn't just make the claim that race-consciousness has been ruled as unconstitutional; she asserts it is unfair. I believe the latter assertion is more dangerous than the former.

Her logic is as follows: White and Asian students are, on average, more qualified on the basis of grades and test scores, and therefore, in a fair world, should be admitted at a higher rate than their proportion in the population. Because, as Owens Pierre puts it, "the fundamental issue here is one of fairness."

To that, I ask: why are white and Asian students more qualified? It is either because of systemic concerns that have created an imbalance in outcomes, or because there are some genetic or cultural deficiencies that predispose Black and Latine people to inferior outcomes. I hope that we can agree on it being the former.

"The fundamental issue here is one of fairness." Owens Pierre emphasizes a need to end race consciousness without considering, or even mentioning, the broader inequality and unfairness that race-conscious systems sit within.

"The fundamental issue here is one of fairness." I have family members that could have died because their life-threatening medical conditions were consistently overlooked by white doctors, only to be finally acknowledged by a Black one. I don't see how any of this is fair to them.

"The fundamental issue here is one of fairness." Do we expect to make a world of white and Asian Ivy League scholars, who go on to become white and Asian leaders of our societies, to pass on their wealth, connections and opportunities to their white and Asian children, and somehow create a world that is fair to Black and Latine people?

Affirmative action is a positive good and — until the continued plunder at the roots of this nation is remedied — a necessary one. I truly hope for a world where affirmative action is no longer needed. But that is not the world we live in today. How fully and honestly we can confront this truth is a question that goes beyond race. It is one that touches to the roots of our humanity, in all its beauty and flaw, and is fundamentally connected to our ability to love — ourselves and one another, tantalizingly so, amidst the cruelty of an unjust world. To that end, perhaps this simple question is the most important question of all.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

ELIAS THEODORE

Alder's welcome



JAMES LARSEN / SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Welcome to New Haven.

You may not have thought of yourself this way before arriving, but you are now a resident of this city. For the next few years, you will spend the majority of your days here. You will meet lifelong friends, grapple with the world's hardest questions and sing and laugh and play here. Some of the most formative years of your life will be spent in New Haven.

As a representative on the city's Board of Alders, a rising senior at Yale and someone who grew up here, I have experienced the Yale-New Haven relationship from both sides. I am writing to tell you that we are happy to have you and to offer a few thoughts on what it means to live in New Haven.

You probably already sense that Yale is an enormous part of New Haven. I hope you will come to understand that New Haven is still much bigger than Yale.

In your first few weeks, you will meet classmates from all over the country and world who — like you — have just arrived. But you will also meet the workers who keep Yale and New Haven running, the business owners and artists who keep our city vibrant and residents who have called New Haven home for generations. Yale's population is transient, but New Haven is not. It has a community and identity that extend far beyond the University and that you can become part of during your time here.

You may have arrived with preconceived notions about New Haven and the relationship between the University and the city. It is true that this relationship has been marked by contestation: decades of grievance and division, enormous institutional wealth alongside immense community need and persistent demands for more from Yale. And it is true that New Haven, like many cities, has faced serious challenges with poverty, crime and disinvestment.

Whatever notions you may have — and whatever truth they may contain — you are now a steward of this centuries-long relationship. The way you choose to engage with the city, the way you treat the people you meet and the way you speak about Yale and New Haven, here and back home, will be a part of this history.

I have two asks of you as you assume this privilege and responsibility.

First, enjoy this place.

Explore its neighborhoods beyond downtown and East Rock. Eat the pizza and not just the big four. Go to an arts event off campus. Visit the waterfront, which is closer than you think. And most importantly, get to know the people who make this city what it is.

New Haven is extraordinarily diverse. Alongside a fifth-generation New Havener often lives someone who settled here just months ago. Nearly one in five New Haveners is an immigrant, with Mexico, China, Ecuador, Jamaica and India among the largest countries of origin.

About a decade ago, FiveThirtyEight published a study finding that the New Haven metropolitan area was the most "normal," or representative, metro area in the United States, closely mirroring the demographic makeup of the country as a whole.

Normalcy isn't always something to brag about. But in a country as diverse as ours, this statistic is remarkable and exciting. In just one small corner of the Northeast, you can experience the beauty and diversity of America.

My second ask is that you go beyond enjoyment: contribute.

There are countless ways to do this: learn the names of the people you see every day downtown, work part-time at a local restaurant, volunteer in a New Haven public school or hospital, play in a local chess tournament, treat unhoused neighbors with dignity and kindness, coach a youth sports team, support small businesses throughout the city or spend a summer in New Haven. If you don't know where to start, Dwight Hall can help.

Find something that is important to you, and show up.

As Yale students, our job is not to think we have the answers to New Haven's problems. It is to recognize those already hard at work in the city, to remember we are members of this community, to be active participants in it and to acknowledge how much we have to learn along the way.

I wholeheartedly believe you will get the most out of your time at Yale if you find meaningful ways to engage with the city beyond Yale. Some of the people you meet here will change your life. Some of the most important things you learn here won't be in the classroom. I feel confident that if you let it, New Haven can become more than the place where you went to college.

Welcome to our city. I hope you come to love it as much as I do.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

AMINE BIT

Refusal is only the beginning

Dear Editor,

On September 3, the Yale Daily News published an article including some remarks by me regarding Yale's potential settlement with the Department of Justice. While I do not dispute the accuracy of the remarks attributed to me, the article does not fully convey my position. Given the stakes of the current moment, I am writing now to clarify and contextualize my opinion.

I graduated from Columbia in 2025, following two years of student protests that were quickly met with administrative repression, and eventually, state intervention. Columbia initially attempted to showcase a veneer of agreeability and dialogue at the beginning of the encampments, but these attempts were soon overshadowed by the reality of the university's actions. By the time I was a senior, seeing NYPD officers around campus was a regular occurrence and acts of civil disobedience were repressed immediately, without any attempt at negotiation. Trust between the students and the university was at an all time low, a distrust which was bolstered by the fact that Columbia's Office of Institutional Equity did not meaningfully acknowledge the nominal unacceptability of anti-Arab discrimination and Islamophobia until after it brutalized, arrested and suspended its students in the spring of 2024. It likewise struck me when, upon arriving, Yale seemed to be more open to articulating its institutional position regarding the settlement. In that sense, I suppose Yale is doing "better," albeit that means very little in light of its own record of repressing student protesters.

I did not get the chance to voice my opinion at length during my interview but I will offer this word of advice when it comes to Yale's potential settlement: I speak from experience when I say now that the Trump administration's thirst for subservience is interminable. If Yale settles, there will be another settlement. Then an "agreement." And then, before you know it, academic departments will be put into receivership, new free speech guidelines outlining the protection of "American values" implemented, and eventually, to paraphrase the words of one of my former Columbia professors, the university as we know it will no longer exist. Because the current federal government's modus operandi is not mutual understanding but fiat. The language of egalitarianism and free speech is flipped on its head in the service of a political agenda that is diametrically opposed to these values.

But that was then and this is now, and Columbia's past capitulation does not have to be Yale's future. Yale can succeed where Columbia failed. Even refusing a settlement would not, by itself, constitute success. Political recognition in the form of a refusal to settle is insufficient as long as it is not reinforced with both legal and material redistribution. The transformation of the university's illusory democracy into real democracy will only be completed when the long-term demands of the students and faculty are considered and actualized. This includes, most importantly, divestment from the military-industrial complex which is funding Israel's genocide of Palestinians. Refusal is only the beginning, and its importance and urgency is non-negotiable.

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