OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

RICHIE GEORGE

Say hello to everyone

Invariably when I walk down the streets of New Haven, either to attend class or to meet friends or to travel to one event or another, I encounter someone I know and I say or yell, "Hello!" Usually they wave back with an equally earnest greeting, and in the rarest of times, with the closest of friends, a greeting becomes an hour-long diversion: a welcome interruption of my day. But sometimes, a greeting is followed by nothing more than a glare or a blink of an eye. Neither an exclamation nor an upturn of surprise, like two strangers walking down an imperturbable street.

Bereft of intimacy, I am left with questions and no answers. "Do they hate me?" "Did they not see me?" "What did I do?" But there is no belated recognition. I am already at the end of the street, on my way to something, somewhere. The last question I often consider is simple and devastating: "Why not? Why not say hello?"

Many students at Yale have intimated to me that they have regularly had missed encounters of this kind. And each has their own explanation. "We aren't in the South." "All of them are usually white people." "Maybe, they are just weird, I don't know."

The phenomenon of silent shunning at Yale is so regular that we cannot attribute its origin to a small yet socially active cohort of white wealthy weirdos from the cold American North. Almost all of us are doing "it" to each other, and we'd like to say we aren't, that we are not playing a game that demands a careful play of meanness and niceness. For students who sincerely commit, almost religiously, to an ethic of absolute hospitality, they are out of luck. Maybe they are the true exception.

There is an economy of friendliness at Yale, and we'd like to omit it from our account books. We'd like to believe we do not calculate the commitments we make to acquaintances, friends and partners, with the unearned belief that our notion of reciprocity is not reducible to whether our credits and debts net to more than zero. We refinance our relationships every day, avowing and in the same breath disavowing the possibility of ever having coffee or grabbing a meal with a hoped-for friend. At least we can speculate a future encounter that projects upon an absent attachment.

Maybe the prohibition on greeting others, that inaudible, gestural "no," is an ascetic practice, out of an aversion of risking long-term investments in another's life or being thrown into an undesirable situation that deranges one's plan for the future. Maybe I read too diligently into the quotidian and ordinary. But I believe any serious attempt at attachment formation, to any degree, whether with a friend you see once in a blue moon or a friend whose common room you sleep in every other day, entails a spiritual commitment to a future with them, in their highs and their lows.

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Otherwise, all of our relationships become entirely optional. When a friend falters, they become toxic, as if a worthless asset, instead of a person in dire need of care. A relationship becomes a so-called liability if the option of having the relationship no longer adds value to your life, whatever that proverbial value is. The rhetoric of optionality has traveled from the mouths of trustees to those of their assets — by which I mean us, their students. If our generation consents to our college years wholly becoming a financial asset, from the very fact of our attendance to the micro-social dynamics of friendships and partnerships at Yale, then we'd be better off honestly admitting to each other that our hospitality is conditional. But if our lives mean more to us than the economic value our relationships may or may not bring, we must take the leap to foster relationships founded on unconditional hospitality for others, at Yale and in New Haven broadly.

I do not expect a din of greetings to be heard on Yale's streets and hallways tomorrow, nor that Yale administration will add an extra five minutes to the passing period between classes for mandatory greeting sessions. But I do expect that we, as students and as friends, choose to hold each other's lives in our hands, to say that no one is a stranger here. If we plan to fight for a democratic university that interrupts the sordid age of financialization, which I hope we do as soon as possible, let's craft a we that remakes Yale for the long term.

Saying hello would be a fine way to start.

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STAFF COLUMNIST

HANNAH OWENS PIERRE

Against politics as entertainment

One year ago, Charlie Kirk's murder was broadcast to the world. Millions watched a man lose his life, a wife become a widow and children lose their father, all for the crime of holding Republican political beliefs.

This moment should have been a time of national mourning. It was a time to confront our own mortality and reassess the foolishness of allowing our political beliefs to inspire hatred of others. Yet none of this happened.

Instead, almost immediately after, people around the world, including Yale students on Fizz, the popular social media application which only Yale students can post on, flooded the internet with memes mocking Kirk's death, which pervade the internet to this day. AI-generated songs, pictures and videos were shared by millions, making light of his life and its tragic ending.

Unfortunately, this behavior is not an isolated incident. Similar reactions occurred after healthcare executive Brian Thompson's murder at the hands of Luigi Mangione. Nor is it seen exclusively on the left: online conservative figures showed a lack of sympathy when former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband Paul Pelosi was attacked in 2022. And far-right figures like Nick Fuentes have famously hidden their true beliefs behind irony and humor to appeal to a wider audience.

Rather, it is representative of a new approach to politics, one of farcical entertainment rather than substantive discourse involving real human beings. Politics is now treated as entertainment. Instead of dealing with real, difficult political questions, people increasingly scorn seriousness, opting instead for shock value and parody. Political consciousness is formed through short clips and ironic humor. Complex arguments are compressed into viral moments, and political opponents are treated as characters to ridicule, rather than people whose ideas are worth understanding.

It is a trend that has afflicted even a great institution like Yale. While the University prides itself on intellectual rigor, its students often treat matters of life and death as mere spectacle. I witnessed this first hand last year, when I debated the left-wing livestreamer Destiny on his statements calling for the death of conservatives. An audience of Yale students laughed and cheered as a guest on our campus mocked the murder of a father and husband.

Even recently, at Yale Political Union debates — where intellectual dialogue should be expected to flourish — students frequently laugh at their opponents rather than engage in serious debate. Those who express unorthodox opinions are often mocked on social media instead of engaged with, as was on display at a debate with Hasan Piker, a left-wing political commentator, last spring.

I see several things wrong as this insipid approach to politics creeps into our culture. For one, it makes us worse people from a normative perspective. There should be nothing amusing about the murder of a young father or the attack on an elderly man. To treat these topics as light-hearted jokes degrades our shared humanity and capacity for empathy. We treat our fellow human beings worse when we view them as nothing more than objects of our amusement.

Equally importantly, it worsens intellectual discourse. When everything is treated as ridiculous, there is no space for honesty. Difficult conversations are cast aside in favor of levity. Debate, which is necessary for intellectual discovery, is impossible with an audience primed for clicks.

Finally, it reinforces political polarization in a troubling way. When culture becomes defined by poking fun at tragedies affecting the other side of the political aisle, people of differing political backgrounds find it impossible to relate to one another.

I do not wish to overstate my claim: There is nothing inherently wrong with humor, even dark humor. Finding topics of death or devastation amusing in the abstract is not harmful, and may in fact help people cope with the weight of these concepts.

But is something else entirely to turn politics itself into mere entertainment, where even human death becomes mere content to be consumed and shared. Politics does not have to be humorless, but it must be serious enough to recognize that the people behind disagreements are human beings. Imagine your mother, your sibling, your friend under the brutal assault of an internet mocking campaign on the basis of their worldview. It's unbecoming.

At Yale, of all places, we should demand more. A week after the anniversary of Kirk's death, commit to politics for the sake of truth, not entertainment.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

ZACHARY SURI

Political diversity is not the problem

I have a confession to make. I have never lived more than a few blocks away from a college campus. As the child of a historian and an economist, I knew the word "tenure" before I learned to read. And my scariest Halloween costume was, by far, a surprisingly lifelike Henry Kissinger.

But despite the many privileges of an upbringing in the halls of American academia, the faculty brat lifestyle has its downsides too. Cue the half-dozen detours to the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in sunny West Branch, Iowa. The long lectures on the development of American agriculture I had to endure before I could take a slice of pizza. And the ever-constant refrain from every non-parental unit, from the father of my first girlfriend to the cantor at a Berlin synagogue: what happened to political diversity on campus?

When I arrived at Yale as a credulous first-year three years ago, it was more of the same. Nearly every party of the Yale Political Union claimed to be the only bastion of an underrepresented political minority on campus. My fellow Directed Studies students lamented that no one else was reading The Iliad anymore. And my FOCUS friends insisted that Yale had destroyed New Haven with its academic imperialism.

In short: The leftists say they are oppressed. And the conservatives claim they are castrated.

As with most things, the truth is they are both wrong. Yale, in fact, has one of the most robust conservative student communities in the country. You can attend speeches in favor of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement deportation at the Buckley Institute, support pro-life causes at St. Thomas More or advocate for the engineering of the Übermensch — true story — on the floor of the Party of the Right. And if you so desire, the Ethnicity, Race, and Migration department would be happy to offer you a course on "Latine Queer Trans Studies."

Though the vast majority of Yale faculty never voted for Donald Trump, that hardly makes them leftist revolutionaries by any measure. They are still teaching Lincoln and Homer and Biblical Hebrew. The problem is not that the conservatives — or the leftists for that matter — don't exist. The problem is where they exist.

Yale has become too siloed. The ER&M department is filled with historians, economists and political scientists who all share a particular ideology. The faculty of Ethics, Politics, and Economics have similar credentials to those in ER&M, but in large part, opposite politics.

The creation of myriad departments in the past quarter century means a left-wing student can now graduate from Yale with an ER&M degree and never take a class with a professor — let alone a student — who is not a leftist. Similarly, an EP&E major might never encounter a professor who is skeptical of capital markets.

The problem is not that Yale offers a course on "Patristics" or "Queer Poetry of the 1990s" in the first place. Those courses should be taught! The problem is the courses that are not being taught instead.

Yale needs to teach survey courses again. The nation's most famed history department does not regularly offer an American history survey course. Nor does it offer a regular German history or British history survey course. If every historian regularly had to teach for breadth instead of depth, macrohistory instead of microhistory, students would have to encounter professors of widely differing viewpoints before graduation.

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The strength of the American university has always been in breadth. Unlike our counterparts in Heidelberg, we don't hide away for indefinite terms of study to learn every ounce of Etruscan grammar and forget to read Tolstoy. We shouldn't let our professors do the same, whether it's Queer Poetry in ER&M or Adam Smith in EP&E.

The day a Marxist is teaching Burke to the finance bros, and a Burkian is teaching Marx to the woke crowd is the day I rest content.

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