OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

ABBY NISSLEY

Our time at Yale is ticking

"So sorry, I'm running five minutes late." I send the text, frantically gather my purse, and race out of class.

I am late to dinner with one of my best friends, who I have been accidentally neglecting in my schedule. And our dinner is already truncated because I am simultaneously late for another meeting. I end this day exhausted, setting my alarm for an irreligious hour the next morning to finish the assignments I abandoned earlier as I tried to make it to every dinner and debate and meeting.

This panic of busyness is not constrained to one hectic day. I live my life bounded by arbitrary and desperate timelines. I know that I am not alone. Time is our currency at Yale, dolled out unbiasedly to every person, but I fear we are not spending it wisely, despite the depressing number of students increasingly interested in "finance." For most students, Yale is a golden ticket in life, but the unique opportunities we have at Yale create a culture of chaotic hurry where what matters most in life is often entirely neglected.

"Be there in five!" has become my mantra for breakfast plans, sent like a timer as I only begin to peel myself out of my blankets. Recently, I am late simply because I was lying in bed drifting in and out of consciousness while ignoring my problem set on the desk. My social guilt for being late is so dulled only one month into school, I show up late to everything.

"I just don't have time." WRONG. We always have time.

Let's reframe the statement without the underlying panic of scarcity. Every single day gifts us, equally, 1,440 minutes. In one day, every heart will beat approximately 100,000 times. However, something has been flipped upside down in our economy of time at Yale. Priorities are rare and far between. We cram our Google Calendars so full because we believe, somewhere buried in our Pavlovian-trained brains which crave the sound of activity, that the true exchange rate between productivity and busyness is 1:1.

Going to church or sitting with friends when they are going through a hard day are not activities that are color coded in our calendars. They are inconveniences that have no apparent value in our Yale economy. Friends will always be there and church has no barrier to entry, so these important aspects of life are shoved to the end of our priority list for "when we are less busy." We will worry about the scary questions of vulnerability and life later.

So, we are left with wandering, wondering and high-achieving students at Yale, whose eyes dance around the dining hall in the middle of conversation. We create students at Yale who are flaky and hold their priorities like juggling balls, never fully grasping them long enough to examine their core beliefs and values. Juggling does not allow a respite.

It's too terrifying to admit: busyness does not equal productivity. Somehow these variables have become entirely, fallaciously, correlated. Not only is this a conflation of variables, such a mistake is an unproductive way to live life.

We weren't designed to be constantly moving and striving. In John Mark Comer's book, "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry," he writes about a study on how Seventh-day Adventists have a life expectancy 10 years above the average. Their secret? Sabbath. They stop the frantic pace of life one day every week.

If we do the math, taking one day off every week adds up to almost exactly 10 years of rest over a lifetime. Mathematically, this study proves that our bodies give us back, roughly, the time that we take for Sabbath in the long run.

In Christianity, the concept of Sabbath comes from the book of Genesis, when an omnipotent God rested after creating the universe. Why would a religion allude to a seeming weakness in a powerful God? Because, perhaps, rest is not weakness.

I am not arguing that students should not be striving to immerse themselves in novel activities at Yale, and I certainly am not in favor of complacency. A compelling solution? Joining one of the student groups designed to wrestle with faith. Yet, ironically, these are the same groups that lack urgency and an external appeal because they are not competitive.

I wonder how many Yalies traverse campus with contemplative purpose despite the shakiness of college life. I wonder instead how many students are floating from finance club to debate group because their older friend's cousin told them to join. I wonder how many students come to Yale with no inherent vision for life, not seeking to discover it even through their hyperactivity here.

We bury the fears lurking at the back of our minds and decide instead to spend the afternoon stressing over our outfit for the night. We are scared to stop and look into ourselves. We are petrified of pausing in the middle of our frantic schedule because we fear having to reevaluate commitments or to ponder the larger questions of life. We are burnt out and hyperactive, but we do not want to reevaluate the investments of our time.

Stop. Think for five minutes before you resume your day. But certainly don't be late for dinner with your best friend.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

ZACHARY CLIFTON

Answering Yale's million-dollar question

On Thursday, a story spread like wildfire.

Hundreds shared and more than 3,400 liked an Instagram post by the Yale Endowment Justice Collective. In bold, firetruck-red letters, the post declared: "Yale gave $1,000,000 to the Friends of the IDF." Beneath, the post displayed a black-and-white page from Yale's federal tax filing — Form 990, Schedule I, which discloses grants and assistance to U.S. organizations. The image didn't show the section explaining the purpose of the grant: that it was a donor-advised fund, otherwise known as DAF, distribution.

The Yale Endowment Justice Collective's examination isn't exactly unusual. It scrutinizes Yale's endowment, probing how money flows into and out of the University's $41-billion fund. But the Instagram post struck a nerve because of its simple yet damning claim: Yale funded the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces.

The Friends of the Israel Defense Forces is explicit about its mission: to provide for the welfare of Israeli soldiers and veterans. That means funding education, housing, and care for active duty troops. Its supporters call this humanitarian; its critics call it militarism dressed in nonprofit clothing. It is inseparable from the ongoing war in Gaza — a war in which tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed.

The truth, as always, is more complicated than the Yale Endowment Justice Collective's initial claim — but not necessarily less troubling. Yale claims to educate, to pursue light and truth. Yet there is no light shed or truth told by channeling a million dollars to support foreign soldiers.

The University might argue its hands are tied. Once a donor establishes a DAF, Yale must honor the donor's intent. To reject a donor's recommended distribution could expose the University to legal risk or jeopardize future gifts.

But universities are not mere pass-throughs. They are moral institutions that shape their legacies not only through the students they educate but through the values they embody. Yale chose to create and advertise its donor-advised fund program. Yale chooses to operate it each year. Yale assumes responsibility for where the money flows.

The technical answer to whether Yale "gave" money to the FIDF is no: a donor did. The accurate answer is more complicated: Yale distributed the funds, put its name on the tax filing, and became part of the story.

DAFs are like charitable bank accounts. Individuals give money to a sponsoring organization — here, Yale — then they receive an immediate tax deduction and "advise" how the money should be distributed. The Internal Revenue Service makes clear that once a donation is made, the sponsoring institution has legal control, though the donor retains advisory privileges.

On its website, Yale invites donors to route their philanthropy through these channels, calling the university "grateful for grants that come from Donor-Advised Funds." It acts as a middleman, receiving money from a donor, then disbursing it at the donor's request.

Typically, Yale's donor-advised fund distributions are less remarkable — others include a smaller distribution to the Alliance for Middle East Peace, a group of over a hundred non-governmental organizations working to build reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians; another to the Wonderland Educational Estate, which funds a private preschool in Houston, Tx.; a larger one to the Yale New Haven Hospital, which received about $1.3 million.

The Friends of the Israel Defense Forces is a benefactor. But its beneficiaries are not Houston preschoolers or Yale New Haven Hospital patients. They are combat military personnel.

Last year's $1 million transfer to the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces stands apart. According to hundreds of pages of Yale's public tax filings I combed through, it appears to be the largest single largest donor-advised distribution the University has made to an organization other than Yale New Haven Hospital since it began disclosing them in 2001.

The Friends of the Israel Defense Forces is not a small neighborhood nonprofit. It is a well-connected organization that raised $282 million last year, headed by a former Israel Defense Forces general. In the wake of Hamas's Oct. 7 attack on Israel, its annual revenue quadrupled as American donors rushed to show support.

So when Yale's name appears on a tax filing, next to a $1 million transfer to the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, it creates more than accounting confusion. It creates moral entanglement.

Partly about the morality of institutions becoming conduits for militarized power, American president Dwight Eisenhower's speech on the Military Industrial Complex seemed to warn about this kind of thing happening. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist," he said.

Universities cannot forever plead neutrality while their financial machinery bankrolls causes with profound human consequences. Yale may not have chosen this particular war. But by approving the transaction, it chose to be complicit.

There is a million-dollar question. No Instagram post or financial footnote can obscure its answer. Yale did not give its own money to the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, but it did give someone else's.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

ARI SHTEIN

Lock the loud up, New Haven

Driving into New Haven this August, I met the northeast in half a dozen unmuffled and shiny BMWs. Each in turn roared down the on-ramp and merged with a jerking motion; they began to weave haphazardly between all three lanes of traffic, brake-checking semi-trucks and terrorizing all the sleepy Saturday-evening-road-trippers they could find.

To call it a culture shock would be an understatement.

My home is Ann Arbor, Mich., a college town much like New Haven, only midwestern, around half as big, and essentially without violent crime or sadistically reckless motorists.

Above all else, Ann Arbor is quiet. I've lived on a campus there before, sleeping in a dorm room with the window open, and it's eminently possible to go weeks without waking at 4 am to the sound of a tricked-out, entirely-unoiled Dodge Challenger tearing through downtown.

There's a special joy one can only feel in the silent suburban night: that of staying up for hours listening to a lone woodpecker pecking wood somewhere out in the night; of falling asleep to the uninterrupted, rhythmic pitter-patter of rain on roof.

This kind of joy is not to be found in New Haven.

Every night, my Elm Street–facing window in the corner of Durfee Hall rattles nearly out of its frame to the sound of joyriders whooshing by. When my mom called to wish me a happy birthday earlier this week, I had to step out into the common room to hear her over the roar — and even then, a couple of particularly loud ne'er-do-wells managed to interrupt our short ten-minute chat.

To most Yalies, the sound is nothing more than an idle irritation — especially to those with childhood big-city bona fides. They shrug their shoulders and say, "Jesus Christ, Ari, you've been complaining about this non-stop for four weeks, please get over it already."

But we who know the pleasures of quiet suburbia can see New Haven's sound problem for what it is: a quality of life concern; a heart health hazard; a threat to the constant and uncountable conversations and discourses which make Yale the humming factory of knowledge, innovation, and discovery that it is — a slap in the face of all which is good, peaceful, and pleasant.

I tend to be pretty allergic to the misuse of state power; as offended by the overpolicing of minor, victimless crimes as anyone — but noisiness is far from victimless. Really, I can think of few clearer examples in which one individual's low-cost act — driving around with a large and unmuffled engine — can so totally and forcibly pollute the shared environment. "Burning coal," "peeing in the reservoir," end of list.

Noisemaking is cheap to do, but it imposes large external costs. Economists have a prescription for such issues: We internalize the externalities! Levy a tax on the act in proportion to its burden on the rest of society, and redistribute the proceeds to those affected.

These taxes are called "Pigouvian" and they Pareto-efficiently — that is, perfectly and magically — deter harmful acts, while justly compensating anyone still harmed. For our sake, the same purpose can be served by a noise ordinance carrying heavy fines for violators.

New Haven does have such an ordinance, with, as of recently, appropriately severe penalties. Section 18-79 (c) of Title III of the New Haven Code of Ordinances prohibits any sound emitted from a motor vehicle "which is plainly audible at a distance of one hundred (100) feet from such vehicles by a person of normal hearing." And Section 18-82 (b) assesses fines of up to $2,000 for repeat offenses.

This is wonderful! But as any student of criminal law enforcement will tell you, the deterrent effect of a punishment's severity is vanishingly small in comparison to that of its enforcement rate.

And, usually, by the time a loud and speeding car's been reported to New Haven authorities, it's already loudly sped away. A 2024 article in the News reports that while the New Haven Police Department received more than 2,600 noise complaints that year, few violators received citations.

I don't expect this to change much. Though the Connecticut legislature passed a law just last year permitting cities to enforce their ordinances with noise-detecting cameras, New Haven's been hesitant to install them. And besides, for violations caught on camera, the legislature limited maximum penalties to about a tenth the size of those found on New Haven's books.

As it stands, the only realistic way to quiet the New Haven night is to step up nuisance-policing. But as the NHPD struggles to hire cops and focuses its resources on more serious crimes, we find ourselves facing the depressing reality that a couple dozen unapologetic sadists can, with total impunity, degrade the lives of hundreds, even thousands, of law-abiding New Haveners and Yalies.

Someday soon, though, the hiring shortages will resolve. And on that day, there will be a reckoning for the noisemakers.

When finally the noise ordinances are enforced, it will be as if a holy declaration has rung out: That beauty and civilization must and will prevail; that, here in New Haven, we must and will act well to one another.

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