Volume 37, Number 5

## Out of the Desert, Into the Frying Pan

Yale's Jewish Community Wrestles With its Own Diversity



# The Elephant

n coming to Yale, Brian Christiansen knew he was entering a social enclave more liberal than any he had ever experienced; that was exactly why he chose it. The son of a retired navy captain, Christiansen had always lived on military basesincluding, years earlier, the US base in Guatanamo Bay, Cuba-and his parents had reinforced the conservative, patriotic tendencies of the military community. But when Christiansen decided to go to West Point as a high school senior, his parents urged him to test new waters; he could always return to the military life later. In the meantime, choosing Yale over West offer a different Point would perspective.

And it wouldn't take long.

One of Brian's freshman-year suitemates also identified himself as a conservative, but they were the only ones in their Old Campus dormitory. "I remember we were sitting around in a dorm room in Farnam one day," Christiansen recalled this summer, three months after he graduated and a month before returning to Yale School of Management as a Silver Scholar, "and someone said, `Well, at least we won't run into many Republicans here!' John and I looked at each other and we both kind of slowly raised our hands."

The experience was a harbinger of ideological divergence to come. From the beginning, Christiansen was less than thrilled with the quality of political discussion at Yale-and with the acrimony of many of his peers' Bush-

bashing. "So after 9/11, I kept my views to myself and studied and prepared for my post-Yale career," he recalled ruefully, but with characteristic good cheer.

In hindsight, Christiansen posits that the quality of political dialogue at Yale has decreased since the time when future members of America's conservative vanguard-people like Governor George Pataki '67 or President Reagan's attorney general, Edwin Meese III '53-studied there. But criticism of Yale's leftist skew and the resulting paucity of substantive debate was nothing new in that era either. In fact, the person most often hailed as the father of modern American conservatism, William E Buckley, graduated from Yale in the class of 1950 and within a year, had their own, Yale had taken to converting its students into "atheistic socialists." The book caused a furor in the national media. Meanwhile, Buckley went on to found the conservative magazine The National Review and to reign over traditional conservatives for more than four decades. His career captured a curious irony: Yale simultaneously bred the first public backlash against left-wing dominance of college campuses, in the form of Buckley's landmark critique, and peopled the vanguard of Republican politics. Today, Yale is the best-represented university among staffers in the current Republican administrationthe second, in fewer than twenty years, under a Yale Republican-and well represented in a range of conservative DC institutions. On the surface, it

"So after 9111, I kept my views to myself and studied and prepared for my post-Y ale career," Christiansen recalled ruefully, but with characteristic good cheer.

cut his teeth in national politics by writing a book that denounced what he saw as Yale's creeping liberal bias, *God and Man at Yale*.

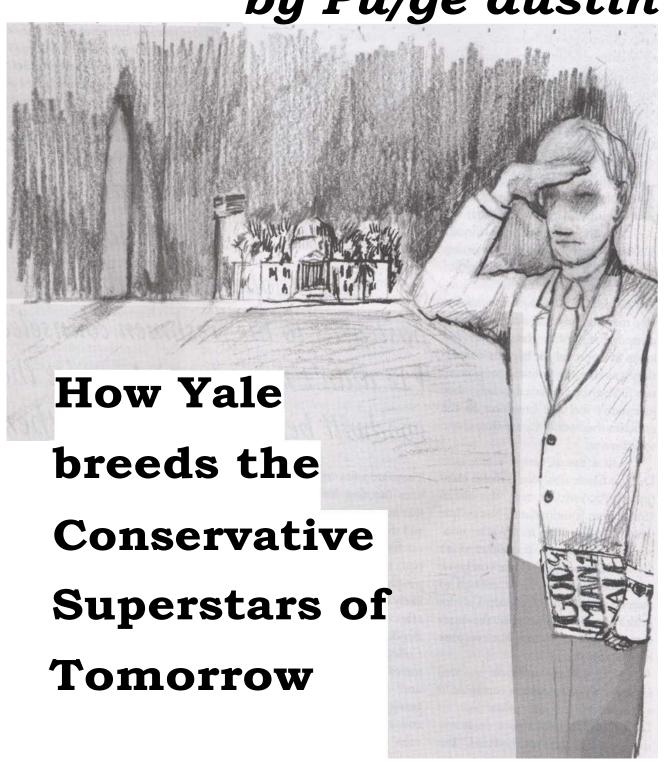
In the book, Buckley warned the good Christian men dominant among Yale alumni and trustees that, rather than filling their ranks with more of

seems Buckley was mistaken in condemning his alma mater. If what he said was true, how could Yale have continued attracting young conservatives, and propelling them into the upper echelons of Republican politics for another half century?

The question sheds light on the

## in the Room

by Pu/ge austin



role of liberal universities in partisan politics, and also on the nature of Republican politics more broadly. Christiansen and Buckley, who graduated fifty years apart, have something besides politics in common: When they left the Elm City, they both went to Washington.

And for them, as for many of their Yale peers, prosperity in the nation's capital came not after overcoming their years at liberal Yale, but by taking advantage of that very liberality to shape a successful future on the right-and to shape the right's successful future.

#### WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

n his biweekly Yale Daily News column "Unchained Reactionary," Keith Urbahn claimed that the Bush-Cheney t-shirt he donned the week before last fall's election uncovered a "covert fraternity of Bush supporters on campus"-a substantial number of fellow Republicans who may not have had t-shirts of their own, but did offer thumbs up and looks of approval for his. His conclusion was that his political peers were not hiding their political beliefs; they just didn't feel like brooking all the criticism they would face if they chose to advertise.

At a casual Greek eatery near Dupont Circle this July, Urbahn elaborated. At Yale, he said, the liberal atmosphere is intimidating for people who disagree with it: "You're constantly barraged. So you either don't say anything or you feel like you know what you're talking about enough to interact with people." Clearly, Urbahn prides himself on being in the latter category. But of course, not everyone hankers for debate.

"If you get to know me well enough," Priscilla Adams explained at a restaurant on the other side of Dupont, "You'll see I have conservative written all over my forehead." But Adams doesn't flaunt it, and she has her reasons not to: "If you're going to be really vocal, you have to be willing to argue all the time... and I'm not a confrontational person." Instead, as a sophomore, she applied for a Pickering Fellowship, which put her on track to spend two years getting a Masters Degree in International Relations, courtesy of the federal government, then join the Foreign Service for another four. She's not sure about a future in politics, but obviously, for the time being, she is ahead of the pack on getting a toehold in government.

The distance between Urbahn and Adams represents the division in the conservative demographic at Yale. compromise their goodwill before he even met them.

The silence of the latter variety of conservatives shrouds the University's Republican minority in ambiguity. There is little doubt that it's there, but its members can be difficult to identify, and easy for the liberal majority to ignore.

Coming to Washington, then, where most organizations carry a political designation by reputation, if not on the door, can bring Yale's political demographics into sharper relief. For Austin Broussard, who interned at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) last year and this summer for his Republican senator David Bitter, the experience was revealing: "It's not like

Andrew Bender recalls being unsure whether to mention his role in Yale College Republicans in ostcards to his freshmen counselees. He didn't want to compromise their goodwill before he even met them.

There are a few highly vocal conservatives (another Yalie interning in DC this summer estimated there are five and then proceeded to count them off on his fingers; Urbahn was number two) and a larger mass of quiet ones, people like Adams and Christiansen, likely to join the political fray, but only after they graduate. Even Andrew Bender, the Vice President of the Yale College Republicans and a summer intern at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, recalls being unsure whether to mention his role in YCR in postcards to his freshmen counselees: He didn't want to

we conservatives run in the same circles at Yale, so it's almost like a coming out party. It's like wow, you too? I didn't even know!"

But in the world of DC interns, conservative Yalies aren't so few and far between. Last summer, when Broussard worked at AEI-home to administration luminaries like Lynn Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and John Bolton '67, LAW '70-seven of the 55 summer interns were from Yale. This year there were another five. The Heritage Institute, a conservative think tank noted for its stellar internship program, had two Yalies this

summer and three the previous year. Three of this summer's White House interns were from Yale.

But those numbers need context: A lot of Yale students intern in DC. When R. David Edelman set up a Yale-in-Washington program for summer interns last spring, 450 students registered for the mailing list. Of attended those, 300 Yale-in-Washington events between the start of June and mid-August, many with noted Washington conservatives like Weekly Standard publisher William Kristol and Senator John McCain. Edelman did not record participants' places of employment, but he agreed with many interns' estimates that at least half of the Yalies in DC were right-of-center.

At Yale itself, the proportions are much more skewed. Judging by membership in the Yale Democrats and the Yale College Republicans, Democrats outnumber Republicans at Yale by almost three to one. Of course, not all conservatives identify as Republican, nor all Republicans as all-around conservatives, but the numbers are telling. Conservatives constitute a much higher proportion of Yale students interning in DC than they do in the undergraduate population as a whole.

For a minority accustomed to dissimulating at school, DC is like a summer-long coming-out party.

#### THE NEW RADICALS

yen in William Buckley's era, at the start of the 1950s, conservatives were a minority, more prone than liberals to cause offense and less likely to receive slack for it. In *God and Man at Yale*, the former *YDN* chairman complained that his right-of-center editorials elicited far more ire than those of his leftist successor in the class of 1951. For Buckley, the experience indicated a turning point in Yale history:

"I am forced to conclude from my



Mathew Ciesielski atop the American Enterprise Institute building in DC. (Photo by Paige Austin)

experience with the *Yale Daily News* through several years, and from other evidence also, that at least at this college level, the great transformation has actually taken place. The conservatives, as a minority, are the new radicals."

At the time, conservatives of Buckley's political ilk really were radicals, fitful in their relationship even to the Republican Party. Today, conservatives occupy far less of a political fringe. Still, many of them count their radicals among the University's blessings. That's because they hail disproportionately from places where, as Adams said of her hometown in the Florida panhandle, "You're hard-pressed to find a Democrat" (though probably not as hard-pressed as Jordan Stevens, a sophomore from Midland, Texas who interned on Capital Hill this summer. In the president's hometown, Stevens "Nobody I know, literally nobody, is liberal."). At Yale, by contrast, conservative-minded students encounter frequent opposition to the views they grew up with. Many say the contention forces them to re-trench and learn how to argue for their positions. Escape, after all, would be impossible. "If I weren't open to hearing liberals, I'd be shunned," chuckled Matt Ciesielski, a conservative from small-town Indiana, and an AEI intern this summer.

All that contact with the liberal opposition keeps conservatives on their toes. By way of example: The Yale Democrats has over a thousand nominal members, about one hundred of whom participate in the group's meetings or events. In the Yale College Republicans, by contrast, over fifty of the 350 members are active-one in six, as opposed to one in ten Yale Democrats.

And at the Yale Political Union, as president Silas Kulkarni explained, "Though the left outnumbers the right by about two to one in membership, the attendance pattern is almost the exact inverse... People have tried very hard to get the left to show up in force, but so far that has proven very difficult." The Party of the Right (POR), the most conservative of the six YPU parties, consistently has the best attendance at YPU debates: On average, Kulkarni estimates, 20 to 25

September 2005

POR members attend, compared to only five to ten members of the furthest left party.

The reason, Kulkarni believes, is that liberals prefer activism to politicking. In a sense, that is not surprising: The Yale Democrats and liberal YPU parties are only two options in a whole smorgasbord of left leaning, single-issue groups and clubs. Conservatives have fewer places to go-as Ciesielski said, "If you're not involved with the Yale College Republicans or the YPU, you're kind of just out there as a conservative." But undergraduates on the right also have more cause to consider their politics and, to the extent that they opt for political involvement at Yale, not to take that involvement lightly. The result is that, proportionally, there are fewer armchair conservatives than liberals.

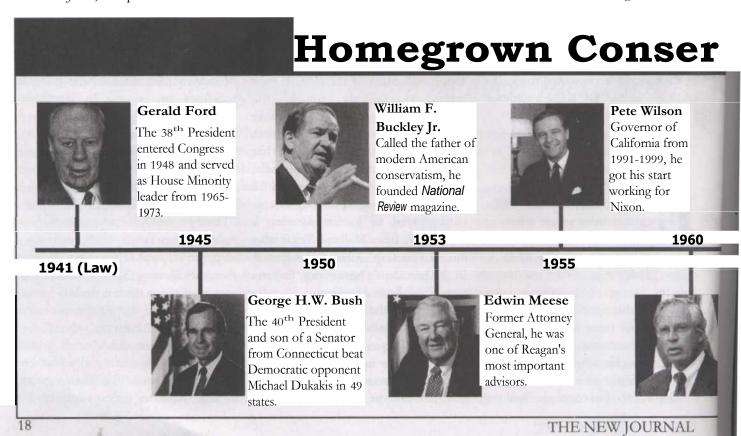
Of course, there are a few places at Yale where conservatives are no minority. When Stevens' football coach polled the team after the election last fall, seventy percent of the players said they voted for Bush. And Al Jiwa, the president of the Yale College Republicans, noted, "Especially at election times, when we needed to rally, it was up to someone to call up the DKE guys"-DKE being, as Urbahn put it, home to "a lot of Cheney hats." Outside the President's old fraternity, however, there are few groups whose members would dare to show their colors.

#### I GOT You BABE

sonically, having fewer conservative organizations at Yale has its perks-conservative Yalies who do get involved in campus politics know where to find each other, whether they need help or are in a position to offer it. When David Barnes, a former president of the Party of the Right, joined the staff of the Heritage Institute last year, he advised several POR members still at Yale to apply for one of Heritage's vaunted summer internships. When they did, Barnes says he was in a good position to advocate. David White, another alumnus from the class of 2003, did the same thing for his former cohorts at *The Politic*, eventually picking Will Ritchie, to intern with him in the speech-writing department at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) this summer.

There is nothing new about connections helping students to secure jobs and internships in Washington. But for conservatives, minority identification lends a degree of camaraderie that dime-a-dozen liberals would find hard to match.

Urbahn, the YDN columnist, got his job as an intern in speech-writing at the Department of Defense when he sent his resume to David White at HUD, who passed it along to fellow Yale alumni in the White House and the Department of Defense. Though Urbahn did not have a formal interview at the White House, those he spoke to in both places were Yalies. "You share stories," he recalled later in the summer. "One guy was a reporter for the YDN; he just identified with me." Chris Michel, the former YDN editor-in-chief now serving on Bush's



speech-writing staff, had in fact already emailed Urbahn to commend him for his plucky biweekly column, which marked its author out as a dogged anomaly on a liberal campus. At a Yale-in-Washington dinner later in the summer, Michel said that, like many of his fellow young alumni, he still trolls the YDN and keeps an eye out for good writers like Urbahn. In a sense, Michel is just returning the favor: At the same dinner, he explained that he got his job when a member of the YDN alumni board put him in touch with a Yale alum working in the White House, who helped him to get an internship in speech-writing and then, a few months later, to turn the internship into a staff position. The reason for that help, and its implication, was not lost on Michel.

"If you go to Yale and you're conservative, you're part of a group that is especially small. I think there's that drive to hire people and help people along," explained Urbahn. "There's a sense that I know what you're going through."

White, who left his HUD job in August to become the assistant editor of AEI's in-house magazine, agreed. "Most Yalies are willing to go out on a limb for other Yalies, even people you've never met before. And probably especially with conservative Yalies, because there aren't as many of us, so if we want to fill up DC with likeminded Yalies we have a smaller pool to pull from."

And with that as their bond, Yale conservatives will find that in Washington, they are not alone.

#### IN GOOD COMPANY

almost

servatism-consolidated undergraduate institutions, and the catalyzing effects of minority status-find an uncanny reflection Washington. This summer, few topics seemed as in vogue among leftist organizers as the right's edge in cultivating young leaders, and the left's need to play catch up. Conservative organizations like Heritage, The Cato

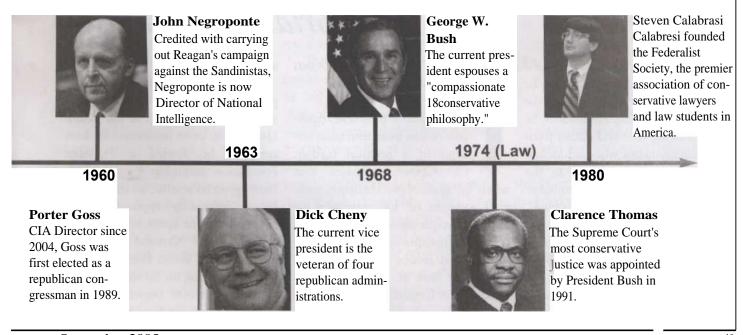
wo features of Yale's con-

Institute, The Project for American Century, and the Inter-Collegiate Institute have been preening college-aged conservatives for decades. In the 1960s and '70s, Buckley's Young America Foundation did the same thing, channeling resources to conservative student groups on campuses across the country. These organizations were intended to counteract the liberal onslaught Buckley had trumpeted years earlier, but by now, they have a two decade head start.

The Heritage Institute, with its 75\_ student internship program is a Washington standout: well-established, well-funded and, best of all, chock full of true believers-the old alongside the young. And this summer, it had the good fortune to attract a recent Yale graduate who, in the previous four years, had plenty of impetus to reflect on his conservative views: Brian Christiansen.

Christiansen spent the summer at Heritage interning for Edwin Meese III, a constitutional law scholar and fellow Yale alumnus, compiling

### native Celebrities

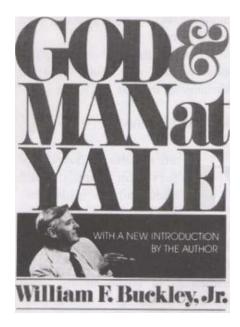


September 2005

research and writing a position paper that will help Heritage establish its stance on prisoners' rights at the military base where Christiansen once lived, Guatanamo Bay. The program, which he described as "half internship, half school," was an eye-opener: Christiansen discovered a whole movement, rooted in Reagan conservatism, to counteract the leftward tilt on college campuses that had hit him in the face in a Farnam dorm room four years earlier. Intellectually, it engaged him as few classes or forums at Yale had-though, of course, Yale had a big effect on his experience. His internship was funded with a fellowship from his Yale fraternity, Zeta Psi, and he says he is a better writer and researcher because of his time there. He added amused, "Sometimes I'll say stuff and people will write it off like, he's been brainwashed at liberal Yale."

His time at Heritage taught Christiansen a few things about liberal Yale too. In June, *The New York Times* published a high-profile article on the veled. "I thought I was one of like ten conservatives."

Apparently, the people who called him thought the same thing. They figure Christiansen is unique at Yale, just like they once were. And but for his time at Heritage, Christiansen would still agree with them.



admitted that the careful case Heritage had presented against affirmative action was hard to refute. Now, he says, he sees the problems with the policy he had supported.

Jonathan Swanson, a Heritage intern last summer, recounts a similar near-transformation on the issue of gay marriage. He explained, "It's not indoctrination, it's just really persuasive."

At most think tanks, interns act as researchers for the institute's full-time scholars, finding mentors and making contacts in the process. Juliet Squire, a two-summer AEI intern, describes the program as akin to "a three-month long interview process," one that brings many interns back for a position on the staff. Her co-intern, Matthew Ciesielski, objects to the characterization of AEI's internship program as a Republican Party feeder ("I'm not sure the kids think of it that way; it's not like they're beginning in single-A and they'll be in the pros in twenty years."), but he agrees that the ties, like the experience,

## Sometimes I'll say stuff and people will write it off like, he's been brainwashed at liberal Y ale.

### Brian Christiansen

Heritage program, which mentioned Christiansen's name and said that he was happy to have reprieve from the "liberal ethos" at Yale. Afterwards, he began receiving calls and emails from other Yale graduates who had looked up his coneact information in the alumni directory. "They just wanted to congratulate me on what I'm doing," Christiansen recalled in August. As one of the quiet conservatives at Yale, he was shocked to find he had so much company. "I almost feel like there's this secret cell of conservatives who you don't know about," he mar-

DC THINK TANKS: CONVINCING CASES, SMILING FACES

nterning at a posh DC thinktank can do more than unite students of a political feather. Christiansen estimates that when he applied to Heritage, only sixty percent of his responses to application questions were in accord with the Institute's positions. On a few crucial issues, like affirmative action, he was at odds. But over lunch at the Capital Hill Brewery on the last day of his internship, he are helpful.

Jonathan Swanson can testify to the potency of those ties. As a junior, he applied twice to intern at the White House, both times unsuccessfully. Last summer, he landed a Heritage Foundation internship instead. With Heritage on his resume, his third White House internship application was accepted, and he spent last fall as an intern at the National Economic Council at the White House. Back at Yale in the spring for his second-to-last semester, Swanson began organizing students around the same issue he had

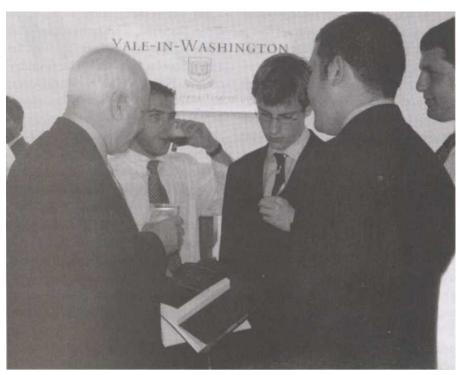
worked on for while there: adding private accounts to social security. When he returned to DC for a second summer, this time to manage the group he had co-founded, Students to Save Social Security (S4), Swanson began to cash in on his earlier contacts. Heritage staffers provided him and his student colleagues with advice on everything from getting an op-ed into the paper ("If you say you have twelve chapters in an editor's state, that helps.") to attracting more media coverage ("The media wants something to take a picture of. I never would've thought that of that."). Heritage even arranged for the group to do a free media training session with the National Leadership Institute-complete with television cameras, live callers, and professional producers to critique the students on their faux guest appearances.

"Little things like that are really practical," Swanson said later. "There was one guy in our group who's really articulate but on camera he never smiled. They told him that."

To date, the group has opened chapters at over 150 colleges, staged a demonstration outside the Capital, enjoyed modest fundraising success, and scored an invitation to the White House. Swanson himself was the focus of an August *Washington Post* article about upand-coming political organizers.

Like a lot of people, the Yale senior concluded that the heightened youth recruitment and training efforts he witnessed from Republicans were no aberration. The right is simply better organized overall. A key breakthrough in Swanson's development of S4 came when he wrangled a speaker's spot at Grover Norquist's famous Wednesday morning meeting, an essential weekly stop for conservative strategists and politicians in DC. Swanson told the group about his organization and asked for any help people at the meeting could offer.

"Afterwards people were coming around"-here Swanson raised his



Yale-in-Washington head R David Edelman canoodles with politicos like Mr. McCain.

arms to indicate the convening masses-" It was literally like the conservative movement coming around me."

"or a young politico like Swanson, fiscally conservative but socially liberal, the experience raised a crucial question: Is the left doing enough to match its competition? Or, as he put it, "Do they have a Wednesday morning meeting where I can go to address every major liberal leader? Because they should."

They don't, of course, but they are beginning to realize that they need one. In 2003, President Clinton's former chief of staff founded a new DC institute, the Center for American Progress (CAP), to take aim at the left's political deficiency in the think-tank realm-and to play catch-up by grooming students for future leadership roles. CAP employed fifty interns this summer (three of them Yalies) and its collegeorganizing wing, the Center for Campus Progress hosted its first annual conference for young progressives, attended by 650 college students from around the

country. CAP also funds *The Hippodytic, a* magazine for progressive students at Yale. But its director, David Halerpin '84, LAW '89 is the first to admit that conservatives are way ahead in moving college students through the ranks.

"There is no question that the right wing is better right now at cultivating and promoting young talent and finding new leaders," Halperin said this summer. And it is better at propelling that young talent upward: "We don't have that same culture; there isn't that same culture that we should all be helping each other."

CAP has made progress in bolstering youth outreach, but the organization-and the left, more broadly-may be well served not to discard the siege mentality anytime soon.

A HEALTHY DOSE OF PANIC

y many conservatives'
own admission, an
enduring sense of panic
has been hugely beneficial to the Republican party over the

September 2005 21

last four decades. In 1964, when the GOP's conservative wing finally marked its ascendancy by nominating ultra-right winger Barry Goldwater, Democrats trounced them in all but six states. Buckley predicted the defeat; even before the results were in, he was encouraging his party to look ahead to the next battle. It wasn't until 1980 that far-right conservatives like Buckley found an ideological peer in the White House. In the meantime, the party rallied around its self-image as the embattled underdog. Today, Republicans control the White House, both houses of Congress, and over half of governorships-but the back-to-thewall fighting spirit developed in the 1960s and '70s still appears, for political purposes, like the gift that keeps on giving.

Most likely the movement to change that philosophy won't origi-

nate at Yale. Here, unlike in the country at large, conservatives' sense of embattlement is often quite justified, and it has been for decades. Buckley felt it in 1950. In 1980, Steven Calabrasi, the founder of the Federalist Society, did too; he claims that he resolved to establish the conservative lawyers' association one day in a Yale Law School classroom when he was one of only two in a class of 90 to say he had voted for Ronald Reagan. When he arrived at Yale two decades later, Brian Christiansen's experience was almost identical.

For most middle-of-the-road Yale liberals, no experience in a Yale dorm- or classroom is likely to be as catalyzing as this. If their conservative peers are correct, far too many of them simply assume that everyone is basically liberal-or, at least, that they would be if they thought about it a little more.

Edelman, the director of the Yale-in-Washington program, thinks that is how the summer events calendar ended up with such a high proportion of conservative speakers, relative to Yale's typical bias. "Bill Kristol's office will call us back in a day, whereas James Carville won't give us the time of day," Edelman complained midway through the summer. Far-left celebrities are hard to come by, he explained, and even those who are well known-like Carville, a prominent Democratic strategist and author-are not necessarily very convincing. He thinks their failure lies in their refusal to engage the opposition on equal terms, preferring as they do to highlight its illogic. Part of the problem may lie in the inherent differences between conservative and liberal ideologies; while the right can coalesce around a finite set of axiomatic beliefs,

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easily conveyed and universally applicable, the left is by nature less coherent, more like a federation attempting to speak the aims of disparate citizens than a centralized state in which shared aims are the uniting factor. But if that characterization is accurate, liberals ought to have more cause for substantive debate, not less. And they should be able to refute conservative arguments with considerably more nuance.

A lot of conservative undergraduates. like Christiansen. would welcome the change. Calling President Bush an idiot, they argue, is no substitute for spirited intellectual discussion ("It's just a lot of screaming," scoffed Andrew Bender, the YCR Conservative vice-president). students can't get away with that kind of behavior-and they are better off because of it.

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE

illiam Buckley would likely know the feeling. His attacks on the University's attempts to cultivate "atheistic socialists" at the expense of god-fearing "individualists" proved legendary, and Buckley didn't stop there. He encouraged alumni who disapproved of Yale's trend towards secular "collectivism" not to contribute to the school financially, and turned down repeated requests to do so himself. But a lack of broad support from Yale's faculty and student body did not stop Buckley from exploiting his years in New Haven. When he founded The National Review in 1955, he appointed a fellow Yalie publisher, and relied on other Yalies as senior editors and advisors. In a 40th reunion toast to his Yale classmates, reprinted in his autobiography, he told them about his circle of friends: "And most of my friends I met forty-odd years ago, met them within a radius of two hundred yards of where I am now standing."

Yale has not had an easy relationship with its contentious graduate from the class of 1950. Its more liberal faculty and students might still find it ironic that an overwhelmingly liberal institution-bred, even motivated and honed, the father of modern conservatism, but time would prove he is no rarity. Yale may not be in the business of mass-producing conservatives, but it does yield its share of luminaries.

Paige Austin, a senior in Davenport College, is a Senior Editor of TNJ.

TNJ

### BERK ELEY COLLEGE MASTER'S TEA with



Fantasy Novelist

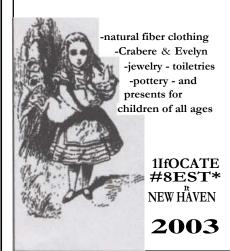
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September 2005 23