

# CLASS HISTORY

*by Emanuel Boasberg, III*

I BOUGHT a musical cigarette box last Christmas, you know the kind that plays "Boola Boola." The student Christmas Sales Agency offers them for only \$10.95, but that's all right because you can put it on the bursar's bill. I noticed a lot about that cigarette box, sort of pseudo-symbolic, you might say. It automatically plays when you open the lid, fast at first, then slower and slower, till at last it stops; but then all you have to do is wind it up again. I guess

maybe we're all getting our second winding this week. Funny too the way the music can stop so suddenly when you close the lid. You even feel a little sorry that it's silent. Stranger still is the notion that the strains of "Boola Boola" might just evoke a memory or even a hope. Oh! But that's sentimentalizing, and that's a sin, especially for an intellectual like myself. I guess I might commit a lot of sins today: I might say some things that we Yale men don't talk about, might

be humorous, might be proud of Yale, might even say these have been the four "shortest, gladdest years of life."

The last few class historians have told us just how we've wasted four years, how silent we've been, how we didn't rebel, argue, or ask questions. Such ideas as this: "We found the present incomprehensible and the future unthinkable"; or better yet, this one: "We had nothing to say to Yale or to the world, and therefore it did not make much difference how we failed to say it." We were a silent generation, security searchers, and creeping conformists. Well, I'm just a little tired of hearing all this, and of having to look around to see if anyone is watching me before I open the *Yale Record*, lest I be seen smiling. I have to condemn the *News* because some days it looks like *Sports Illustrated*, and besides, look at the Political Union or the *Yale Lit*—gone to the dogs. What's the most vigorous young organization on the Yale scene? Why, the Yale Cinema, of course, with three different flicks a week; not even the Crown or the Lincoln can boast of the quality or the variety of the Linsly-Chit Flick House, and you can even smoke.

Oh! The evils of Yale—the IBM monster. No longer is Davenport's lower court symbolic; the black shoe now walks next to the Cordovan and the cleated on the Calhoun meadow; the slide rule is fast disappearing from the newly flannelled TD common room, and even Saybrook's grass is growing. Trumbull has lost its Beer 'n' Bike, and the Maiden Form Five Plus Two is gone forever. Never again will Smithie and Yalie frolic on a Tuesday afternoon 'neath the elms, for Mount Tom beckons, and besides you know it just isn't nice.

But it's not only the fact that Yale's golden days are over but also that our class in particular is dross. Worse still, it's jockless—three, count 'em, three varsity football players, not even a senior basketball captain, one lone Rhodes Scholar, no outstanding personalities, and even the Whiffenpoofs have 12 instead of 13 members. We were the class that matriculated after the great ice-cream riot and graduated before the newly formed Ivy League crowned its first undefeated Yale football team champions.

Yet we still have some honor left. We were a smart class, so they made us take five courses

instead of four in senior year, and there's a new Dean's List out now to combat the great inflation. Anyway, there's still an all-senior spook list, and at least Harvard week-end didn't fall on Thanksgiving.

We witnessed the passing of a lot of tradition. Fat Herman left, and some guy from Villanova came in, and imagine, he even wants to win games and develop a new spirit—not very casual. They abolished two-platoon football and daytime college guards. Derby Day had already been buried for two years, and Hammonasset Day followed—too many deer shot or something. Tap Day was abolished, and a few weeks later Stalin died.

Sophomore year saw Plan A and Plan B, but just looked and soon forgot. The Old Heidelberg upped its beer prices along with the other mellow institutions, and even the barbers couldn't resist a 50 cent hike. As juniors we got democracy in the colleges via IBM, a loss to Harvard and Princeton, and a 3-23 basketball record.

By the time senior year rolled around almost everything was revolving. Besides the new calendar, which was just for our last year, there were signs that in place of the nine fraternities a brand new residential college would solve the problems. The Tombs were going to get windows, and Besse-Richey was going shoe.

Although we witnessed the passing of many great Yale traditions, we gave birth to some new ones. We were now sitting on the shady side of Bowl, and this was good because the beer could be kept cool longer. WTRU, the first college television station, was born and merged with the ever-growing voice of the Yale campus, WYBC. The great game of bladderball assumed major proportions, and the time was not far distant when the moguls could see the brutal contest staged in the Bowl and the Yale-Dartmouth football game played between halves. The old lunch wagons were gone and so was the Ringside Restaurant. No longer the innocent tales of Barney and Al but instead the new D'Andrea's blossomed forth with the quarter pound hamburger. We could not see "Mort for that snort" nor would Rappaport ever wrap another quart, but we could still "see Dave and save," or "Esta for the besta," or at 5 a.m. the Greek philosopher at the United could still advise us to let a "smile be our umbrella."

We got a new Art Gallery, a remodeled Connecticut Hall, and a new snowball riot.

Then too, mid the dying of the old and the birth of the new, there were still many traditions which would not change, which were too fused with Yale for even the *News* to loosen them. Miss Bowers signed up for a brand new 15 year contract our sophomore year: "Now she belongs to the ages." The student agencies have expanded in every direction to almost unbelievable size. There is a student rooming agency, a picture delivering agency, a birthday cake agency, even a fruit basket agency, and the future looks promising.

The flush-o-gram, typical only of college students, has remained preferable to either the flush-o-phone or the flush-o-letter. The quaintness of New Haven is preserved forever in the Walk—Don't Walk signs, and furthermore, if you walk when the Don't Walk signs are on, it's a crime. But the New Haven police probably won't see you because they're too busy tagging cars. The waiters at Mory's still speak only to those whose Christmas gratuities are over \$10; the Lizzie still serves tea; and the Pundits still have lobster and champagne and their TBIYTB. It's also possible to get mugged if one tries hard enough, and the guys at Boardman Trade still wear the traditional black leather. The swimming team hasn't lost in so long that we don't even mind their wearing their letter sweaters inside out and backward.

Press and Fenn's are still slashing prices so that a hand-loomed and handwoven troon and Shetland tuxedo with buffalo bone cuff buttons made on the Isle of Hebrides only goes for \$300. But George Fien will slip two tickets to the Army-Navy game in the pocket, so everything's O.K. Morris Widder will never take off his hat or open on Saturdays, but if you hit him after a good day at the track, you can always get two bucks for your high school overcoat. We all dislike Princeton and agree there's nothing worse than a Princeton man with his orange and black tie, garters, belt, scarf, and hate-Yale button, unless it's a Harvard man who's got a Sunday afternoon date with your girl at Wellesley. Then, too, the PR at the Co-op or the 13.4 per cent at Whitlock's, the Yale student store, will never die. The rain will always come on week-ends, football week-ends preferably.

Yale men will continue to conform because if we didn't there would be so much less to criticize, and it wouldn't feel like home any more. We all dress alike, talk alike, and look alike, and there's so much conformity that even Fence Club has the greatest difficulty in choosing the best conformed. DKE still averages over four busted tables a year; Zete still takes newsies if they get the nod from Ernie; and the Betas, as usual, will always have their Ravin' good times together. Haunt Club members make up the only group which still wears the striped tie with pride. The good guy, better guy, best guy, and cricket clubs are still in competition with the 15 nice guy clubs, and the Whiffs still need two great guys to push the piano on the Glee Club stage. So you can see that the old order has not quite yielded place to the new.

In the *News* of October 18 last fall, there appeared an article called "The Yale Man Gives Himself Away," and it really hurt us to see that somebody was saying something good about us, especially some guy on that abominable *News*. But we quickly dismissed the guy as a bourgeois liberal who wanted to get in good with the administration, and besides he might have been right. We of the numb 900 couldn't have given ourselves away because we were the hollow men, voiceless, emotionless. Could the fraternities possibly serve some good? Could someone actually enjoy a beer at G & H? or Thanksgiving under the clock? Could the Yale man be a little altruistic about floods? I think I even heard a cheer or two at the Army game. We couldn't have sincerely supported the blood drive or given a little more than we could afford to Yale charities. No, this was impossible. Did some of us enjoy Harkness Tower when it was lit up between Thanksgiving and Christmas? Did some actually have a good time with the crowded mass of sophisticated tweeds at the Junior Prom? And, God forbid! There might even be a few who knew the words to "Bright College Years," though not the second verse, I grant you.

Sin of all sins—perhaps a few actually learned something at Yale. Were none of us moved when Maynard Mack, talking about *King Lear* said, "Reality? Reality is merely hints and guesses"? Or when Sewall spoke of ambiguity and tragedy? Or Cecil Driver of democracy? Could we have thought twice when Frank Baumer, talking about Francis Bacon, mentioned, "A mind free and

open, with patience to meditate and courage to doubt"? Perhaps we remember when Uncle Sid Lovett in a soft voice said, "Every now and then take a good look at something not made with hands—a tree, a star, the turn of a stream." Or white-haired Mr. Gabriel, pausing a minute at the end of his final lecture of the year and then looking straight ahead: "Gentlemen," he said, "I've brought you this far—you take it from here—I wish you Godspeed." Maybe far back in our heads are such names as: Weiss, Green, Vincent Scully, Wimsatt, Witherspoon, and Dick Young, Dunham, Krieger, Bill Emerson, Bemis, Watkins, and Barry Farrell, Foord, Buck, and Dan Merri-man, and perhaps we even have a lasting friendship with a scholar or two. Maybe we do think about Yale, about the world, and maybe we're not so silent.

Finally, let me tell you about another Yale class of '56—the Class of 1856. They graduated with 98 members full of optimism and confidence and then suddenly were clubbed over the head with the greatest crisis of Young America—the War of Rebellion. About 60 per cent fought in the war, and about 10 per cent never lived to make another reunion; but those who did, came back with their optimism unclouded. They joked and sang at their fifteenth reunion and talked of their dead and their living in the finest Victorian metaphors. At their twenty-fifth reunion

they were in the midst of the glorious 80's, and by their fiftieth reunion the 15 that survived saw the dawn of a new century of prosperity and security. But in the last volume of their class history, written in 1920, the seven living members of the great Class of '56 had just dragged through another war, this one a world war. The last words they wrote as a class, only 13 or 14 years before we were born, were still clothed in Lincolnesque language—they expressed the wish that the enemy should be treated with "malice towards none and charity for all." They concluded, "We old men may not live to see the dawn of this new world, but we still are saved by hope." They still had their old confidence, and maybe it is better that they never saw a second World War or heard of an A-bomb. In the last analysis our history is still unwritten, but I hope that in our final volume we can have the faith and confidence that the Class of '56 did before us. Although we can't transform the world into Utopia, we can still preserve our personal integrity. Maybe we won't find fulfillment in this ever-changing, troubled universe, but we can leave Yale with a keener intellect and a more sensitive conscience. Perhaps we will find happiness in the realization that William Graham Sumner was right when he said, "The only security is the constant practice of critical thinking." Well, it's about time to rewind that old cigarette box.