

## **1) 'A little red pocket on the New Hampshire border': The national fissures splitting a competitive Mass. state rep. race (The Boston Globe, July 22, 2022) – pg. 2 in Clips.pdf**

A Boston Globe Page A1 feature I pitched on a state representative race reflective of national political battles. I systematically reviewed all of Massachusetts' State House races for the most telling and representative local election fights. This one was the winner, featuring three first-time candidates with wildly different political brands and rhetoric, two of which would mark a historic shift for the district if elected.

This became the Globe's most-read news story on the day of its publication. Clarification note due to a copy editor's error.

## **2) The MA crime wave over catalytic converters and the bill aiming to curb it (The Boston Globe, June 20, 2022) – pg. 11 in Clips.pdf**

Catalytic converter theft and legislative means to put a damper on it was a topic I believed needed more coverage in Massachusetts. I identified a bill doing just that moving speedily through the legislative process but flying under the media radar. I interviewed metals experts, scrap metal dealers, legislators, police PIOs, and theft victims. Well-read online, the story I pitched made A1.

## **3) The Crimson Klan (The Harvard Crimson, March 25, 2021) – pg. 16 in Clips.pdf**

After a yearlong investigation, I uncovered the forgotten history of the Ku Klux Klan's presence at Harvard, including unearthing photos of robed Klansmen posing at commencement. Scholars I interviewed criticized how the 20<sup>th</sup> century was seemingly excluded from Harvard's historical reconciliation efforts today.

After publication, Harvard's Legacy of Slavery project included a chapter on the 20<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated a section to the KKK's presence on campus. This was The Crimson's most-read piece last school year and received coverage from the [Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com), the Boston Globe and others. AAJA Student Excellence in Written Reporting Award Winner and Finalist in In-Depth Reporting at the SPJ Mark of Excellence Awards.

# ‘A little red pocket on the New Hampshire border’: The national fissures splitting a competitive Mass. state rep. race

By [Simon J. Levien](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated July 22, 2022, 5:52 p.m.



Main Street in downtown Pepperell, which will choose a new state representative this fall. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

PEPPERELL — In this community of 11,000, you can visit the closest skydive site to Boston or walk along a picturesque covered bridge. Nearby Groton is known for its prestigious college-prep schools and a tranquil rail trail that meanders up the Nashua

River.

This stretch of the Nashoba Valley near the New Hampshire border is also home to what observers see as one of Massachusetts' most competitive races for the state House of Representatives, a contest with just about as much ideological diversity as Massachusetts can muster, and a rare pickup opportunity for Democrats.

The race for the GOP nomination between a hard-line and a moderate Republican is also a brass-knuckle brawl of a reminder that national fissures — over whether the 2020 election was stolen, for instance — can still divide the most local contests, even in a state like Massachusetts.

The district's longtime Republican representative, Sheila Harrington, resigned after Governor Charlie Baker picked her for a clerk magistrate job.

Now, in spite of headwinds that could make the midterms a banner year for Republicans across the country, Massachusetts Democrats see a prime opportunity to flip a seat that has been in GOP hands since 1984, with Margaret Scarsdale, former chair of the Pepperell Select Board, set to be the party's standard bearer in the race.

Two candidates who have never held elected office are vying for the Republican nomination. Andrew Shepherd, a farmer with moderate politics, and Lynne Archambault, a fitness studio owner who takes a more MAGA stance.

So, who's leading?

"I don't think anyone's a shoo-in right now," said Karen Riggert, a Groton resident, independent, and a friend of Harrington who previously worked on her campaigns. "Sheila was lucky to be in office for as long as she was."

The 40,000-resident district — which includes all or part of Groton, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Ashby, Townsend, and Dunstable — sits at a political crossroads. Harrington

was first elected in 2010 and reelected five times, mostly without having to put up much of a fight. She's a well-liked moderate Republican who was endorsed by Governor Charlie Baker. But in 2020, a Democrat, Deb Busser, came close to unseating her, losing by about 800 votes.

Busser, though, isn't too shocked at the loss.

"You've got to understand — the district has always been more conservative, and for a long time has been a little red pocket on the New Hampshire border," Busser said.

Still, in 2020, Joe Biden would have won nearly 56 percent of the vote under the newly drawn district lines, boundaries that will be used starting this election. But historically, the area has routinely elected Republicans at the state level.

State Senator Jamie Eldridge, an Acton Democrat who represents towns just south of the district, described the purple 1st Middlesex District as a far cry from eastern Massachusetts.

It's "ignored by Boston and the State House, and that's everything from fixing roads and bridges to not providing enough support to rural school districts to underwhelming job growth," he said.

That constellation of concerns has made the district fertile political ground for a moderate Republican, observers say.



Andrew Shepherd, a candidate for the GOP nomination for state representative, spoke to attendees of Republican candidates night at the Peppereil VFW Post 3291. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

And of the candidates running, the one hewing closest to Harrington’s brand of politics is Shepherd, who runs a Townsend water delivery company.

A mustache-sporting, button-down-wearing farmer whose family has called the district home for more than 100 years, Shepherd peppers his Facebook page with a hodgepodge of patriotic posts and “Tractor Talk” videos. And while Shepherd holds some conservative views, such as opposing vaccine mandates, he leans into conciliation and moderation, and says, for example, when it comes to abortion, the government shouldn’t “tell somebody what to do in that regard.”

“In my opinion, people who supported Sheila and align themselves with her views and her values will support Andrew,” said Joanne Foran, who ran several of Harrington’s campaigns.

Shepherd, who interned for Harrington and Baker, said he’s forging his “own brand of Republicanism.”

When asked, he wouldn’t share his presidential vote in 2020.

“I’m not interested in the national brand of politics,” Shepherd said. He prioritizes securing state funding for the district and juicing what he characterized as a sluggish local economy.

“I’m the guy that’s shoveling that turkey [excrement],” Shepherd, who raises turkeys, said at a recent campaign event. “And I’m ready to go down to Beacon Hill and shovel the [excrement] . . . for our district.”



Lynne Archambault watched as Andrew Shepherd shared his message with Republican and independent voters at the Pepperell VFW Post 3291. Both are running for the Republican nomination for state representative. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

But there is a more conservative strain of Republican politics in the district, one that is ascendant in the Massachusetts state party and the national GOP.


From Shepherd's right comes his primary challenger: Lynne Archambault, a Pepperell mother of three, schoolteacher, and owner of a fitness studio in Pepperell.

Archambault is running on a platform of stopping critical race theory from being taught in schools, pushing back on vaccine mandates, and supporting the police.

"We share a lot of conservative beliefs," Shepherd said of his primary challenger. "I think we go about it a little differently."

She is a self-described "conservative Republican" who voted for Trump in 2020 but said going forward she's a fan of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis if he steps into the 2024 presidential race.





Informational pamphlets propped up a table leg at Republican candidates night. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Archambault released what she called a voter's guide. It said her opponent doesn't oppose vaccine mandates and doesn't oppose critical race theory in public school curriculums. Shepherd said he was "disgusted" at this, wondering how she could get away with misconstruing his positions.

One late June evening, Pepperell's senior center held a candidates night featuring all four challengers. The GOP differences were stark.

One resident stood up and asked all the candidates to give a yes or no: "Do you believe the 2020 presidential election was stolen from Donald Trump?"

Outright "no's" from three candidates. Archambault paused.

"I'm going to say there was some fraud," she said. "But I am not qualified to say if it was stolen."

On abortion, Archambault describes herself as "pro-life."

Shepherd highlighted the opportunity for the district to run a local electric utility and said he wanted to stay out of federal issues. Archambault's first words in her opening statement at the Republican debate: "Joe Biden."

Whoever the GOP victor, Democrats are counting on their presumptive nominee, Scarsdale, who has racked up a number of endorsements from liberal statewide organizations and sitting lawmakers. She is embedded in local politics. A Georgia transplant, she first ran a writing and consulting business and had stints in environmental activism.





Margaret Scarsdale, a Democratic candidate for state representative, bumped elbows during a NoWoCo (North Worcester County) Pride Flag raising ceremony and celebration in Lunenburg. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Scarsdale, who will face the GOP nominee along with independent Catherine Lundeen, said she is “fiscally conservative” and “socially responsible,” repeatedly describing herself as someone who rolls up their sleeves. She voted for Baker and Biden, and touted her “lifelong Republican supporters.”

In an interview, Scarsdale struggled to answer questions about several of her policy proposals.

When asked about her priorities if elected, Scarsdale said she hopes to reform how soil dumping sites, like one planned in Pepperell, are selected, but she said she’s unsure if

this could be addressed via legislative action. Scarsdale added she hoped to secure more state aid for local schools and fund workforce development in environmentally sustainable industries.

Whatever issues most animate voters, local or national, old-school door-knocking might decide the race.

Said Foran, the former Harrington aide: “It’s literally going to be who has a stronger presence.”

*Clarification: An earlier version of this story deviated from the way Lynne Archambault characterizes her position on abortion. She describes herself as “pro-life.”*

---

Simon J. Levien was a Globe intern in 2022. Follow him on Twitter [@simonjlevien](#).

[Show 111 comments](#)

# The strange Mass. crime wave over catalytic converters and the bill aiming to curb theft

By [Simon J. Levien](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated June 20, 2022, 11:22 a.m.



Catalytic converters, like one seen here in Richmond, Va., are being stolen across Massachusetts. STEVE HELBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Earlier this month, staff at the Hebron Food Pantry in Attleboro were gearing up for a trip to the Greater Boston Food Bank, set to haul back thousands of pounds of food for over 300 families. A volunteer, ready to make the journey in the pantry's box truck, put the key in the ignition, and the exhaust roared and sputtered.

“It was the loudest noise he ever heard,” Heather Porreca, the pantry’s vice president, said. “The catalytic converter had been cut right off the truck.”

Catalytic converters, a pollutant-reducing device that’s in nearly every modern car, have become catnip for car thieves across Massachusetts, as sky-high metal prices have led to a huge payday for the pilfered part.

In Cambridge alone, Police Department spokesperson Jeremy Warnick said police get a call over a missing converter just about every day.

Police Lieutenant John Soules said some Pittsfield businesses have suffered thefts “multiple nights in a row,” an “astounding” rate.

Enter: the state Legislature.

Representative Steven Howitt, a Republican from Seekonk, has led a bipartisan push to curb these thefts. And with its momentum, his bill just might become law before the State House breaks for summer recess.

This type of theft is [notoriously hard to track](#). With a reciprocating saw, a thief can crawl under a car, cut off the converter, and split in under 10 minutes. Catalytic converters are rarely etched with markings matching them to the vehicle they belong to, stumping police investigators as to whose converter went where, even when the thieves get busted.

“If we were to pursue a scrapyard, there’s no evidence to indicate that they knew they knowingly purchased the stolen catalytic converter,” Warnick said.

According to Howitt, the measure establishes a “chain of custody” for converters.

The provision would create a paper trail for someone looking to offload a catalytic converter with its pricey precious metal components. Scrap metal buyers could only pay for catalytic converters via check and would have to keep a transaction logbook recording identifying information about each seller. Sellers would also have to prove their legal

ownership of the converter.

“You’ve created a situation where the person who stole it is no longer able to take cash and go anonymously,” Howitt said of the bill.

Precious metals used in systems that reduce tailpipe emissions have hit historic highs in the market, according to metals market expert Nick Jonson at S&P Global Commodity Insights. Because of stronger emissions standards in Europe and China, demand for the metals has jumped in the last few years. But supply is hampered too: Russia — which harvests much of the world’s precious metals — is economically cut off from the West due to its invasion of Ukraine.

Howitt filed the bill late in the session, realizing it was an issue across his district, and a personal one, too: his own pickup truck is missing its converter. Replacing a catalytic converter can lead to steep repair charges, typically upwards of \$1,000. And driving without one, on most modern cars, is illegal.

Howitt admitted that his bill is more a deterrent than a shutdown measure against theft, but it might force thieves out of the Commonwealth to sell their stolen wares, he argued.

“They’d have to either ship out the catalytic converters, or else they have to travel a distance,” Howitt said of the thieves. “It doesn’t necessarily solve the problem, but it will make it more difficult.”

The bill also does not include language regulating the informal, online sales of catalytic converters. A quick search on Facebook Marketplace shows dozens of converters listed from individual sellers around the state, many of whom take cash.

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed a similar bill into law last month. Rhode Island’s Legislature is also considering a bill to clamp down on catalytic converter thefts. On Beacon Hill, the legislation has moved quickly through legislative committees and could now be on the precipice of a vote in the House.

“I don’t know of anybody who thinks it’s a bad idea,” said Representative Patricia Haddad, a Somerset Democrat who co-sponsored the bill. “Small businesses don’t need to lose their trucks.”

Eric Euell, who runs a Seekonk garage door company, had two trucks’ converters stolen the evening of June 12. He has since had one replaced, but every morning he warily glances over and checks that it’s still in the undercarriage.

Euell sprayed the new converter a bright pink, just for an additional layer of deterrent and for spot checking.

“Any legit buyer of catalytic converters will not buy it,” he said of his newly pink converter. “They need to go after the people that are buying them and hold them accountable.”

And he is right; many licensed scrapyards don’t want one-off converters. Second Street Iron & Metal Co. in Everett, for example, has stopped buying catalytic converters altogether because of theft concerns. Matthew Applebaum of Framingham Salvage said the bill wouldn’t add a layer of red tape: his scrapyard and others already record the IDs of sellers and the provenance of catalytic converters.

Applebaum said he isn’t comfortable buying catalytic converters from individuals anymore — just reputable companies.

“We did before there was a huge epidemic, if you will, on these,” Applebaum said. “The only time we would take them from an individual is if somebody comes in, they tell us the year, make, and model — they prove that it’s their car.”

Applebaum was skeptical that mandating check payments for converters would be a sufficient deterrent. But the recordkeeping mandated by the bill is something he thinks

many scrap buyers already do. As long as the string of thefts continues, his industry will have a bad name, he said.

In the meantime, Hebron Food Pantry has replaced the truck's missing converter to the tune of over \$1,000 in parts and labor. They requested that the mechanic put a shield over the converter to prevent another theft — another \$1,000.

On a shoestring budget driven by donations, Porreca, the pantry's vice president, said the repair set them significantly back. Now they wait, anxiously, until the converter guard is installed.

“We're just holding our breath coming into the pantry every day, hoping that it's still there,” she said.

---

Simon J. Levien was a Globe intern in 2022. Follow him on Twitter [@simonjlevien](#).

[Show 108 comments](#)



## The Crimson Klan

BY SIMON J. LEVIEN, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER  
MARCH 25, 2021



When J. Max Bond Jr. '55 entered Harvard at the age of 16, he was among 15 Black students in his class, most of whom lived in the north corner of Harvard Yard.

As his freshman spring semester began, two other Harvard freshmen erected a wooden cross facing that corner of the Yard, formed by Stoughton and Holworthy Halls.

And around midnight on Feb. 5, 1952, the students lit the cross on fire.

“Some of the onlookers cheered when, after ten minutes, the cross was knocked down,” Bond and his Black classmate wrote in a [letter](#) to The Crimson at the time. “But we are sorry to say that others expressed indignation at its destruction. Minutes later a Negro student passing thru the Yard was hailed with remarks such as might be expected in the Klan-dominated States of the South.”

Save a few miscellaneous Crimson articles, Bond’s memory of the incident is the strongest account of the Harvard Yard cross burning, which nearly every biography of Bond’s — he became a well-known architect — invariably notes as formative in his college years.

“I saw the flames,” Bond told The Crimson a few weeks after the incident. “I didn’t think of the Klan right off the bat. When I did realize what it was, I was shocked and I didn’t know what to do.”

Several Harvard deans publicly condemned the cross burning. Three progressive student organizations circulated a petition, garnering several hundred signatures, to have the perpetrators punished.

Post-Harvard, Bond became one of a few prominent Black architects in the 20th century. After his death in 2009, his widow, Jean Carey Bond, released an 11-page retelling of his life.

In it, Jean reveals that the University threatened Bond or any Black student with suspension should they go to the media with the cross burning. Bond, who graduated Phi Beta Kappa and finished undergrad in three years, was never suspended.

Meanwhile, the two freshman perpetrators were handed temporary probation by the Administrative Board.

The pair, hailed as pranksters by administrators and students alike, made a half-hearted apology, saying it was a practical joke. Freshman Union Committee secretary Geoffrey H. “Geoff” Ball ’55 told *The Crimson* at the time the Union would have taken action if there was “any maliciousness” uncovered. Ball did not respond to a request for comment.

“We do not feel that this demonstration can be dismissed as a prank,” Bond wrote to *The Crimson* two days after Ball’s comments. “A burning cross carries with it so many unpleasant associations that it cannot be simply laughed off.”

Despite Bond’s appeal to take this history seriously, it is unclear the extent to which the University has, or will, reckon with its troubling ties to the Ku Klux Klan throughout the 20th century, which do not begin or end with the 1952 cross burning.

Last year, University President Lawrence S. Bacow convened the Initiative on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery, a group tasked with reviewing Harvard’s history with slavery and its residues which seep into Harvard today.

With its initial report coming **this upcoming winter**, the initiative is the University’s most visible step yet in understanding its enduring connections with slavery. Although it studies the “legacy of slavery,” public statements from and about the initiative rarely mention the 20th century, let alone the KKK — among the most brazen signs of the racism that outlives the formal end of American slavery.

In his letter announcing the Legacy of Slavery initiative, Bacow invoked “the work of the distinguished historian and Harvard alumnus John Hope Franklin, who said, ‘Good history is a good foundation for a better present and future.’”

This article is my attempt to do “good history.” It represents a year’s worth of archival research, as complete a narrative of the Klan’s presence at the University as I could construct. Along the way, I’ve discovered this 20th-century

historical hole in Harvard's reconciliation attempts. Assembling these archives is an opportunity to make them known and put them in productive tension with both present-day racism and other efforts to reckon with Harvard's past.

Chester W. Hartman '57, who in 2014 investigated the cross burning, wrote in a *Crimson* op-ed he could not gather clear details from surviving alumni regarding the incident, but noted that it had gone unacknowledged by Harvard for over half a century. Bond, in his initial *Crimson* letter, even wrote it was "regrettable" no other students had come forward to write in condemning the incident except him and his classmate.

Hartman emailed then-University President Drew G. Faust, detailing to her the cross burning.

Faust wrote back that the incidents were "particularly egregious and make painful reading," but noted that "unfortunately, in a university as old as ours there will be many regrettable incidents involving administrators whose values are different from ours, and not all of them are easily verifiable after much time has passed."

## 'A Burning Cross in the Ivory Tower'

Tucked away in the Boston Public Library's digital archives are a pair of photo negatives. They depict 10 men in bright white sheets, pointy hats, and cut-out eye holes, posed around the John Harvard Statue. In one shot, a hunching Klansman, propped up in the statue's lap, turns his body to face the statue, staring down the cameraman.

There are hints of formal wear; dress shoes and slacks peek out underneath the white robes. A man on the far right holds a boater hat, historically synonymous with Harvard Class Day attire. This was Class Day 1924. At Harvard's graduation, students took a break from midday commencement exercises, donned sheets, and celebrated by playing dress-up as the Klan.

The photo description read: "Harvard Klass Kow & Klans — students having fun."

A friend had alerted me to these photos last summer — their existence, and the lack of immediately available information about the Klan at Harvard, were alarming.

I asked history lecturer Zachary B. Nowak about the KKK at Harvard in the 1920s under University President A. Lawrence Lowell, Class of 1877. Nowak teaches a popular class History 1636: “Intro to Harvard History: Beyond the Three Lies” and is writing a book on the “people’s history” of Harvard’s 385-year past.



Zachary B. Nowak, a lecturer in the Department of History, who teaches a popular class on Harvard history, was stunned when he heard of the existence of the KKK at the University. By [Courtesy of Zachary B. Nowak](#)

Nowak, alongside almost every scholar I asked, was not aware of the KKK’s presence at Harvard.

He was stunned when I showed him the photos of the Klan at Harvard, yet viewed their existence with “less surprise.”

“This is part and parcel of a long Harvard tradition of support for white supremacy,” Nowak says, calling the Lowell years some of Harvard’s most regressive.

Similarly, University of California, Berkeley sociologist Jerome B. “Jerry” Karabel ’72, who has studied Lowell’s presidency at Harvard, says Lowell was prejudiced “on each and every issue that has contemporary relevance” — an imperialist, racist, anti-Semite, sexist, and so on.

“He is one of the very few people who would check every single box,” Karabel says, bluntly. “That simply cannot be written off to be the ‘spirit of the times.’”

The first Black Harvard doctorate and famed activist W. E. B. Du Bois, Class of 1890, even publicly condemned Lowell’s attitudes on race. Amid another

scandal when Lowell attempted to **expel** Black students from Harvard dorms, Du Bois wrote in Crisis Magazine that he thought Lowell was an ally to violent Southern vigilantes. The NAACP echoed his comments, writing in an official statement at the time that Lowell was “putting into effect the program proclaimed by the infamous Ku Klux Klan.”

Werner M. Sollors, one of Harvard’s early Department of African and African American Studies faculty, says the KKK “showed up” in his research on Lowell. But Sollors did not explore it further, because he focused his research on “Black presence” at Harvard, rather than the “worst opposition of racial integration.”

Sollors co-edited “Blacks at Harvard,” likely the first major record of Black Harvard affiliates, published in the early 1990s. (At the time, Harvard University Press declined to publish his book, saying “nobody would be interested” in it and that they do not publish books “only of Harvard interests,” Sollors says. HUP wrote in a statement it could not account this response years later but that this does not reflect its editorial policy.)

Sollors says that confronting obstacles to openness and equity in Harvard’s past is vital, and that “the Klan certainly was a very big obstacle.”

“It’s a burning cross in the ivory tower,” he says.

Sollors adds, “You will find out things that are before your time at an institution, and you are a little bit aghast at what you find.”

One of the earliest attempts to reconcile with the University’s past in connection to slavery came in 2007, when history professor Sven Beckert embarked on a research project, “Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History.”

Katherine M. Stevens, then a graduate student who collaborated with Beckert on the project, writes in a statement that the initiative was inspired by Brown University’s early attempts to reckon with its historical connections to slavery. The group touched on a legacy of scientific racism which “extended well into the 20th century,” but deeper explorations of the continuing legacy of slavery in the 20th century were only “suggested” at the time.

In November 2019, Bacow announced Harvard’s Legacy of Slavery initiative, as a University-sanctioned successor building off of Beckert’s research project. And like its predecessor, the current initiative has yet to pay much attention to the 20th century.

The Legacy of Slavery initiative is divided into subcommittees that study specific aspects of slavery's continued footprint at the University. In her subcommittee within the project, Professor Evelyn M. Hammonds — former Dean of Harvard College — says she has focused more so on the 19th-century history than the 20th-century racism that slavery laid the foundations of.

Radcliffe Institute Dean Tomiko Brown-Nagin, who directs the initiative, said in an interview that the real focus of the project is Harvard's earlier history because there is a "greater need" for understanding Harvard's "direct ties" to slavery.

Brown-Nagin says that beyond individual scholars, she is unaware of any other program to study Harvard's 20th-century racial history.



Tomiko Brown-Nagin is the Dean of Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. By [Courtesy of Harvard Public Affairs and Communications](#)

"It can't be a committee about the entirety of the history of race, racism, and racial injustice at and through Harvard, because that would be a neverending committee," adds Meira Levinson, a School of Education professor who is part of the initiative.

"There will be allusions to the 20th-century history" in the group's forthcoming report, Brown-Nagin says. "However, the 20th-century history is fairly well-known."

Yet it is not clear that Harvard's ties to the Klan are well-known to all.

Hammonds says she was "shocked" when she saw the photos. Having grown up in Atlanta, Ga., she says the stories she knew about the KKK were those of "terror."

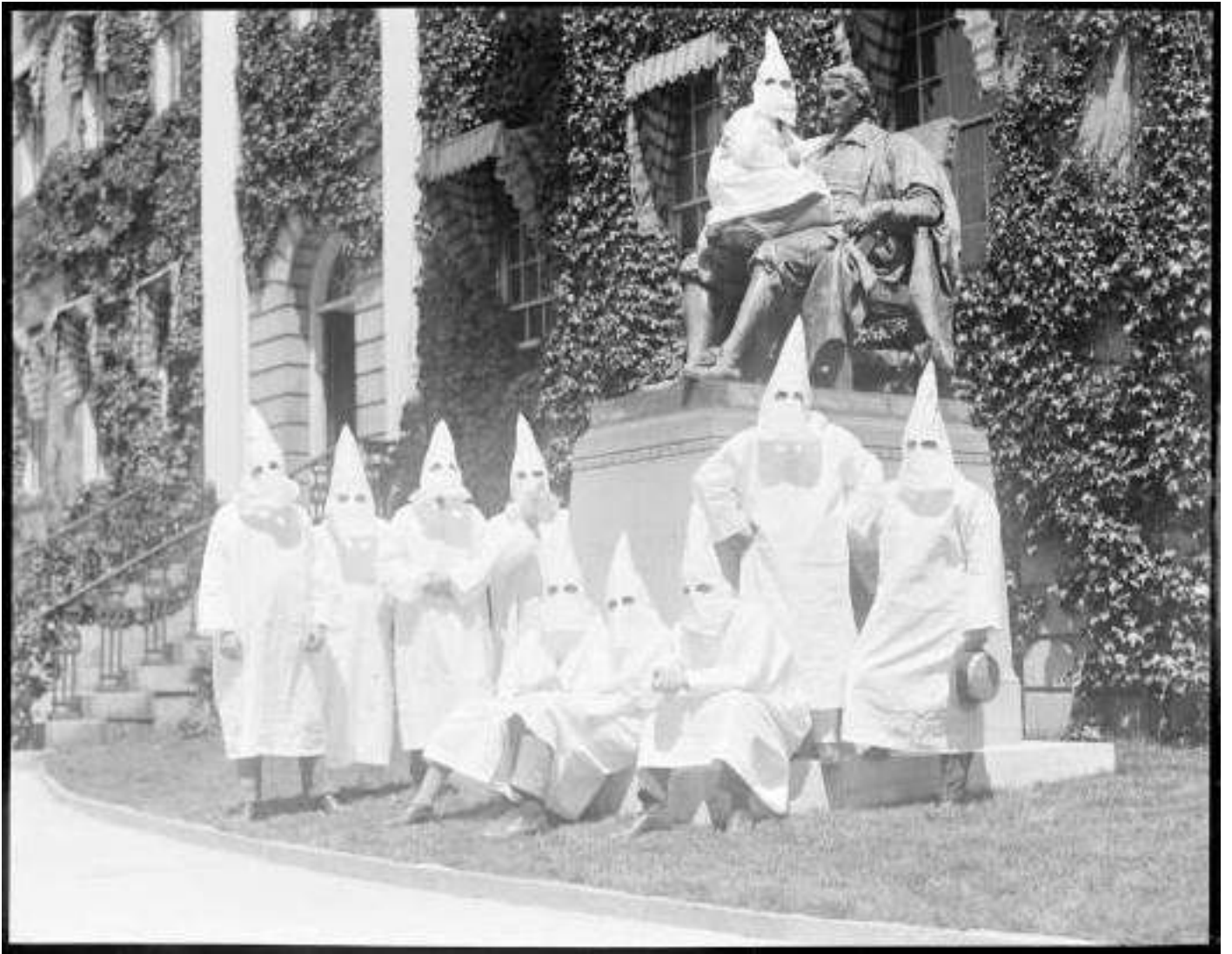
"I certainly wouldn't have thought it would find fertile ground at Harvard," Hammonds says. "I was truly shocked to see them standing around John Harvard's statue."

## 'Considerable Secrecy'

At the turn of the millennium, a Crimson magazine [article](#) written by Lauren E. Baer '02 was among the earliest contemporary acknowledgments of the Klan at Harvard.

Baer tells me she heard rumors that there had been a branch of the KKK at Harvard and began her search in the Harvard Libraries.

"Finding evidence of it in the University archives was a surreal and unsettling experience, and pointed to a history of racism and anti-Semitism at Harvard that had gone unexamined," Baer wrote to me in an email.



Harvard Klansmen pose for a second shot at commencement in 1924. One Klan member, sitting in the lap of the John Harvard Statue, with his body facing the statue turns his head towards the camera. By [Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection](#)

After her article's publication, however, she wrote that it went largely unnoticed by students and administrators.

The library docket of evidence she refers to, HUD 3502, contains a *Crimson* article on the Harvard Klan which lay it bare in portentous detail.

HUD 3502, dated in the fall semester of 1923, sets the stage for the aforementioned Klan commencement photos in 1924.

Purportedly founded on campus in 1921, Harvard's KKK chapter arose at the same time as the reviled, second iteration of the nationwide Ku Klux Klan took prominence during and after World War I.

According to the docket from 1923, the Harvard KKK, while not on the fringes of University life, was leading a half-existence with its "shadow" hanging over



campus.

“The Harvard Klan is inactive. But it is very far from being disorganized, nor can I say that even now its influence is unfelt,” an unnamed Harvard Klan member said of his organization. The Crimson’s “traditional policy” at the time awarded all of the Klan members anonymity.

The latter half of 1923 proved to be a crescendo of activity for the Harvard Klan. There was a membership drive with hopes for a public announcement and platform despite the group’s “considerable secrecy.” There was even talk of a Radcliffe College chapter for Klanswomen.

“Harvard, considered the stronghold of culture and conservatism, is about to try its strength with the boasted omnipotence of the Invisible Empire,” the article stated.

The article continued, “The Harvard Ku Klux Klan has only been waiting for the favorable moment to show its strength.”

The author of the 1923 Crimson article also speculated on internal divides within the Harvard Klan.

Some Harvard Klan members believed their presence was redundant because the University was already “100 percent American,” in the exclusionary, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant sense. Yet others saw Harvard as the opposite, a stronghold of racial, religious, and political “filth” that the Klan would not be able to break into.

A day after the article’s publication, NAACP secretary James Weldon Johnson sent a telegram to Lowell and the Harvard Board of Overseers condemning their college’s outgrowth of the KKK.

“The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People wishes to go on record as believing that it would be better to close the University than to permit it to become a vehicle for disseminating the poison of race and religious hatred,” Johnson wrote. “We trust that every effort will be made to discover those responsible for bringing this organization into Harvard and that they will be expelled.”

Neither Baer nor I could find any record of Lowell responding to the telegram or otherwise acknowledging the Klan’s presence on campus. According to SUNY Plattsburgh historian Mark P. Richard, many Massachusetts college presidents

joined together in an anti-Klan effort to identify and prosecute found-out Klansmen in November 1923. I could not find any record of Lowell joining such a cause.

One month earlier, October 1923, the Cambridge Chronicle reported on two KKK meetings in North Cambridge, Mass.

Many Harvard students attended these biweekly meetings of the Cambridge chapter of the KKK, according to The Crimson, revealing the existence of pro-Klan sentiment despite the lack of a formally-recognized branch at the College.

Students switched to the “intellectual” Brookline, Mass. Klan chapter after becoming disillusioned with Cambridge. Harvard Klansmen thought the Cambridge chapter was controlled by “low-brows.”

An unnamed Harvard alumnus said to The Crimson in 1923 that 300 “Harvard men” attended a Boston KKK rally mid-October that no media outlets reported on. Harvard Klansmen, reluctant to be recognized as an official student organization because University policies would imperil their secrecy, continued to meet unofficially or at local metropolitan chapters.

In November 1923, the Klan draped a “flaring banner” on Massachusetts Avenue in opposition to Cambridge Mayor Edward W. Quinn. Amid mayoral elections, Quinn had stated the previous day, “If I knew there was a chapter of the Klan at Harvard, I’d come down and break it up!”

In the early 1920s, a former Harvard Klansman said he had been threatened by the Klan for being “indiscreet” with their clandestine activities, the New York Times reported at the time. He reported the threat on his life to a “Harvard College office,” which in turn called it “undoubtedly” a joke. The student eventually left Harvard for fear of what the Klan might do.

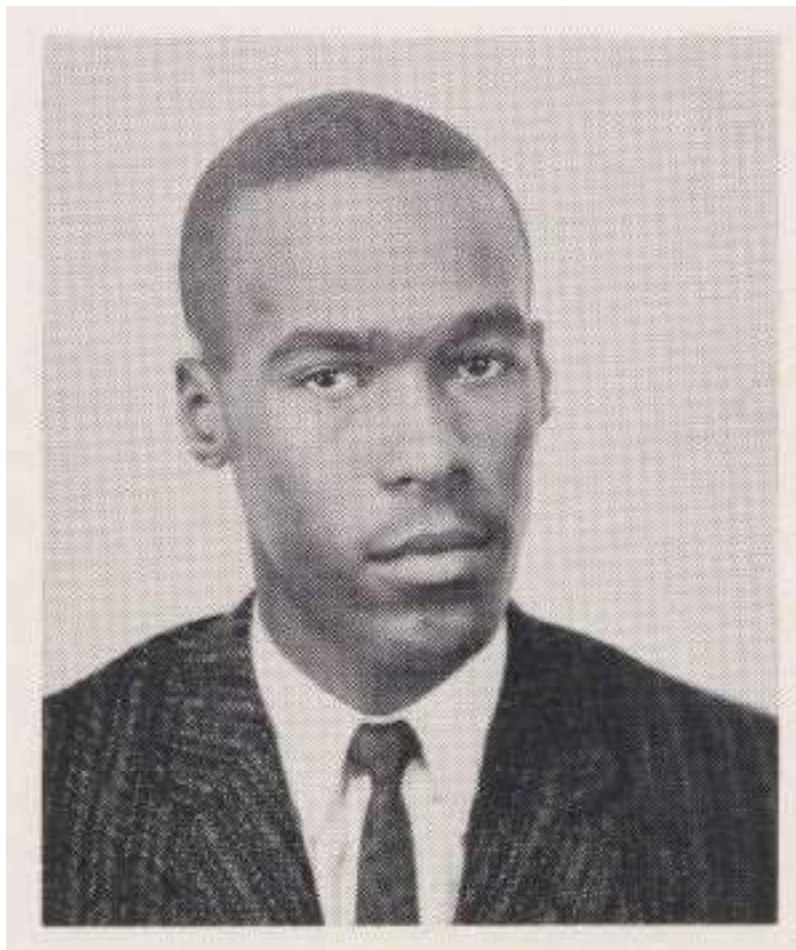
At the same time that the Klan’s presence was growing, another organization, the Blue Shirts Club, had formed to combat social issues plaguing campus. But while its platform included strong condemnations of the KKK at Harvard, it does not appear to have mounted any successful opposition. And the club’s priorities wavered, with its stance against cars on campus “taking precedence even over its condemnation of the Ku-Klux Klan,” the New York Herald Tribune reported in 1923.

Mostly unchecked and unashamed by the academic year's end, Harvard Klansmen posed for that photo-op in front of the John Harvard Statue. The Blue Shirt Club, meanwhile, apparently sloughed off into inactivity. And there, public records of the Klan at Harvard in the 1920s seem to stop.

## 'White Shadows in the Yard'

In his family, Kent A. Garrett Jr. '63 is one generation removed from sharecroppers. Having grown up in Brooklyn, N.Y., he says going to Harvard was so foreign, it was "kind of like landing on the moon."

Garrett was one of 18 Black members of Harvard's class of 1963. After racing across the country to interview his former classmates, he anthologized their experiences in his book "The Last Negroes at Harvard," published last year.



Kent A. Garrett Jr.'s '63 headshot in the Harvard Yearbook. Garrett was one of a handful of Black students that attended Harvard at the time. By [Courtesy of Kent A. Garrett Jr. and Jeanne Ellsworth](#)

He tells me that Fred Lee Glimp Jr. '50, then Dean of Admissions who later became the Dean of the College, called him and other Black students at Harvard “an experiment.” Garrett remembers a white classmate even “studied” him and the other Black students, dubbing them the “White Shadows in the Yard,” in a class paper that received an A. Racial hatred as glaring as cross burning, Garrett says, was rare — but constant indignities and less aggressive forms of racism were regular.

Garrett joined Harvard just seven years after the cross burning and says that no students had “passed down” the history of the incident to him. He never learned about it until he began work on his book. But the cross burning’s legacy, in the form of institutional and interpersonal racism, blazed bright.

While he was at Harvard, Garrett said, students had a willingness to associate with the Klan as a “joke.”

“It was the thing to do — to be in the KKK,” Garrett recalls.

By mid-century, an organized Klan at Harvard had all but vanished. Instead “KKK” transformed into a frequent racist invocation, a conjuring jeered at Black and Jewish students.

The “KKK brothers,” in a 1937 demonstration reported on by *The Crimson*, released “flory crosses, crudely constructed from paper but none-the-less grimly reminiscent of [the] real thing” to float down and around the Dunster House courtyard.

“Perhaps KKK terrorism is not confined to the deep South,” a Dunster resident remarked at the time.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Harvard students would sign up for or propose at least four separate screenings of “*The Birth of a Nation*,” a historic 1915 Klan manifesto turned three-hour film. All were criticized as being shown without historical context.

One screening, planned in the same year as the cross burning, was canceled after the NAACP put the pressure on, which “disappointed” the more than 250 students signed up, according to a *Crimson* article at the time.

Howard J. Phillips '62, elected as Harvard’s student body president in 1962, was lauded by “*The Cross and the Flag*,” a Klan magazine, for his “patriotic” ideological bent. Phillips publicly and immediately disavowed the Klan. But

later in life, Phillips invited Richard Shoff, the former Grand Kilgrapp (state secretary) of the Indiana Klan, to serve on a lobbying group governing board with him.

In several incidents across the 20th century, including one as late as 1996, students saw KKK leaflets, threatening letters, and KKK graffiti on campus.

Garrett never mentioned any acknowledgement from the University of the challenges he and other Black students at the time faced.

“Yale and Harvard were intent on keeping their Southern alumni happy,” he surmised.

## ‘Good History’

Now 90 years old, Charles L. “Chuck” Greenblatt ’52, a member of the Society for Minority Rights, a student club that condemned the 1952 cross burning at the time, says his memory of the incident is fuzzy.

“I probably...accepted the story of the administration that it was sort of a prank,” Greenblatt admits in an interview.

Greenblatt, who hailed from a diverse small city in Ohio, was one of several students who worked with the NAACP to recruit more Black Harvard applicants. In describing Harvard’s attitude towards his recruitment efforts and the cross burning, he says its deans had an air of nonchalance.



Charles L. Greenblatt '52 pictured during his Harvard undergraduate years. Greenblatt was then a spokesperson for the Society of Minority Rights, a student club that condemned the 1952 cross burning in Harvard Yard. By [Courtesy of Charles L. Greenblatt](#)

Long after the incident, he says, no other Harvard administration has publicly acknowledged the cross burning.

The Class of 1955 alumni secretary Warren M. “Renny” Little ’55, however, is “quite aware” of the cross burning, but did not elaborate much further in a statement to me.

He adds, “It was an embarrassment to all concerned and best buried.”

To continue to bury this event, along with the larger history of the KKK at Harvard, would further the common narrative of Harvard as a “bastion of liberalism,” as Nowak puts it.

Yet Harvard's institutional and social values have, at points throughout the 20th century, often seemed to be more representative of the American racial climate than ahead of it.

Karabel, the sociologist who studied elitism and admissions at Harvard in the 20th century, said Harvard then was still a mouthpiece of "the Protestant upper class" despite a number of Jewish and nonwhite students trickling in.

In contrast to the explicit racial violence associated with the South, Nowak says Harvard's Boston Brahmin contributed to an "equally toxic" and "subtle" intellectual undergrowth of white supremacy.

Yet from the 1920s Klan chapter to the 1952 cross burning, some members of the Harvard gentry nevertheless flirted with a less "subtle," more violent tendency.

So what does the University do with this history?

Harvard leadership has approached historical reconciliation through thorough scholarship and examination, which can sometimes make such efforts feel sluggish — a "psychological effect," of Harvard's prominence and "symbolism," Sollors says.

"[Change] becomes a lot of hand-wringing," he adds.

Karabel says that adjacent to the Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery initiative, a "parallel inquiry" into the 20th century racial history of the University is "warranted."

"No reason to limit it to slavery and the 19th century," he adds.

Such inquiries are not easy. "Going to the history of the 20th century is harder because it is more recent," Sollors remarked, "and so the implications are actually much stronger."

Harvard junior Samantha C. W. "Sam" O'Sullivan '22 co-founded the Generational African American Students Association in 2019 and has since focused her efforts on educating others about the legacy of slavery in a Harvard context. She says she was unaware of the long history of the KKK at Harvard.

O'Sullivan says the Legacy of Slavery Initiative is "long overdue," but that she wants to push for more "actual action" beyond research efforts buried in

bureaucracy.

“The whole committee is treating the issue as if it’s in retrospect, how has Harvard done these things in the past, and not so much on what they are continuing to do,” she says. “It feels like the University does not care about these issues, or is more interested in forming committees and talking about these things very intellectually, but not in a very concrete sense.”

If she were to lead the initiative, O’Sullivan says she would start at the present and work her way back, in place of the old-to-new approach of the current initiative.

Garrett says he finds the initiative promising, but was curious as to why they seem to stop at 1865. He says he hopes the racism he and other students endured throughout the 20th century can be taught about through courses and other academic offerings at the College.

---





Kent A. Garrett Jr. '63, one of the few Black students at Harvard in the early 1960s, published a book last year anthologizing the experiences of him and his former Black classmates. By [Courtesy of Kent A. Garrett Jr. and Jeanne Ellsworth](#)

Professor Meira Levinson, who co-leads the curriculum subcommittee for the Legacy of Slavery initiative, says she is not sure what place the 20th-century history will play in their efforts, and that it was “too early” to share specifics on the “entry points” for students’ learning about slavery.

Hammonds echoes these comments, saying they are still in the “exploration phase” of research for the report.

In an emailed statement, Brown-Nagin wrote “the Committee is very much engaged in work with bearing on the present,” including an initiative by several professors to document the experiences of Black students descendent from enslaved people. She added that the Radcliffe Institute, which oversees the

Legacy of Slavery initiative, has funded several student projects, some of which grapple with “contemporary legacies” of slavery.

Nowak also says the University is taking steps adjacent to the initiative — such as a **committee** on reforming signage and a mapping effort of “inclusive symbols” around campus — that deal with racism at Harvard in the 20th century.

Both he and Karabel concluded that a significant first step to reconciling with the history and perpetuation of racism at Harvard in the 20th century would be the removal of Lowell’s name from Lowell House dormitory, as **students pushed** for last summer. Harvard has convened two committees to review name changes, but they are still in the research and discussion stages of their work.

Karabell says Harvard is “behind the times” for not already striking Lowell’s name down after Yale and Princeton removed the names of Calhoun College and Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy, respectively.

University spokesperson Jason A. Newton declined to comment for this article.

While several scholars I talked to wished the Legacy of Slavery initiative would broaden its scope, all recognized it as an important first step in a long line of much-needed steps from students, faculty, and administrators to address the past.

“Telling the history of this very complex institution is going to take a while, but the most important thing is the willingness to engage with the history as we uncover it,” Hammonds says.

“These dynamics did not emerge overnight, nor will they be quickly disentangled,” Brown-Nagin wrote in a statement to me about the Legacy of Slavery initiative. “I ask members of our community to give us time equal to the magnitude and complexity of our task.”

But O’Sullivan finds the University’s attempts to claw closer to historical understanding still nebulous and ultimately painful to some students.

“There’s so much that we as students don’t know,” she says. “Harvard’s lack of transparency is almost speaking more volumes than the things they are doing.”

“Especially to Black students, that’s one of the largest forms of violence.”

There are many stones unturned in my own research: surviving alumni of the cross burning I didn't talk to, parts of Lowell's personal archive marked as classified, documents inaccessible due to the pandemic. The 20th-century story of racial injustice in Harvard's most accessible historical period retreats every day — with the fading of memory and death of alumni — without a thorough cataloguing. Just like the rest of Harvard's past, the last 100 years need their own reckoning, their own moment to be added to a broader band of Harvard and American history.

“It is my hope that the work of this new initiative will help the university gain important insights about our past and the enduring legacy of slavery,” Bacow wrote in his 2019 announcement of the Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery Initiative, “while also providing an ongoing platform for our conversations about our present and our future as a university community committed to having our minds opened and improved by learning.” That is my hope, as well.

—Staff writer *Simon J. Levien* can be reached at [simon.levien@thecrimson.com](mailto:simon.levien@thecrimson.com). Follow him on Twitter [@simonjlevien](https://twitter.com/simonjlevien).

---

TAGS   SCRUTINY   EDITORS' CHOICE

---

#### ALSO ON THE HARVARD CRIMSON

6 days ago • 4 comments

**On the  
Jackson, Miss.,  
Water Crisis**

5 days ago

**As An  
Colle  
Strug**

32 Comments

 Login ▾



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

---