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PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin



Memo from Harvard Admissions

WHAT A PERILOUS YEAR WE'VE HAD, WITH THOSE PUSHY, inscrutable pressure groups trying to dictate to us their slanted conceptions of equity and diversity. Their campaign for race-blind admissions is a patently obvious racist tactic. More than anything else, eliminating racial criteria in selection would return us to an era of pernicious institutional racism.

Despite such reactionary assaults, we have met our equity and diversity targets for next year's entering class. Afro, ∞gender, Latinx, donor, LGBTQWXYZ, athletes, legacy, etc., are all in the bag. To achieve felicitous balance, we've once again managed to avoid certain overrepresentations. Even in the symbolic merit-alone tranche, we've filled the 20-odd slots, though thereby hangs a tale.

When the bus crashed into Wigglesworth last year, it subtracted four beds. But in the elimination of that entry's obsolete sex-restricted bathrooms, another bed was added. Because the equity and diversity targets are finely balanced to a tenth of a percentage point, we had to choose one candidate from the eight on the merit-alone waiting list, with, of course, an eye to equity and diversity.

At first we thought the Newton kid was going to be another you-know-who from Newton, Massachusetts, but it turns out he's English, white, male, and—oh God—religious. He was also disqualified not only because he lacked gravity, but because the committee discovered that he and yet another white male on the list, the Leibniz kid, have apparently used an online source to come up with almost exactly the same crackpot mathematical proposition. Too calculating, too many negatives, and he hasn't built a library in Guatemala.

The Melville kid was initially promising for his gap years living with Pacific Islanders, and his environmentalism (whales). I can't describe our shock in discovering that he wants to *kill* whales. For profit! Confronted, he said, inexplicably, and I quote, "Well, it's either them or you." Outrageous. To boot, he said he wanted to write "the great American novel." Uh-huh.

The Mozart kid: white, male, and German. Okay, not Jewish, and although he wants to concentrate in music (note to any legal scum who may subpoena this, we say *concentrate* instead of *major*), at least he doesn't play the cello like every inscrutable and unlikeable you-know-who who's also good at math. But he writes church music. Can you imagine, Christian rock?

Boy, were we pumped when we opened the folder of the Washington kid. Obviously African-American, from the South, extremely tall, legendary athlete (some sort of toss), great recommendations, not a mark on his record, and such beautiful handwriting! We were practically delirious. Edna Moisture of Womyn's Studies actually brought Champagne. It was as if the election of 2016 hadn't been stolen by the Russians. That is, until he showed up for the interview and we had to

pass around the Xanax bowl: he's *white*. Not only that, he's a veteran, with a history of oppressing Native Americans. He dresses like a fop, carries a weapon, and is the epitome of white privilege, living on a huge estate near the District of Columbia. Although in a bald-faced lie he stated that he was a "revolutionary," we were speechless upon learning that he had scores of African-American servants, to whom he referred as—I kid you not—"my slaves." Only in Trump's America.

WE HAD TO ADJOURN AFTER THAT, BUT THE NEXT DAY seemed to bring hope, when Evelyn Torquemada of Latinx Studies brought up the Jesus candidate. Moving in the right direction! "I saw him," she said. "He's a hippy—long hair, beard. He dresses in natural fibers, does woodworking, he can bake like a beaver, *perfect* SATs, wants to help the poor, and, according to his recommendations, the kid can walk on water." Well, it turns out that he's not Hispanic, but Jewish. And then we discovered, in the strangest interview ever, that, God help us, he's some sort of religious fanatic. Christ! We've informed the university police that we don't feel safe, because, as he left, he turned to us and declared that he was coming back.

One more false start: the Einstein kid. More white privilege, though at least not a you-know-who even if he does play the violin and is good at math. We gave him the benefit of the doubt, in that from what we can discern he believes that truth is relative and claims to have a theory about that. He may be a Zionist, but at least he wasn't uptight. What a meshugana! You should see his hair, and he came to the interview in bedroom slippers. But not only would he add to the overbalance of Jews and white males, he's dangerously reactionary in regard to the nuclear problem.

Almost in despair, we finally got our person: the Mussolini kid. White, yes, but possibly LGBTQWXYZ (hard to tell, but possibly Z). He's a declared socialist and the editor of his school's socialist newspaper. He's 100% in favor of managed industrial policy and identity politics. A committed environmentalist, he has an ambitious proposal concerning wetlands, and is a huge booster of public transportation. If the trains run on time, he said, people will take them. He has no fear whatsoever of big government, and confided in us that, among other things, he thinks the Green New Deal is not far-reaching enough, and he wants to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church.

Okay, he never built a library in Guatemala or invented an app to send transsexual puppets to Nigeria, and we were somewhat hesitant when he said he wants to "make Italy great again," or "MIGA," but, let me tell you, he's got an Obama-esque charisma. Our class is now complete, with a kid after our own heart, and next year, at least, we won't be overrun by hordes of you-know-whos.

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