

Inbox



COMPELLING PORTRAIT

Elyse Graham '07's eloquent Princeton Portrait of George "Horse" Kerr Edwards 1889 in your July/August edition merits further promotion in your pages.

Graham brings back to life an ultimate, bittersweet moment in a young alumnus' short time on Earth with grace and compelling storytelling. The reader feels fondness for Horse, despite the 125 years that separate his passing from our learning of his unique "species of humor," beloved by his peers.

Were it not for this portrait, we'd also not see so piercingly how infectious diseases we don't think much about today, like tuberculosis, used to cut short the lives of men and women who would have doubtless made great marks on history, had they been allowed more time. In that context, it lets us marvel at the many lives saved from the current pandemic, thanks to fast vaccines, antivirals, and modern health care.

But most importantly, I appreciated Graham's touching description of Princeton during that Reunions weekend of 1897, as it would have appeared through Horse's eyes, a vision that could hold true today. We see "faces that glowed with expressions decades

younger than their wearers ... [watch] daylight sink over Nassau Hall ... [look] at the night sky through treetops heavy with the song of summer insects ..."

Thank you for this moment of pure Princeton poetry, and I hope to see more portraits by Graham in the future.

Zeyna Ballée '01
Aix-en-Provence, France

Editor's note: Elyse Graham '07's latest Princeton Portrait appears on page 64.

ALUMNI VOLUNTEERS

I write in reference to the article on "Princeton's Special Sauce" (July/August issue). As chair of the National Schools Committee (and an Alumni Council member) in the 1980s, I observed a break point in alumni-University relations for many alumni who volunteered to interview applicants. A major change in the admissions office led to an instruction that alumni were no longer to provide evaluative comments regarding applicants. Rather, interviewers were to act as ambassadors from Princeton whose role was to present the University in the best light to applicants. This sea change resulted in a considerable number of resignations from alumni who, for many years, had seen themselves as providing helpful input to the admissions office in its difficult decision-making process. Now, they saw their views as unwelcome.

Of course, alumni were not trained as interviewers nor were they, in any real sense, vetted for the role. This change was likely inevitable even though it caused serious angst among some of Princeton's

longest-serving volunteers. During the remainder of my term as chair, I spent a lot of time defending the University's new policy. It was important for alumni to educate applicants about Princeton, and it was important to defer to the admissions office as it used its special expertise in its challenging task of evaluating applicants. My success rate with this argument was not as high as I had hoped.

Stephen Olson '70
Santa Rosa, Calif.

FOSSIL-FUEL DIVESTMENT

I was dismayed and distressed to read President Eisgruber '83's assertion that Princeton will not divest from fossil fuels because "it's not our job to make political statements with our endowment" (Reunions coverage, July/August issue). His statement perpetuates the dangerous notion that protecting our planet is and should be a political issue. And yet, the forces of global climate change march on, unperturbed by our political divisions. This is a matter of ethics and values, not politics. If we are to make a dent in global warming, every ethical person and entity must do all they can to protect the planet. While an individual can reduce, reuse, and recycle, Princeton can divest of fossil fuels and invest in renewable technologies.

By saying "not our job," the Princeton trustees are either denying that climate change is an issue, denying that they have an obligation to invest ethically, and/or denying that Princeton has a role to play in shaping our world. No matter their rationale, our trustees are effectively covering their eyes and ears and abdicating responsibility. Princeton can make a difference. Our trustees can demonstrate leadership. They can do the ethical thing and divest of fossil fuels. If it's not their responsibility, whose responsibility is it? What happened to "Princeton in the nation's service and the service of humanity"? This motto was quoted by President Eisgruber himself on Princeton's website in July. Perhaps he should add the

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Daniel Hertzberg

caveat: “unless we can make more money by tossing our values to the wind.”

Linda Bonder '85

Portland, Ore.

At President Eisgruber '83's annual address to alumni in Alexander Hall during Reunions, I asked if I might “have hope that the administration and trustees will begin to exhibit a greater sense of urgency” in addressing climate change. Over the summer as temperatures have risen, wildfires raged, water supplies dried up, and glaciers melted, I wondered repeatedly why my direct question did not elicit a direct answer, reflective of the catastrophe building around us. President Eisgruber pivoted to rehearsed talking points in the manner so common with politicians and corporate leaders today.

What I realized three months later is that when the president lauded Princeton's unnecessarily time-consuming process he had addressed my question tangentially: Urgency? Forget

it. The urgency remains even if he and Princeton refuse to act decisively.

John Huyler '67

Boulder, Colo.

I urge all alumni who are concerned about the climate crisis to read Divest Princeton's full response and analysis of the faculty report on fossil-fuel dissociation (On the Campus, July/August issue) on the website divestprinceton.com.

Over two years ago, Divest Princeton began urging the University to divest its \$1.7 billion holdings in fossil fuels. We know that when Princeton wants to, it can act quickly and decisively. In 2017, when President Donald Trump rescinded DACA, Princeton filed a federal lawsuit only 58 days later. However, when it comes to combatting the climate crisis, Princeton is perfecting the art of delay and disinformation.

In May of 2021, with much self-congratulation, Princeton's trustees announced that Princeton would consider dissociating from coal and

tar sands. But this past year, as part of the faculty panel's proceedings, it was quietly made public that the endowment has no exposure to companies that derive more than 15 percent of revenues from tar sands and only \$19 million in run-off mode in thermal coal. When the dissociation statement was made in 2021, did the trustees, several of whom are also PRINCO directors, know that 98.9 percent of the \$1.7 billion they had in oil and gas would go untouched? Did Princeton intentionally greenwash its own divestment announcement?

Alumni of this university must stop being enablers of the Board of Trustees' complicity and lift their voices as this existential crisis unfolds in front of our eyes.

Cory Alperstein '78

Newton, Mass.

MINIMUM-WAGE STUDY

Thanks to PAW for providing easy access to a piece of economic research that I have been doing my best as a historian to document ever since the news first

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