



The Lost Generation

Citation

Greenhouse, Linda. The lost generation. In *Yards and gates: gender in Harvard and Radcliffe history*, edited by Laurel Ulrich, 289-292. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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The Lost Generation

Linda Greenhouse

Although I graduated in 1968, my undergraduate experience was not really all that different from Ann Karnovsky's, who was the class of 1952, 16 years earlier. So not a whole lot had changed. Recently I got in the mail from Harvard a very glossy--I'm sure very expensive--little booklet celebrating the integration of Lamont Library, which happened at the beginning of my junior year. I read this, needless to say, with some interest. It gives the various reasons why women had not been allowed in Lamont--admitting women would have made it too crowded, or women might have been a distraction to the young men. But this booklet doesn't really convey the reason given at the time, which was--smelly socks! What they said at the time was that Harvard men liked to study with their shoes off and that the smelly socks would create an atmosphere in which the young women of Radcliffe would certainly not be happy studying. We were kept out Lamont for our own good!

The 1960s was the decade of the mixed message, the really mixed message: on the one hand, the dominating fact about undergraduate life for Radcliffe students was numbers--there were four Harvard men to every one of us. So we were told that we really were quite special, that it was much harder to get into Radcliffe than into Harvard, and that consequently we were smarter and better prepared and so on. Yet, on the other hand, not

one of the postgraduate fellowships was open to us: the Rhodes, the Marshall, the Sheldon. It wasn't even a question of competing; they just simply would not have accepted an application from a woman. On the *Harvard Crimson*, I was essentially fungible with all of the guys that I worked with, yet after graduation they had these fellowships and marched off to various interesting destinations.

I didn't expect a Rhodes scholarship, but I would have been very happy to accept membership into the Signet, a literary society that all the guys belonged to. Once in a while the *Crimson* would have functions there, and I thought this was really cool because in those days I had literary pretensions beyond mere journalism. Every time they had a Signet election I would ask male friends at the *Crimson* to put me up for election--just to do it kind of symbolically. And they always promised that they would and they never did. When I was back here for my twentieth reunion, almost 15 years ago, one of those guys--whom I hadn't seen for a couple of decades--showed up to participate and essentially took one look at me and said, "Linda, I apologize. I'm sorry I never put you up for the Signet Society."

I concentrated in government, which was a heavily male concentration. I will never forget the first class day of my freshman year, section meeting in Gov. 1A. I got there early (Radcliffe women were always on time), took my seat, and watched as the room filled up with 25 or 30 of the other members of the section, and it dawned on me that I was the only female in the room. It also dawned on me that this should be a thrilling experience. This was wonderful, me surrounded by 29 Harvard guys! But it didn't feel so good; it just felt strange. I had only one female professor during my entire

undergraduate tenure at Harvard. She was a junior faculty member in the Government Department who did not get tenure here, but went on to have an extremely distinguished career at the University of Virginia.

The Radcliffe students had work assignments in the dorms--waiting on tables and so on--that Harvard students didn't have. This was all under the rubric of "gracious living." Gracious living in the late 1960s was becoming darned inconvenient, because in order to have dinner you had to dress, you had to wear a skirt, you had to come back from whatever your activity was in the Square and get dressed and take your seat. To be on the first floor of a dorm on a Sunday to read the paper or just hang out you had to wear a skirt. It came to mean that I was almost never able to *have* dinner back at the dorm because of my work on the *Crimson*. The *Crimson* had an arrangement with Adams House, which is right next door to the *Crimson* offices, so that the guys could eat in Adams House every night, but of course women could not eat in Adams House. So all the Harvard students would go off to Adams House, leaving me alone in the newsroom without so much as a goodbye, and I would go get a 50-cent hamburger at Tommy's Lunch. That was my dinner night after night after night.

I think the basic fact of our existence was that Radcliffe students were not the norm. We were the deviation from the norm. Yet we didn't have the language, we didn't have the concept to formulate our situation in political or systemic terms. We thought it was a problem with us. I thought, "I'm a *Crimson* editor. They are *Crimson* editors. They're eating at Adams House. Why can't I eat at Adams House?" I didn't have the

conceptual framework to think, “I’m a woman, I’m paying the same tuition, I’m paying the same room and board, what gives here?”

There’s only one respect in which we had the last laugh: we did have separate commencement ceremonies, and on my commencement day, which was a rainy Thursday in Radcliffe Yard, as I recall, the commencement speaker, the father of a classmate, was the mayor of Washington, DC. Perhaps no big deal, but the Harvard men had as their commencement speaker the Shah of Iran. Need I say more?