



HARVARD-RADCLIFFE CLASS OF 1966

Dear Classmates,

March 2026

Here we are with the March, '26 newsletter:

60th Reunion Information:

Our 60th Class Reunion will take place on campus Wednesday, June **3rd through Friday, June 5th**. Registration will open the first week of April via a whole class email and postal mail. Early Bird registration (best price) will be available through Monday, April 23rd –don't wait until the last minute.

The reunion will start with a Reception on Wednesday, our Memorial Service, classmate panels, presentations and discussion and a great clambake dinner on Thursday, and a presentation, Harvard Alumni Day festivities and lunch on Friday. Latest schedule and other information is posted at <https://alumni.harvard.edu/reunions/class-rogramming/60th-reunion>

After Friday's lunch, **Paul Dry** will once again host a small group literary discussion: In Robert Frost's poem "West-Running Brook" a young married couple (overheard by an unidentified observer) converse – about nature, about their sense of things as they watch the flow of the brook, and about themselves. While the husband does a lot of talking and the wife does much less, both hint at more than what they put into words. Join us in a conversation about their conversation. This session is limited to 20 attendees, so **please reserve your spot by emailing Paul at pdry@PaulDryBooks.com**

Class Store Open

Your Reunion Committee, working with Harvard Student Agencies, has again put together a selection of class-logo merchandise which you'll hear about in early April. The store will be open only a limited time in order to ship merchandise to arrive before the reunion. Lots of good stuff. Get yours!

60th Reunion Class Fund

For more than 60 years, our great class has been showing up for each other and for Harvard and Radcliffe. Our Class Fund leaders, including **Mike Holland, John French, Jeff Tarr** and others hope you will help continue our tradition of support by making a gift to the Harvard College Fund in honor of our 60th Reunion. All gifts, of every size, matter. Whether you care about financial aid, groundbreaking research, the student experience, or something else, your gift helps enable so much for today's students and faculty—especially during these challenging times for the College. If you would like to make a gift online, you can do so at alumni.harvard.edu. If you have any questions about giving to Harvard or would like to learn more about our 60th Reunion Campaign, feel free to contact our class officer Erin Hobin-Audet at erin_hobin-audet@harvard.edu

Are you a published author?

If you would like your recent publication added to our authors list and potentially featured in the COOP during Reunions, please [complete this brief online form](#) by **April 17**.

We cannot guarantee that all submissions will be featured in the shop at 1400 Massachusetts Avenue, but many will. Even if you are not an author, you can support your classmates who are—COOP members get a 10 percent discount on their purchase. (continued net page)

A few important notes:

- Titles that are chosen for stocking and/or the digital curated lists by the COOP during Reunion Week and for the alumni author displays at the Harvard COOP are independently chosen by the COOP team, based on store capacity and distributor availability. There is no submission process beyond the completion of the online form, so please do so by April 17. The selections are in line with industry availability, format, list pricing, publication dates, and book industry and consumer book reviews, and are also supplemented by the staff based on consumer interest and sales trends for the genre.
- Please don't send physical copies to the COOP—they are unable to send copies back and will not sell copies received directly. The COOP does not accept books on consignment. If you do have questions, you may contact Beth Savage (bsavage@bncollege.com) at the COOP, though she will not be able to accept book submissions over email.

Sarah Karmon (Exec. Dir. HAA):

An annual ritual of spring is elections for the Harvard Board of Overseers and HAA Elected Directors, which will open on April 1. This is an important way for alumni to participate in the governance of the University. I hope you will participate personally by casting your ballot.

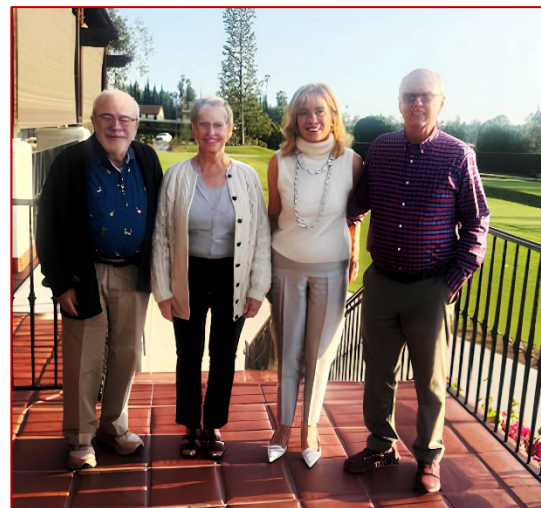
Comedian, writer, and television host [Conan O'Brien AB '85 will be the principal speaker at Harvard's 375th Commencement](#).

Daniel (Sandy) Goldfarb:

Ada and I are coming in for the reunion, our first since the 45th. **We have to travel from Boston/Cambridge to New York City Friday morning, June 5th.** I write to ask for help hitching a ride: two people and two bags. Bus or train are options, of course, but we wondered if maybe a classmate with space in the car might be driving this route at that time. Gas on us (even if it's an electric car), plus coffee en route. In the old days, to which I still belong, we'd post a notice on a bulletin board, but I guess bulletin boards and thumbtacks are extinct. So if it would be appropriate to include in the Newsletter, that would be great.

Ted Leary:

Two of your long time classmates (Leary & Dan Melia) and beautiful wives in LA.



J. Chester Johnson:

In connection with Poets House's Showcase of recent books of poetry, J. Chester Johnson presented selections from his latest book of poetry, *Reading Whispers, Book of Triple Haiku*, at Poets House on Saturday, February 28. The presentation at Poets House follows the featured display of "You, A Love Poem", a poem from *Reading Whispers* that appeared hourly on Times Square jumbotron for Valentine's Day. The poem, "You, A Love Poem", was also featured in a distribution for Valentine's Day by another New York City venue, Carnegie Hill Village. *Reading Whispers, Book of Triple Haiku*, is available from the publisher at blazeVOX.org or from Amazon.



Note: an excerpt from a longer J. Chester Johnson book is at the end of this newsletter.

In Memoriam:

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| '65 | Paul Kelleher | 12/25/25 | East Orleans, MA |
| '65 | Robert Loeffler | 2/09/26 | Washington, DC |
| '65 | Robert Mckibben | 12/21/25 | Lee, NH |
| '65 | Peter Moody | 2/03/26 | Clio, MI |
| '66 | Bill Neaves | 8/17/25 | Spur, TX |
| '66 | David Mittell | 6/19/25 | Jamaica Plain, MA |
| '66 | Arch Cummin | 8/06/24 | Palm Beach, FL |
| '66 | Roberta Mundie | 10/21/23 | Baltimore, MD |
| '66 | Sandra Rothbaum | 1/04/26 | Carmel, IN |

That's it for this month. See you all at the reunion; registration opens this week!

Tom Black
co-class secretary

J. Chester Johnson:

For Racial Healing: #11 'A Deeper Revelation of The Filiopietism-Damaged Heritage Axis'

William Faulkner, one of our country's most ardent and foremost practitioners of filiopietism as an art form, could still see the nefarious impact of filiopietism on historical injustice and violence. In the novel, *Intruder In The Dust*, Faulkner has one of his characters recognize this connection between filiopietism and damaged heritage, "No man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors."

At an earlier point in this 'For Racial Healing' series, we considered briefly the phenomenon of the filiopietism-damaged heritage axis. While we've learned that both filiopietism and damaged heritage together constitute a legacy of racism, we should also learn, based on the trauma and long-term agony felt by Blacks in America, that filiopietism is a creator with damaged heritage its

result. Though related, like two unredeemed, untamed cousins, filiopietism and damaged heritage are nonetheless separable and distinguishable.

While a filiopietism-damaged heritage axis derives mainly from the protection and the inoculation provided by filiopietism that allows damaged heritage to conduct its prejudicial forms, including violence, under the aegis of a valued and beloved past and historical family views, customs, and traditions, the two features are surely separable when especially analyzed on an actual, resultant basis. Since racism's damaged heritage is a direct result of filiopietism, we know that the greatest challenge to racial healing today between Blacks and whites remains the residual commitment by a sizeable number of white Americans to filiopietism, that devotion to history, past familial and white behavior, customs, tradition, and similar motifs.

The two families in which I was born and reared – the Birches and Johnsons – are separable and distinguishable for the roles that each played in development of the racist milieu surrounding my youth. When I look back through time, I am struck by the translucent alignment of the two families, respectively representing damaged heritage in one and filiopietism in the other.

My maternal grandfather's family and antecedents – the Birches, dependent economically over several generations on agriculture – lived in or near the rural community of Tillar in Desha County, Arkansas, immediately south of Phillips County, site of the Elaine Race Massacre. While filiopietism could and did flourish with the Birches, other factors, including an almost innate comfort with violence, would cause this family to demonstrate qualities that made the Birches more accustomed to and motivated by damaged heritage. This example is not unique in the American experience for white families. Many whites have too often relied directly on the behavior and ideas of previous generations to inflict serious and occasional, brutal harm on Blacks, including additionally multiple forms of economic and social subjugation.

For a family like the Birches, even though they left southeast Arkansas of Desha County and migrated to the city of Little Rock, Arkansas by the 1940s – some twenty years following the Elaine Race Massacre, it was, during my childhood, still closely tied in an exhibited attitude that could lead to damaged heritage. Although violence is, of course, not the only manifestation and tincture of damaged heritage, it is the most repugnant and fearsome, for it can decide outcomes if allowed to go unchecked and released to take all matters and situations into its own hands. Such was the case when the white, federal soldiers, harnessed with machine guns, were brought to Phillips County to “restore order” during the Elaine Race Massacre and chose to execute the mission through an uncompromised usage of mostly unfettered assaults against Black Americans. It is hard to imagine that racism in America would have been as thorough and long-lasting in the absence of a high degree of ferocity exercised by whites against Blacks.

The Birches demonstrated unmistakable features of damaged heritage, such as overt and implied violence, present in the nature of the Birch clan with Lonnie's participation in the Elaine Race Massacre and his membership in the Ku Klux Klan being indicative of the family's predilection toward physicality and racist braggadocio. In fact, it was normal practice for the Birches to employ or suggest destructive behavior in the face of challenges and opportunities that undoubtedly added exposure, distinction, and saltiness to the family's personality, as appreciated by many outside this clan.

Physical actions and responses to threats, affronts, or potential attacks were regularly savored and revisited in story and occasional humor for Birch family gatherings during my youth. The narratives also carried a valuable “moral” lesson, as imparted to Birch progenies, that a show of fierceness could protect a person – man or woman, boy or girl – against something far worse later. These were family traits expected to be carried forward with a complete absence of remorse. The aggressiveness, present in family histories, would be sprinkled intermittently into conversations on race and on current news items about Black liberation when the Birch clan met with family members participating in ritualistic conversations and occasional diatribes about Blacks.

The family figured, having been encouraged in speech by an aunt or uncle, sometimes subtly, sometimes not, to be at the tip of the spear if and when it became necessary, according to some Birch voice, to set Blacks in their place. The tip of the spear. Would racial violence climb out of such scenes, or were the words simply meant to convey a continuation of a way to see, to believe, to behave? Were the words meant to construct a context to build a way to conduct one's life, a way to treat others who were Black and different?

At the same time, filio Pietism can come at a person from a variety of angles and sources, a factor that makes filio Pietism the most sinister and lethal weapon when it comes to race as it provides cover and shelter through familial love, loyalty, honor, emulation, etc., to damaged heritage. Moreover, notwithstanding its capability to lead one to commit unspeakable, racial sins, filio Pietism is unhappily supported and granted authenticity by codified, limited, biblical scripture: honor your father and mother and, by inference, your grandparents and even those who preceded them. Ancient Greek and Roman families took it an additional step – without consideration of Judeo-Christian scripture – by formally worshipping past family members as gods. We white Americans have been relieved of much guilt for racist views by looking at the history of our ancestors and our past for justification.

In my case, while the Birches brought the “tip of the spear” violence, mentality, and personality of damaged heritage to racism, the Johnsons, my paternal family members, enjoyed a different kind of respect and retained intellectual surety and historical concurrence with different forms of filio Pietism that regularly contributed to and helped to solidify racism. The Johnsons were decidedly a different breed from the Birches. Notwithstanding the continuous flirtation and attachment the Birches had with physical force and its related avatars, the Johnsons, as far as I was concerned, were a more dangerous lot. One generally always knew the current and prospective intentions and plans of the Birches, but the Johnsons, as I perceived them, including information I gleaned from tales and family histories, carried more stealth; this group of relatives seemed clever, surprising, manipulative, political, intellectual, and more subtle. They were big readers. In fact, I owe Sister (my father's sister, but my aunt, who never married), for she spent endless hours with me during my youth discussing poets and poetry, grammar, and writing.

I've never known anyone who had a stronger allegiance to ancestors and the past than Sister did. Her association with former family figures was mythological. For example, she would habitually go to the closet before retiring and touch the clothing she had saved from both her father and brother (my father), leading to a short, one-sided conversation with both of them before bidding the departed men good night. As further evidence of her commitment to her own, individualized version of filio Pietism, one of Sister's principal projects consisted of her writing of a Johnson genealogy; in some cases, she tracked individuals back to a time well before the Civil War, using her own intellectual tools many years in advance of services now available on the internet.

Relatedly, my paternal grandmother and Sister spent an inordinate amount of time at Johnson graves, making sure there was no weed invasion and the tombstones weren't soiled. The priorities dealing with the dead led to the presumption that the past always had a way of being better than the present, and that acknowledgment needed to be honored. Mostly, the homage couldn't be real unless it were formed in the spoken word, a special meal, or an invitation to family members or old friends – only to those who already understood and obeyed a measure of the respect and emulation due. And after the most immediate and unsuspecting soul showed a commitment to the same pledge and behavior, words were routinely unnecessary.

In the latter part of his farming career, my paternal grandfather (John Maxie Johnson), relying extensively on Black labor, owned 1,600 acres of land with much of it arable for cultivation a few miles west of Monticello, Arkansas near the hamlet of Wilmar. Notwithstanding their propensity for filio Pietism, the Johnsons didn't talk as much as the Birches did about race or racial matters, which left the impression that these subjects didn't mean as much to the Johnsons, though they depended even more than the Birches on Blacks to handle most aspects of cotton or other crops and duties for the family. My mother inherited, at the death of my father, a farm of 380

acres near other Johnson land holdings, and she too depended heavily on Black labor for the same reasons. I can still recall the terrible conditions the Blacks bore on our farm, living in porous shacks and using well water and an outdoor toilet.

A prime relationship continued between the Johnsons and filio Pietism, conducive enough for Blacks to be employed at minimal compensation and minimal accommodations in various positions for John Maxie Johnson at his home, farms, and the local railroad depot in Wilmar, which he also managed. Blacks were subjected to the prevailing toil in order to allow the Johnsons to enjoy their hallowed standards and advantages, but the Johnsons would remain quiet about Blacks, unlike the Birches.

I've often wondered how John Maxie Johnson consciously thought about the tide of racism that normally percolated around him in Drew County, Arkansas. On the one hand, he apparently continued to benefit himself and his family by relying, during much of the first half of the 20th century, on the multi-generational practice of taking unfair advantage of Black labor. On the other hand, he apparently withdrew from participation in verbal diatribes, supportive of Black subjugation. Thus, since this grandfather set the decorum for other Johnsons, I never heard any comments about racial violence or intimidations against Blacks from the two generations of Johnsons that preceded me.

The silence about racism and racial subjugation emanating from the Johnsons has always intrigued me, especially in contrast to the Birches. I eventually recognized, however, that this silence about racism and racial subjugation, which ran counter to the family's actual practices, made their hidden views conveniently obtuse, if not impervious. The silence about these subjects had been so loud that it created an inability to hear above the noise of the racism that the Johnsons had put in place. No one, especially in the family, dared to invade with inquiry or opposition to the benefitted way of life.

If we live with unrelenting racism, it is impossible to discern the beginning, end, or middle of it all, for it has this consuming relevance and nature day after day; we see and experience it everywhere, and there is no relief. It took my living apart from it, from its size, its catastrophe, its fraud, flatness and indignity, its traps and exactitude and inexactitude, the inability to give its components accurate names, and the terror for both culprit and victim. Only in abandonment, whether near or far, can one break apart the elements, identifiable and separated, of white subjugation of Blacks.

While we know it is right when I say that filio Pietism and damaged heritage have relied upon each other for centuries of chaos, we must then scramble to put ourselves out of the content, righting the process that leads to discovery and possible cure. And yet, we, in truth, can't stand away fully from filio Pietism and damaged heritage. If we are to address them, we must know them like thunder and lightning, sun and moon, start and finish. It took both the Birch and Johnson families to frame this view, where the bludgeon of damaged heritage is strengthened by articulation deep inside as filio Pietism reveals its malevolent intelligence, schemes, and hollowness.

Next Time: Structure Versus Attitude

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