OPINION

GUEST COLUMNISTS

VICTOR ASHE

DONALD GLASCOFF

For a stronger Yale, open trustee elections

On May 24, 2021, the Yale Corporation summarily terminated the long-established petition process to become a candidate for election as a Yale alumni trustee. Under the petition process, alumni could stand as candidates if they obtained signatures from 3 percent of eligible alumni voters. Senior trustee Catharine Bond Hill GRD '85 wrote in a statement that the principal objective was to eliminate "issues-based candidates."

One of this piece's authors ran as a petition candidate in 2021. He was not elected. He had hoped to bring new perspectives to the Yale Corporation. He was a lawyer, the mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee and the U.S. ambassador to Poland. The other author, a retired Wall Street lawyer with an interest in freedom of expression and diversity of opinion, joined forces with alumni across class years to launch a court challenge of the new, ill-considered and hastily announced Yale policy. We consider ourselves loyal supporters of our great university.

> THE CORPORATION HAS LIMITED THE DIVERSE VOICES NEEDED AROUND ITS TABLE, SUPPRESSED THE EFFECTIVE ARTICULATION OF POLICIES AND OPTIONS BY CANDIDATES AND FAILED TO ASSURE THE FREE EXPRESSION OF IDEAS.

Our goals were not debatable "issues" of the type condemned by Bond Hill. What is also not debatable is the effect of the revised policy upon the university. The Yale Corporation, with the stroke of a pen, became a self-perpetuating entity whose alumni members are only people selected to run for election by the Alumni Fellow Nominating Committee — a standing committee of the Yale Alumni Association.

A nonprofit board needs trustees who can bring different perspectives, work with others, listen and consider different views and always focus on the overall best interests of the university. Yet, in our experience, the Alumni Association is an "insider" group, dominated by Yale. It has no separate legal status. It is a constituent part of the university.

Connecticut courts have now spoken. We lost. Three courts heard our case and decided it on what we consider very narrow bases. But is the new policy good for Yale?

As Nicholas Lemann noted in a recent piece in The New Yorker, the historical "compact" of government support for university research is at an end and may not be fully restored by some future administration. Only the Yale administration knows if the new policy has materially affected contributions by alumni to Yale. We know it has eliminated contributions by many alumni who supported our litigation.

The Yale Corporation should reverse its decision. The Corporation has limited the diverse voices needed around its table, suppressed the effective articulation of policies and options by candidates and failed to assure the free expression of ideas. It has remained closed and alienated donors.

Yale has seen this movie before. Direct election of alumni trustees began in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Yale's finances were wobbly and its future uncertain. The "Young Yale" movement forced the creation of six alumni trustees to balance the self-selecting successor trustees who still hold the numerical majority today.

As the late campus historian Judith Schiff once observed in the Yale Alumni Magazine, those constituting the movement were concerned that a board composed solely of Connecticut clergymen were charged with guiding and raising donations for a national university without appropriate training or breadth of experience. Many alumni today share a similar concern about narrowness of focus among trustee candidates, either not identified in advance — the successor trustees — or those chosen by a small committee in the Yale Alumni Association on which university officers sit.

New election procedures should reinstate direct nomination of candidates to become the six alumni trustees, a minority on the Yale Corporation. The new rules should include a realistic timetable for candidates to gather support and a much lower threshold of petition signatures. A change which does not result in real change is no change.

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GUEST COLUMNISTS

ZOE KANTER

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Standing our ground at the Women's Center

In 1970, in the dimly lit basement of Durfee Hall, something extraordinary began. Members of the first classes of Yale women gathered to speak about the discrimination they faced from administrators and male peers alike, often for the first time. As Anne Gardiner Perkins '81 described in her book "Yale Needs Women," these gatherings were sanctuaries.

These first women at Yale forged the Yale Women's Center, the oldest continuously operating women's center at a major university in the United States, according to co-founder Elizabeth Spahn. Since then, 198 Elm Street has been a haven for feminist advocacy, birth control distribution and intersectional community organizing. It is a physical safe space for gender minorities, a launching pad for political action and a living inheritance passed from one generation of Yale women to the next.

In December 2025, the Yale College Dean's Office presented the Women's Center board with two pathways. In the first, the center would be absorbed into the Dean's Office as a cultural center — directed by professional Dean's Office staff, stripped of its political mission and required to reflect the neutrality of Yale College. In the second, the center would be downgraded to a Registered Student Organization, drop its designation as a "center," lose all paid student employment and face an uncertain future in its Durfee Hall space, which could be revoked at any time due to "renovations, operational needs or RSO policy shifts."

This moment seems representative of the nationwide gutting of diversity, equity and inclusion infrastructure. Since August 2023, at least 31 gender- and sexuality-based resource centers have closed across 23 college campuses. Yale is a spineless participant in this trend. Yale portrays its mission as "improving the world today and for future generations." Yet its defanging of the Women's Center is another notch in its hypocritical record of continued investment in weapons manufacturers and repression of student organizing.

This forced choice is also contiguous with the Women's Center's history. In 1987, the Dean's Office ruled that the Center must allow a anti-abortion group to affiliate with the center, after the center's board had previously rejected them. "The Yale Women's Center has always been an expressly political organization," the board responded in an open letter published in the News. Lisa Hoffman '88, a board member, believed the Dean's Office would "like the Center to become [like] a student center for 45 percent of students. If that's what they want it to be, they should give us more space and more funding."

Hoffman likely meant this as a hypothetical. But almost 40 years later, the choice between space and funding or being political became real. The Women's Center of 2026 was faced with losing our political vision and maintaining institutional support, or maintaining our vision and losing our employment and foreseeably the physical space. In line with its history and politics, the Women's Center has chosen the latter.

> THE WOMEN WHO FOUNDED THIS CENTER IN 1970 WERE NOT NEUTRAL. THEY DID NOT ASK PERMISSION TO IMAGINE SOMETHING BETTER.

The women who founded this center in 1970 were not neutral. They did not ask permission to imagine something better. They built a sanctuary in a basement and refused to leave. As their inheritors, we cannot bargain away what they built.

The center's history is vibrant, at many times contentious, and thoroughly political. The 1980s center hosted groups ranging from Yalesbians to to Spinsters Opposed to Nuclear Genocide.

In 1984, the center was a hub for student organizing during the strike of Local 34, Yale's Clerical and Technical Workers Union. According to alumna Alexa Bradley '85, the center organized for classes to be held off campus so students and faculty could avoid crossing the picket line. They wrote letters, organized vigils and staffed picket lines.

As more women enrolled at Yale, political action was a constant at the center. Almost all of it was volunteer-based: The Women's Center only gained paid staffing in 2008, reportedly as a consolation prize of sorts after Zeta Psi fraternity pledges posted to Facebook a photo holding a sign reading "We Love Yale Sluts" in front of the center.

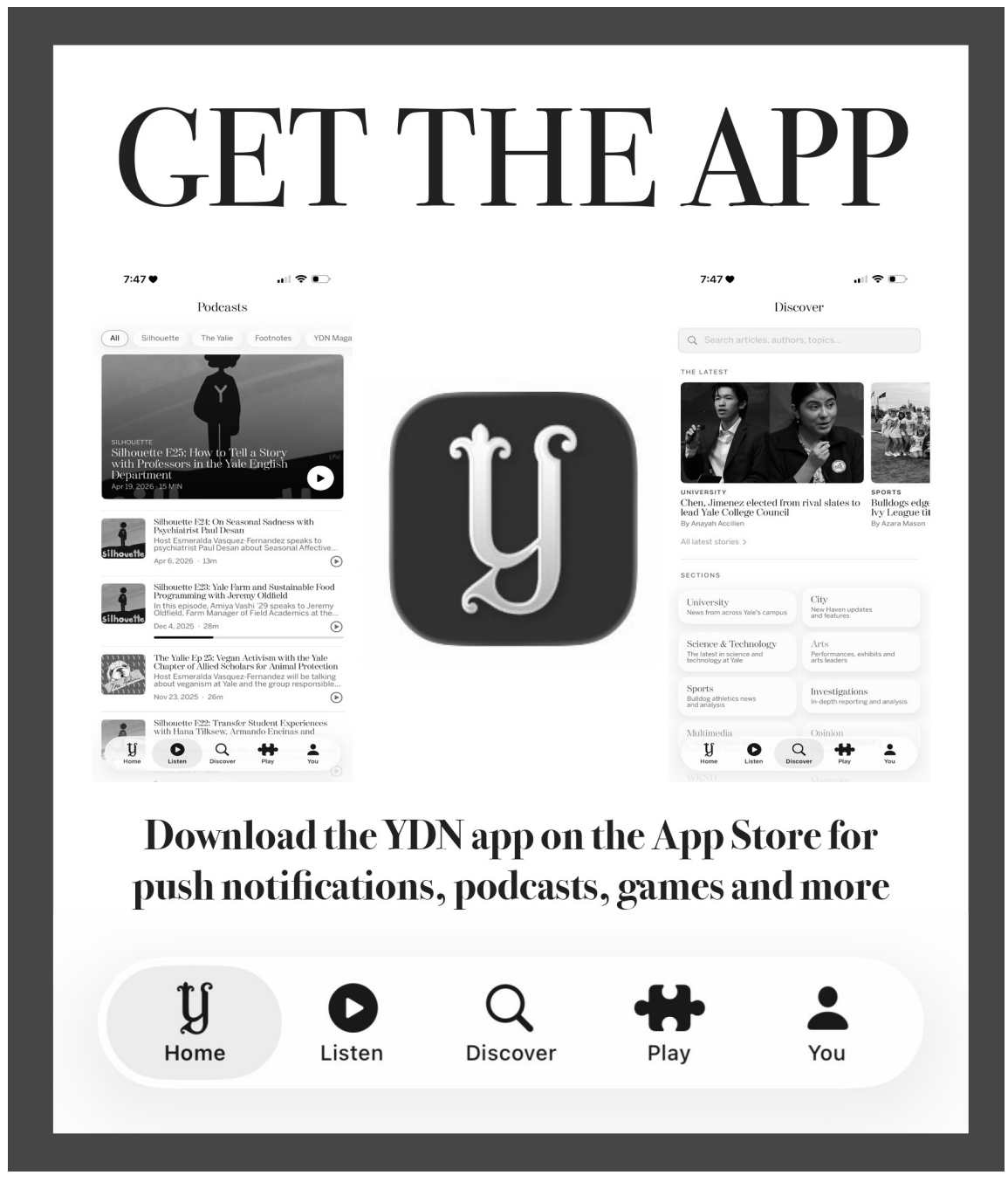
In the 2010s, the Center continued its focus on sexual assault advocacy after DKE pledges chanted "No means yes, yes means anal" on Old Campus. According to alumna Sally Walstrom '12, the Center strove to improve remediation options for sexual violence survivors and strengthen disciplinary procedures for offenders, leading an overhaul of the first-year consent education which created workshops that we still use in 2026.

Now, we'll be reverting to our pre-2008 days of volunteer staffing. If, in your time at Yale, you have stopped by the Center for an emergency tampon or condom, napped on the Center's colorful couches or drunk tea from the Center's kettle; if you, like us, have found a home in the center, or if you haven't been inside yet — we invite you to volunteer as a Women's Center staffer.

The Yale Women's Center will continue as a registered student organization, with less institutional security but more freedom than ever. We will deepen our roots in New Haven. We will organize without asking permission. We will return to our hard-earned history.

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