

H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N



J E F F R E Y H A R R I S O N

Antioch, Berkeley, and Columbia
were the ABC's of colleges
my father said he wouldn't pay for –
breeding grounds for radicalism
he called them, as if their campuses
were giant Petri dishes spawning
toxic cultures. Our own pathology
was pretty toxic at the time, both of us
stubbornly refusing to learn
anything about each other, or
about ourselves for that matter, stuck
in a rudimentary pattern of
defining ourselves as opposites.
I wouldn't even look at Kenyon,
his beloved alma mater, despite
its long tradition as a school for
future poets. I hadn't read a word
of Robert Lowell or James Wright yet,
but I'd read Ginsberg, and the first stop
on my college tour was Columbia,
and that's where I ended up going.
And my father, to his credit, must
have seen it was the right place for me
or at least was unavoidable,
so he let me go, and he paid for it.
And the only price I had to pay
was, when I was home on holidays,
to suffer his barbed commentary
about the very education he

was financing, which ironically
had to do with the core values of
Western Civilization. I can't
remember – is forgiveness one of them?
We both got a C in Forgiveness
but later bumped it up to a B minus
when, in a surprising twist, my son
ended up at Kenyon. My father
took real pleasure in that, though he
was already dying by then. I thought
of him at graduation, how proud
he would have been for his grandson
who, he might have joked, was a better
student than he had ever been – all
our ignorance put aside at least
for that one day of celebration.