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The Battle For Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg launched an online empire from his dorm room at Harvard. Now four fellow students say he stole their idea

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It's a sunny afternoon in downtown Palo Alto, California, and inside the graffiti-covered walls of the Facebook headquarters, workmen are hanging lights and arranging tables for champagne glasses. Tomorrow night, there will be a party to celebrate Facebook's four-year anniversary. But in a nearby building — one of four sleek offices that the social-networking Website runs not far from the campus of Stanford University — the company's founder is oblivious to the preparations. Mark Zuckerberg, the head of the Facebook empire, sits inside the safety of a small, glass-walled office, hunched over a Styrofoam box of take-out. He looks more like a boy in a bubble than the CEO of a corporation that's worth as much as General Motors. Only 24 years old, Zuckerberg has a baby face, a long, long neck and big ears. Since he took Facebook live from his Harvard dorm as a sophomore four years ago, Zuckerberg has been crowned by *Forbes* as the world's youngest billionaire — a dentist's son worth an estimated \$1.5 billion.

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Zuckerberg made that fortune by creating Facebook — now the sixth-most-visited site in the world — as easy to use and as addictive as any drug. Every day, some 70 million users log on to gaze at their friends' profiles and post a wealth of information about themselves: phone numbers, personal preferences, romantic timetables. Zuckerberg and his staff work, often in all-night coding parties, to hock all that valuable consumer data to ravenous advertisers. With the number of users growing by at least 150,000 daily, it's no surprise that Zuckerberg has been called his generation's Bill Gates, another technological wunderkind and Harvard dropout who changed the culture and went on to amass great wealth and power. "If there's going to be another Bill Gates," says former Harvard president Lawrence Summers, "Mark is as close as anyone." And like Gates early in his career, Zuckerberg is facing serious allegations that his creation was based on ideas he stole from others.

In a lawsuit one judge describes as a "blood feud," three fellow Harvard students claim Zuckerberg fleeced their idea after they hired him to code a social-networking site they were creating. "We got royally screwed," Divya Narendra, one of the students, has testified. And in April, another classmate, Aaron Greenspan, filed a petition to cancel Facebook's trademark, claiming he invented an online facebook months before Zuckerberg. Greenspan, who has compiled reams of e-mails chronicling his months of communication with Zuckerberg, bristles at equating the Facebook prodigy with Microsoft's founder. "Gates was shrewd, calculating and insanely competitive, bordering on autistic," Greenspan writes in his self-published autobiography. "Mark was inarticulate and naive."

The legal challenges to Zuckerberg's empire paint a curious picture of the man who has put himself in charge of our

social future. One of the world's most popular networking tool was launched by a brilliant but ostracized nerd sitting alone in a dorm room. From his days at Phillips Exeter Academy, where he was known as the prep school's top programming impresario, Zuckerberg has drawn on a powerful combination of isolation and entitlement to surpass his peers. He is a Nietzschean superdork for the digital age — a college student who gamed the system, propelled by a primal understanding of how to program computers to serve human needs. Whatever the outcome of the legal wrangling, the battle over the origins of Facebook prompts a fundamental question: Is Mark Zuckerberg's social-networking empire, like so many other great fortunes in history, founded on a crime?

Facebook may have been born under disputed circumstances, but there is one uncontested moment in its inception: a Tuesday night at Harvard, where a 19-year-old boy wonder from Dobbs Ferry, New York, sat in front of his computer, dejected, alone and on his way to being trashed. It was the fall of 2003, and the World Wide Web was just beginning its love affair with social networking. That month, Fortune wrote, "There may be a new kind of Internet emerging — one more about connecting people to people than people to Websites." Friendster.com had launched at the beginning of the year and would soon have millions of users and millions from investors.

In moments of need, two things had always pulled Mark Zuckerberg through: an obsessive love of technology and an almost ruthless competitive streak. (Among his personal interests, he once listed "defeating nemeses.") His relationship with computers dates back to the sixth grade, when he got his first machine and promptly bought a copy of the programming guide *C++ for Dummies*. By ninth grade, throwing himself into his Latin class, Zuckerberg had created a computerized version of the board game Risk, set in the Roman Empire. Zuckerberg was always dreaming up little tools to get things done quicker, "dorky things," as he would call them. In his senior year at Exeter, Zuckerberg and his roommate, Adam D'Angelo, wrote software for an MP3 player that was able to learn a user's listening habits and build a digital library based on previous selections. Several companies showed an interest in the application, including an AOL subsidiary, but D'Angelo and Zuckerberg had no intention of selling. They didn't care about money. They cared about code. "They were the most advanced computer-science students at the school," recalls Kristopher Tillery, a classmate who set up a site with Zuckerberg that allowed Exeter students to order snacks online.

When he wasn't programming computers, Zuckerberg was striving to be the best at everything: the math team, science Olympiad, band, Latin honors society, a summer course in Greek. In 2000 he was voted MVP at the New York regional competition of the U.S. Fencing Association. On his application to Harvard, he wrote that fencing had "proven to be the perfect medium" because "whether I am competing against a rival in a USFA tournament or just clashing foils, or sometimes sabers, with a friend, I rarely find myself doing anything more enjoyable than fencing a good bout." He graduated with academic honors from Exeter and entered Harvard in the fall of 2002, spilling over with ambition.

But at Harvard, Zuckerberg found himself surrounded by hundreds of other freshmen whose résumés were as burnished as his own. He was just another face in the crowd. By his sophomore year, he had retreated into the domain where he was most comfortable, building a Website called Coursematch.com that enabled students to register for courses online and see who else was signing up for the same classes. An early concession to voyeurism, the project came to an abrupt end: Zuckerberg was running it from his laptop, which soon crashed from the demand. But the experience taught him an important lesson: What happened online wasn't just about programming. It was about what made people tick. Despite his virtuoso ability at coding, Zuckerberg didn't choose to study computer science. Instead, he majored in psychology.

The courses didn't help him much with his personal life. Sitting alone in his dorm room that night in 2003, Zuckerberg had just been jilted by a girl. He started drinking and once again sought solace in the realm that never let him down. Logging on to his blog, he created an entry titled "Harvard Face Mash: The Process." His plan was as simple as it was vindictive: create a site called Facemash.com, hack into Harvard's directory, download photographs of his classmates and post them online next to photos of farm animals to rate who was more desirable.

He began like any other hurt schoolboy. "Jessica A— is a bitch," he wrote. "I need to think of something to take my mind off her. I need to think of something to occupy my mind. Easy enough, now I just need an idea."

An hour later: "I'm a little intoxicated, not gonna lie. So what if it's not even 10 p.m. and it's a Tuesday night? What? The

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Kirkland [dorm] facebook is open on my desktop and some of these people have pretty horrendous facebook pics. I almost want to put some of these faces next to pictures of farm animals and have people vote on which is more attractive."

At 11:09 p.m., invention was in full swing: "Yea, it's on. I'm not exactly sure how the farm animals are going to fit into this whole thing (you can't really ever be sure with farm animals . . .), but I like the idea of comparing two people together."

Zuckerberg hacked into the night, breaking into the private user data of each of Harvard's residences and blogging proudly about his exploits every step of the way. The site was an instant hit. That first night, students across campus were e-mailing one another about Facemash. More than 450 signed up, logging 22,000 page views. Within hours, school officials tracked down Zuckerberg and shut off his Web access. Later, in a hearing before Harvard's administrators, he was accused of violating student privacy and downloading school property without permission.

The notoriety turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to Zuckerberg. After he escaped with a warning, he went back to his dorm, opened some champagne and celebrated with his roommates. His reputation on campus as a renegade programmer was cemented. Amid all the high-performing Harvard students, Zuckerberg finally had an identity. And he had also learned an invaluable lesson. "People," he summarized later in a deposition, "are more voyeuristic than what I would have thought."

Zuckerberg wasn't the only student at Harvard exploring the Web's potential for bringing people together. All over campus, students were thinking up ways to use this new tool to make online the personal connections that seemed to elude them in real life. "Networking is a time-honored practice at Harvard, going back to FDR," says Lawrence Summers. "It was waiting to happen. It was a wave of the next Internet thing and a group of very talented, social people. All innovators are great adapters to social need."

Ten months before Zuckerberg launched Facemash, a Harvard junior named Divya Narendra had come up with the idea of creating a social network aimed at college students. The son of a doctor, Narendra grew up in Bayside, New York. He had the face of a Bollywood matinee idol and a mind for mathematics: He got a near-perfect score on the SAT. Narendra was as ambitious as any Harvard kid but felt like he wasn't part of the social stream. "I — and my friends, who were in the same dorm — had the feeling that there were too many barriers and a lack of time for students at Harvard to do social networking," he would recall. It was nerdspeak for feeling left out.

Narendra went to two of his dormmates, identical twins Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss, and told them he had an idea for an online community for Harvard students, with access granted only to those with a college e-mail address. The twins instantly recognized the idea's potential. Unlike Narendra and Zuckerberg, they were popular jocks: tall, brawny, blond and chiseled, they rowed on Harvard's crew team and competed internationally. Their father, Howard Winklevoss, was a wealthy financial consultant who had nurtured their athletic abilities. After the twins had shown promise with a coach at the Saugatuck Rowing Club in Connecticut, Dad paid for a 15,000-square-foot nautical-themed boathouse and founded a company, RowAmerica, to support his sons.

Throughout 2003, Narendra and the twins worked on the site, hiring several fellow students to help them code it. But by that fall, the site still wasn't finished. Then, in November, the entrepreneurs, who'd heard about the rise and fall of Zuckerberg's Facemash, decided to contact the programming prodigy and catch some of his computing heat.

On the phone, Narendra told Zuckerberg the site — called the Harvard Connection — would have two sections: "dating" and "connecting." Students could post photos of themselves, enter personal information and search for links. Narendra and the twins wanted Zuckerberg to do about 10 hours of programming; in return, they claim they offered him a piece of the company. That month, Zuckerberg met with the partners, and he agreed to work on the site.

Zuckerberg later claimed that he had no faith in the ability of his partners to pull the project off. "My most socially inept friends at the school had a better idea of what would attract people to a Website than these guys," he scoffed in a deposition. But in his e-mails at the time, Zuckerberg was conciliatory to the partners. "I have most of the coding done," he assured them in November. "It seems like everything is working." Over the next two months, he kept making lame excuses for putting them off — "I forgot to bring my charger home with me for Thanksgiving" — but his tone was cheery, and he promised them that things shouldn't take much longer. Zuckerberg later admitted that he did only a little work on the site in December and none in January.

As the weeks dragged on, the Harvard Connection team started to get anxious. Every time they tried to meet with Zuckerberg, he postponed, blaming his busy schedule. Cameron Winklevoss pressured him to finish the job: "hey mark, drop me a line when you get a chance," he wrote on January 6th. Two days later, Zuckerberg replied with an apology: "I'm completely swamped with work this week. I have three programming projects and a final paper due by Monday." Finally, on January 14th, Zuckerberg met with the twins and Narendra. Despite his previous assurances that all the code for the site was nearly ready, he informed them that they should get another programmer. The Harvard Connection guys were stunned. What happened to all the work they'd been promised?

Zuckerberg has said under oath that he began writing the code for TheFacebook.com, his site's first incarnation, in January, presumably after his last meeting with the partners from Harvard Connection. It took him maybe a week or two, he claims, in between homework and finals. He was inspired, he said, by an editorial in *The Harvard Crimson* about his Facemash debacle. "It is clear that the technology needed to create a centralized Website is readily available," the paper observed. "The benefits are many."

No matter the timeline, Zuckerberg ultimately dumped his jock overseers and went into business for himself. "I basically took that article that [the *Crimson*] wrote and made a site with those exact privacy controls, and that was Facebook," he recalled.

But Zuckerberg's memory of the subject is hazy at best.

"Really unsure of like when the moment was that it crystallized and I said I'm going to make Facebook," he said in testimony. And what Zuckerberg didn't tell the Harvard Connection guys is that he officially registered the original Facebook site with his Web provider on January 11th — three days before he gave them the brushoff. His lawyers have told the court that it was "on or about" then that he started coding Facebook.

According to Zuckerberg, he enlisted one of his closest friends, Eduardo Saverin, who shared his dorm suite, to think about how to incorporate the site. (A recent book proposal, for which Saverin is likely a primary source, suggests that the two friends hoped to use the site to get laid.) On January 12th, while he was still ostensibly working for Harvard Connection, Zuckerberg e-mailed Saverin and told him the Facebook site was almost complete and it was time to discuss marketing strategies. They each agreed to invest \$1,000 in the site, with Zuckerberg owning two-thirds of the company.

Zuckerberg threw himself into programming his new site. In the weeks he spent writing Facebook, he couldn't be bothered to study for one of his courses, "Art in the Time of Augustus" — so he built a Website, posted all of the artwork from the class and then sent an e-mail offering it up as a communal study guide. Within a half-hour, classmates had assembled the perfect study guide. Zuckerberg passed the course.

Unencumbered by class work, Zuckerberg plowed ahead with his new project, isolating and exhausting himself. Facebook launched on February 4th, 2004. "If I hadn't launched it that day," he told the *Crimson*, "I was about to just can it and go on to the next thing."

The site immediately took off. After 4,000 people signed up in the first two weeks, Zuckerberg and Saverin realized they needed help, fast. They asked Zuckerberg's roommate Dustin Moskovitz to help, and he began to work with them, trying to launch the site at a few more colleges deemed worthy: Stanford, Columbia and Yale. Adam D'Angelo, Zuckerberg's high school inventing partner, also chipped in to help set up databases for the new schools. Around this time, the ownership percentages were renegotiated: 65 percent for Zuckerberg, 30 percent for Saverin and five percent for Moskovitz. Zuckerberg also pulled in Chris Hughes, another roommate, to act as their spokesman. On April 13th, the team filed letters of incorporation. Zuckerberg posted his job description on Facebook as "Founder, Master and Commander [and] Enemy of the State." The empire of the nerds had begun.

The Harvard Connection partners felt burned. "At first we were devastated and climbed into a bottle of Jack Daniels," the three said in a message on their site, "but eventually emerged with a bad headache and renewed optimism. We weren't going to lie down and get walked over." They fired off a letter to Zuckerberg, threatening to bring him before the school's board on ethical grounds. They appealed directly to President Summers, saying Zuckerberg had violated the school's honor code. In May, they launched their own site, with the new name ConnectU, but it went nowhere fast: Four years later, it boasts only 15,000 members at 200 schools.

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The advertisement features a blue background. At the top left is the 'family moments' logo in a yellow speech bubble. To its right, the text reads 'Family moments cost less at Walmart.' Below this, three video game covers are displayed: 'active' (Wii), 'DIRT 2' (Xbox 360), and 'NBA 2K10' (Xbox 360). A white arrow points from the 'active' cover to the 'DIRT 2' cover, with the text 'Roll over to learn more' above it. At the bottom left is a 'CLICK TO BUY' button with a right-pointing arrow. At the bottom right is the Walmart logo.

Zuckerberg, they claimed, not only stole their idea, he intentionally delayed work on their site so he could launch his first. "He boasted about completing [Facebook] in a week, after leading us on for three months," Cameron Winklevoss told the *Crimson*. "We passed through Thanksgiving, winter break and intersession. He had ample time. He not only led us on, but he knew what he was doing." His brother Tyler, speaking to *The Boston Globe* after the partners filed a lawsuit against Zuckerberg, was even more direct. "It's sort of a land grab," he said. "You feel robbed. The kids down the hall are using it, and you're thinking, 'That's supposed to be us.' We're not there, because one greedy kid cut us out."

From the start, Zuckerberg vehemently denied the charges. That February, in a letter to Harvard administrators, he portrayed himself as a victim of his own kindness. After listing the pleasure he gained from helping others, including a couple of girls from the Association of Black Harvard Women, he let loose on his former employers at Harvard Connection. "What I don't enjoy, however, is people like these three guys telling me I 'have' to do things for them and then threatening me when I don't do them," Zuckerberg wrote. "Frankly, I'm kind of appalled that they're threatening me after the work I've done for them free of charge." He presented himself as the aggrieved party: "I try to shrug it off as a minor annoyance that whenever I do something successful, every capitalist out there wants a piece of the action."

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The idea of a social-networking site, he told the *Crimson*, was in the air at Harvard. "There aren't very many new ideas floating around," he said. "The facebook isn't even a very novel idea. It's taken from all these others. And ours was that we're going to do it on the level of schools."

The guys from Harvard Connection, it turns out, weren't the only ones who felt that Zuckerberg had stolen their idea. Back in September 2003 — a month before Zuckerberg had posted his Facemash site — a skinny and serious Harvard junior named Aaron Greenspan had launched a networking portal for Harvard students. The site was a new version of a project he had created as a member of the Technology and Entrepreneurship Center, a student organization with a \$3 million endowment. That earlier effort — which allowed students to post addresses and other personal information — had been a disaster. The *Crimson* slammed it as a possible invasion of privacy, and Greenspan received a warning from Harvard. After retooling the site, he relaunched it with a section called TheFacebook. Very few students signed up.

Then Greenspan heard that another student had hacked the university's data and used it to create a hot-or-not site. He e?mailed Zuckerberg at the end of October and invited him to join the Student Entrepreneurship Council. Zuckerberg responded warmly that he would check out the next meeting.

Deep in the night of January 6th, a week before he dumped his Harvard Connection overseers, Zuckerberg e?mailed Greenspan for advice on a "top-secret project" he was working on. "I was thinking of making a Web app that would use the Harvard course catalog, but I'm a little worried about the university getting upset after the whole Facemash episode," he wrote. "I know you used info from the catalog . . . (which is awesome, by the way), so I was wondering if you had to get permission to use that material and if so, whom you contacted."

Greenspan responded quickly. He asked if Zuckerberg would like to integrate Greenspan's earlier "Facebook" project into the new mystery program Zuckerberg was working on. No dice. "It's probably best to keep them separated at least for now," Zuckerberg replied. "That said, once it's off the ground, I think it could be mutually beneficial to integrate the two, but we can speak about that then."

Later in January, Zuckerberg sat down with Greenspan in the dining hall. They compared notes, and Zuckerberg asked Greenspan if he would help with his top-secret project. Greenspan declined.

"The way he talked, the way he dressed, everything about him screamed immature," Greenspan recalls. "He seemed unprofessional. I had run a company since I was 15. It just didn't seem like he got it. That whole persona just didn't impress me." Although he was congratulatory at the time, Greenspan now says he was put off by Zuckerberg's original venture, Facemash. "You can spend time writing software for good or evil, and that was pretty close to evil," Greenspan said. "It wasn't that he inflicted harm because he enjoyed it — it was because he didn't care. Which I thought was almost worse."

After Zuckerberg launched Facebook, he continued to seek Greenspan's advice. While most of their exchanges were about the nuts and bolts of the site operation, Zuckerberg occasionally revealed ambitions that were far beyond the scale of his classmates'. His new social network, he wrote, would do more than "get people signed up" and "get people

psyched." His goal was to create something new, something that touched a deeper need. "I kind of want to be the new MTV," he declared.

But Zuckerberg had no interest in giving Greenspan any credit for creating Facebook, let alone a piece of the action. In December of 2004, when Greenspan decided to "admit defeat" and ask Zuckerberg for a job at the rapidly expanding company, all those months of advice proved worthless. "We're looking for someone with more engineering experience — like, 10 to 15 years," Zuckerberg told him. The guy who first created an online facebook for Harvard couldn't even get a job at Facebook.

Wherever the idea for Facebook came from, it was Zuckerberg's version that went viral throughout college campuses that spring. By the time the term ended on May 28th, he had nearly 200,000 users at some 30 schools nationwide. College students, it seemed, were eager to use Zuckerberg's invention obsessively, to share their most personal details online and stalk each other virtually, diving into Facebook with unbridled enthusiasm. "Harvard was around for a few centuries before young Mark came along, with students doing what they did," says Jeff Jarvis, director of the interactive journalism program at the City University of New York. "He just helped them do it better: party, get laid, study, network."

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Facebook immediately set itself apart from other social-networking sites by creating a high bar of entry — users had to have an e-mail address from its roster of elite schools. This ensured that users registered as themselves, instead of as the anonymous identities that proliferated on MySpace and Friendster. Its stripped-down design and user-friendly interface also added to its cachet. It is not superior programming that sets Facebook apart, but what Zuckerberg likes to call "elegant organization": the site's ability to organize social desires, to create a clean, virtual reflection of real-life relationships.

"It was better than its predecessors," says Jarvis. "Friendster was a game; MySpace was a tacky home page. Facebook was the best to come along."

But Zuckerberg's burgeoning success online did little to stop him from burning those closest to him in real life. After school ended, he packed a bag and took a plane to California. In his eyes, Silicon Valley was "sort of a mythical place for a startup." Taking a leave of absence from Harvard, like Bill Gates before him, Zuckerberg moved to Palo Alto in the summer of 2004. His goal was to take his extraordinarily popular Website to the next level. He and Saverin each agreed to invest another \$20,000 in the operation. While Zuckerberg was in California, Saverin stayed behind in New York. That decision would prove ill-advised.

Zuckerberg, Moskovitz, two interns and a few other guys rented a house on La Jennifer Way, a quiet cul-de-sac a few miles from Palo Alto's main drag. It was a modest place in a quiet neighborhood of idyllic bungalows and dusty minivans. Not that Zuckerberg saw much of his surroundings. Asked later to describe that period, he summed up his days succinctly: "Woke up, walked from my bedroom to the living room and programmed."

Stephen Haggerty, who had just finished his freshman year at Harvard, applied for an internship with Facebook that summer. "To call Facebook a company at that point was generous," says Haggerty, now a Ph.D. student at Berkeley. Most of the time, he recalls, everyone in the house would wake up late and stay up late, programming from noon until 5 a.m. "Did we do anything besides sit in front of our computers?" Haggerty says. "Mark had a girlfriend, but after a while she wasn't around. We invited some people to our parties through Facebook."

The roommates shopped at Costco and went to Home Depot, where they bought whiteboards to map code. One day, on a spontaneous urge, they spent \$100 on a zip line, which they strung from the chimney of their house to a telephone pole, allowing them to plunge into the swimming pool below. They drank beer and listened to bands like Green Day and Infected Mushroom on the computer speakers. But things never got out of hand — mainly because Zuckerberg was more intent on fostering other people's social lives than developing his own.

"We were all Harvard kids, so we weren't like party kids," says Haggerty. "Mark is a big nerd. He spent a lot of time in front of his computer." When he wasn't programming, Zuckerberg watched epics like *Gladiator* and quoted frequently from one of his favorite movies, *The Wedding Crashers*. His parents sent him his fencing foils, and he spent a day happily thrusting them at his friends, like some crazed Jedi knight, until they banned swordplay in the house.

If there was any fun in the house, it was because of Sean Parker, a co-founder of Napster. A few months earlier, Parker had been visiting his girlfriend at Stanford when he noticed that she and all her friends were using a new site called Facebook. Parker says that he sensed the potential and arranged to meet Zuckerberg and Saverin in New York at a stylish Chinese restaurant. Saverin brought his girlfriend, and the four sat for a few hours while Parker regaled them with stories of raising big money in California.

Less than a month later, Parker was at his girlfriend's house in Palo Alto, unloading a car, when he saw some young guys walking toward him and recognized Zuckerberg. The Facebook crowd, it turned out, was living only two blocks away. It seemed like destiny. Parker, who had co-founded Napster at the age of 20, was exactly the kind of hot young entrepreneur that Zuckerberg aspired to become. Parker was soon living with the Facebook team and introducing Zuckerberg to investors in Silicon Valley.

Even then, moving among the world's biggest venture capitalists, Zuckerberg asserted his identity. "Mark showed up in his pajamas to meet with Sequoia Capital," Parker recalls. "He was trying to make a statement." Part of that statement was that Zuckerberg didn't plan on surrendering his identity. He wore his signature Adidas shower shoes and T-shirts everywhere. Parker was proud of him for turning down offers to sell Facebook: "The last thing I wanted was for the company to be taken away from him."

Parker didn't need to worry — Zuckerberg wasn't going to let that happen. In July, Zuckerberg and Saverin had a mysterious falling out. Zuckerberg has filed a lawsuit, claiming Saverin jeopardized the company by freezing Facebook's bank accounts. Saverin countersued, claiming that Zuckerberg never matched his \$20,000 in seed money and, further, used that money for personal expenses. That summer, Zuckerberg transferred all intellectual-property rights and membership interests to a new version of the company in Delaware. The value of Saverin's stock was unhinged from any further growth of Facebook, and Saverin was expunged as an employee.

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Not long after the incident, Cameron Winklevoss ran into Saverin in a bar in New York. Saverin, Winklevoss said in a deposition, apologized to him.

"Sorry that he screwed you," Saverin allegedly said. "Mark screwed me, too."

The lesson to those around Zuckerberg was clear: Nobody, not even the college roommate who had once been his closest confidant, was going to stand in his way. "It seemed like in all his dealings, it was a big deal to him that he be the CEO when he got the first round of financing, and that he maintain control of the company," says Haggerty. "He knows where he wants to go: Facebook everywhere."

By December 2004, Facebook was well on its way to everywhere. Only 10 months after its launch, the site had 1 million users. Back at Harvard, Lawrence Summers told entering freshmen that he had gotten to know them through their profiles on Facebook. The student who had once been threatened with expulsion for posting pirated photos of fellow students had succeeded in altering Harvard's entire culture.

At the start of 2005, Zuckerberg appointed Sean Parker president of Facebook, hoping to bank on his friend's Silicon Valley connections. But once again, things fell apart between Zuckerberg and a friend. That October, after Parker was arrested at a party, he abruptly resigned. Although Parker was never charged and denies possessing any narcotics, Zuckerberg told a courtroom Parker was busted for cocaine possession and was lousy at running a business. "He freaked people out," Zuckerberg testified. Even the co-founder of Napster wasn't good enough for the upstart kid from Harvard.

Despite the management shake-ups, users still flocked to the site. In the spring of 2005, real money started flowing into Facebook: A venture-capital firm invested \$12.7 million in the site. Facebook also opened itself up to high school students; within months, it was rewarded with 5.5 million users. But Zuckerberg, now one of the wealthiest twentysomethings in the world, continued to play the part of the college kid. He carried two business cards: a plain one with just his name and another that read "I'm CEO...Bitch." He insisted to anyone who would listen that he wasn't in it for the money. "I'm in this to build something cool," he told *Fortune*, "not to get bought."

But that didn't stop Zuckerberg from pursuing his vision of Facebook as a one-stop social utility with global domination of the marketplace. Last November, he presented advertisers with a new program called Beacon that would enable large retailers to access a shopper's Facebook page. Suddenly, a purchase of budget furniture on Overstock.com would show

up as part of a user's Facebook identity. For the first time, Zuckerberg told those assembled, advertising would become an integral part of social interaction online. His goal, he told them, was simple: to start a revolution.

"Once every hundred years, media changes," Zuckerberg said. "The last hundred years have been defined by the mass media. In the next hundred years, information won't be just pushed out to people: It will be shared among the millions of connections people have." Tapping those connections, he added, was the key to advertising's future. "Nothing influences people more than a recommendation from a trusted friend. A trusted referral influences people more than the best broadcast message. A trusted referral is the Holy Grail of advertising."

Beacon's glory was fleeting, however. Users revolted, protesting the invasion of privacy, and Zuckerberg apologized. Still, his bold plans persuaded Microsoft to invest \$240 million in Facebook, valuing the company at \$15 billion — a staggering figure, considering that the site's total revenues last year were only \$150 million. "On the surface, it seems insane," says Charlene Li, a technology analyst who has co-authored a book on social networking. "Why would Microsoft pay so much for such a small piece of a company? But whether it was \$1 billion or \$15 billion, it doesn't matter. By making it \$15 billion, it assures that no one would come near it. The only one who could now buy it is Microsoft."

But as more and more money has poured into Facebook, more and more of Zuckerberg's inner circle have left. His Harvard roommate Chris Hughes went to work for Barack Obama. His roommate from Exeter, Adam D'Angelo, left in May. Rumors swirl that Dustin Moskovitz is fed up. Eduardo Saverin has sued the company for forcing him out.

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It is easy for Zuckerberg to cast Saverin, Harvard Connection, Greenspan and all the others he's left in the dust as con artists trying to get a piece of the action. Facebook has countersued, accusing Harvard Connection of unfair business practices. "Facebook was built through the ingenuity and hard work of its founding team," the company declared last year. "We continue to disagree with the allegations that Mark Zuckerberg stole any ideas or code to build Facebook."

But the fight has grown increasingly ugly. Harvard Connection's lawyers accuse Facebook of playing a "shell game" with the hard drives, of hiding the code used to create Facebook. When the drives finally resurfaced, key data from Zuckerberg's Harvard days had mysteriously gone missing. "It is fishy indeed, if not impossible, that the Harvard Connection code, the prelaunch TheFacebook.com code and the Facemash code supposedly do not exist," attorneys for the plaintiffs said in a court filing. While Facebook has morphed into the world's sixth-most-visited site, ConnectU ranks 377,920th. Divya Narendra works for an investment firm in New York. The Winklevoss twins continue to row, training for the Olympics. On his Facebook page, Tyler Winklevoss has written that he is about to settle the lawsuit against Zuckerberg, but he has yet to do so. The epic and never-ending nature of all the legal wrangling seems to suggest that, at least for those who feel screwed over by Zuckerberg, the battle over Facebook is ultimately about more than money. On the site, Winklevoss describes himself with a quote from Shakespeare's *Richard II*. "Mine honor is my life, both grow in one," it reads. "Take honor from me, and my life is done."

In the end, it's difficult to assess whether Zuckerberg's creation of Facebook constitutes a crime. Sometimes, great ideas seem to be everywhere at once. Newton and Leibniz independently developed the fundamentals of calculus, creating controversy at the turn of the 18th century; Darwin and Wallace rolled out the theory of evolution in separate papers in 1858. In October 2003, when Mark Zuckerberg sat down in his dorm at Harvard, drunk and alone, the idea of using the Web to connect people seemed as pervasive as iPods on the campus quad. The school already had an online database known as the facebook. All Zuckerberg did was make it interactive. The fact that a couple of other students had the same idea at the same moment doesn't mean he is a thief. And the fact that many consider Zuckerberg a grade-A asshole doesn't mean he did anything illegal. "There are lots of things that an average person might consider reprehensible that aren't against the law," says James Boyle, who co-founded the Center for the Study of the Public Domain at Duke Law School. "I'd warn against assuming that the 'Ew, what a slimeball' reflex be equated with what is illegal."

Zuckerberg likes to present himself as an altruistic, harmless computer geek who invented a widget that will make the world a better place. "I'm just like a little kid," he told the *Crimson*. "I get bored easily and computers excite me. Those are the two driving factors here." But unlike most nerds, Zuckerberg possesses gifts beyond the narrow realm of programming, the monomaniacal processing of ones and zeroes. Even his fiercest critics concede that he is more Donald Trump than slacker dork, someone with an almost ruthless taste for battle — and a sharklike ability to keep moving forward, whatever the obstacles. Like Trump, Zuckerberg has left a string of broken relationships in his wake — a track

record that raises questions about his ability to manage the company he founded. It's one thing to stumble across the Next Big Thing one night in your dorm room. It's another thing to build it into a new kind of empire, one with the potential to dwarf even the Wal-Marts of the world: an online monopoly of virtual communities.

"He's young — and I'm nervous about that," says Kara Swisher, a columnist who writes about Silicon Valley for *The Wall Street Journal*. "How many people has he burned, and he's only 24? Even if he's not culpable, the number of people he's had problems with at a young age is remarkable — and not in a good way."

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