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HARVARD

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# INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

The  
Holiday Issue



# CONTENTS

3. **The Ins and Outs of Wintersession**  
by Sara Kumar '27
4. **Harvard Versus Its Own: Trump's New Cabinet**  
by Sophia Ghafouri '27
5. **Furman Forecasts Trump's Second Term**  
by Jonah Karafiol '26 and Calvin Frank '28
6. **Starting School with a Start-Up**  
by Gemma Maltby '27
7. **Traditions and Turmoil**  
by Pippa Lee '28
8. **Holding Space for Defying Expectations**  
by Jules Sanders '28
9. **From Harvard to New Hampshire**  
by Whitney Ford '28
10. **Dawn Redwoods**  
by Aidan Fitzsimons '25
12. **Whose Home for The Holidays?**  
by Anonymous
13. **Does Democracy Matter?**  
by Jai Glazer '27
14. **From Dusty Shakespearean Relic to Radical Reinvention**  
by Todd Bida '87

16. **Creative After College: "Mai Anna" Pacheco**  
by Kya Brooks '25
17. **Break on a Budget**  
by Natalie Frank '27
18. **Celebrating the Holidays with Food**  
by Calvin Frank '28
- As It Fell**  
by Meena Behringer '27
19. **Happy Harv-idays: A Student Holiday Gift Guide**  
by Ellie Tunnell '27
- Breathing Room**  
by Andrew Morrissey '26
20. **Experiencing the Holiday Season Through the Arts**  
by Sophie Dauer '27
21. **How to Talk Politics Over the Holidays**  
by Lucas Cohen-D'arbeloff '27
22. **Sports Spotlight: Women's Rugby**  
by Kate Oliver '26
23. **Indy Sportsbook: Football's Winding Down**  
by Andrew Christie '26
24. **Crossword: BRRR**  
by Han Nguyen '27

## About the *Independent*

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newspaper, the *Harvard Independent* provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The *Independent* has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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# NEWS

## The Ins and Outs of Wintersession

A look into the range of programming offered to Harvard College students in January.

BY SARA KUMAR '27

After the fall semester's final papers, exams, and projects have ended, there is a brief academic lull before the spring semester begins.

While some students spend their extended holiday break with family, catching up on sleep, or re-planting their hometown roots, a select population participates in Wintersession.

Wintersession at Harvard, colloquially known as "J-Term," is part of the College's liberal arts mission to further student enrichment and learning via for-credit and noncredit opportunities.

Running during the last week of Winter Recess, any Harvard office or department, faculty and staff member, or the majority of recognized student organizations are allowed to sponsor Wintersession programming. Once Harvard College posts the lists of available programming, any interested current students can register. While most options are free, a few have fees which are typically noted on the experience's registration form. Students who plan to participate only in the week-long Wintersession options do not need to apply for housing, as all dorms will remain open. However, some initiatives, especially those run by student organizations, often last longer than just one week. Depending on the location and duration of these programs, undergraduates may have to request Winter Recess Housing.

From building concrete professional skills to traveling with peers who share similar interests, Wintersession is seemingly the perfect chance to broaden one's college experience. However, there are additional benefits beyond just the activities one is engaging in. Maya Flores '27, who is working at the Y2Y Homeless Shelter in Harvard Square during Wintersession, expressed, "Being on campus will also allow me to get prepared before the start of [the] second semester."

The 2025 Wintersession runs from Jan. 17 to Jan. 26. Since some student organizations are running more complex programs, many have already released and closed their applications. However, here are a few unique opportunities that may be available in the future, should they spark your interest.

### Closed Applications

Lasting from Jan. 8 to Jan. 24, the Conflux Collective is hosting its Winter Residency 2025. The Conflux Collective is a student organization that explores the intersection between art and technology. This residency guides Conflux fellows through panels, workshops, and targeted project development focused on everything from AI and algorithmic tools to physical interactive art. Ultimately, this experience has students explore how these technologies influence everyday personal, social, and professional identities. Participating undergraduates will create anything from interactive installations to digital performances. The 2024 Residency projects offer more information on what enrollees will be devoting their time to over the 2.5 weeks.

Dedicating a little under a week to vastly different activities, the Harvard Outing Club (HOC) is hosting their annual retreat in their

New Hampshire cabin from Jan. 19 to Jan. 24. Participants can expect to fill their days with self-selected ventures, including cross-country skiing, hiking, nature walking, going to the nearby town of North Conway, or having a cozy day in the cabin playing games. Wanting to expose all students to the outdoors through HOC's strong community, there is no experience necessary to participate in this program.

HOC Gear Manager Nate Marinaccio '27 remarked that "[The HOC retreat] was truly one of the highlights of my freshman year. I made so many friends and got closer with others, one of which is now my blockmate. I think it was the best consecutive six days of 2024 for me to date."

Apart from hobby-oriented activities, there are also pre-professional initiatives offered through Wintersession. For instance, Harvard Undergraduate BIOME is offering Harvard undergraduates the chance to shadow healthcare workers in the Boston area from Jan. 19 through 26. Participants will also experience networking panels, team dinners, community socials, and more to bolster their understanding of medicine in advance of their potential future careers.

Looking to travel further from Massachusetts? Harvard's Habitat for Humanity is taking students to Decatur, Alabama from Jan. 3 to Jan. 12 to work on house renovations while sightseeing throughout the local area.

Journeying outside of America, the Harvard Undergraduate Philippine Forum (HUPF) is offering a peer-led trip to the Philippines from Jan. 3 to Jan. 13. Aiming to expose Harvard undergraduates to the vibrant Filipino culture in Luzon and some parts of the Visayas, HUPF's trip focuses on engaging with diverse locals, visiting cultural sites, and interacting with nearby student leaders.

Darley Boit '25 wrote in her Individual Trip Reflection that "nothing has deepened my investment and interest in the country as much as this recent experience with HPF, not just in the Philippines as a state, but the area as a cradle of history and culture." Approximately 15 students will be selected for this trip.

Service opportunities are popular throughout Wintersession, and the Fong Family Winternship Program offers a hands-on learning experience in the public sector. Student participants will devote three weeks in January to service work of their choice, making a direct impact on an organization while developing professional connections. All program-enrolled undergraduates will receive a \$1,000 stipend for their time.

### Open Applications

If you did not have a chance to apply for the above programming before their applications closed, there are countless courses, workshops, seminars, and more still available during Wintersession.

Y2Y Harvard Square is a student-run

homeless shelter looking to provide a secure and welcoming space for young adults ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness. Since the shelter stays open during winter break, undergraduate staff members are responsible for maintaining successful and smooth operations throughout January.

While Y2Y staff is hired at the beginning of the school year through the Phillips Brooks House Association, anyone can volunteer. As

one of Y2Y Harvard Square's Volunteer Directors, Flores explained, "During the colder months, the need for shelters is especially high, so it is also a critical time for the population we serve." More volunteers are always welcomed, especially during

Wintersession. All undergraduates are welcome to join the Y2Y team over the course of January to support their critical efforts.

With this being Flores' first time participating in Wintersession, she is looking forward to furthering her involvement in the Y2Y community. "Being involved in Y2Y has connected me to the most wonderful community, so I look forward to continuing this work over break. It is also a special time, as we have many new volunteers helping us out over break, so it will be great to see new faces involved in Y2Y," she commented.

In addition to Y2Y, the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter has volunteer options for any students looking to come back to campus early.

Apart from volunteer initiatives, the Office for the Arts at Harvard (OFA) hosts Wintersession programming each January. The 2024 workshops ranged from DIY terrarium building projects to the architecture of poetry. While the OFA has not yet posted their 2025 offerings, deadlines usually close around early January, and their available experiences should be uploaded onto their events calendar soon.

For any individuals not looking for formal programming but who are interested in arriving on campus earlier to re-adjust to Cambridge before classes resume, Harvard Athletics and Recreation (Harvard Rec) hosts a collection of events throughout the week. Similar to OFA, Harvard Rec has not yet posted its 2025 Wintersession engagements. However, here is a list of the 2024 offerings, and the 2025 programming will likely be added to the same page soon.

Harvard will be posting the full list of Wintersession programming for any undergraduates still looking to get involved. From public service to international trips, there are countless opportunities available to Harvard students looking to end their six-week-long Winter Recess with an extra week back on campus.

**SARA KUMAR '27 (SJKUMAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO PARTICIPATE IN A WINTERSESSION PROGRAM DURING HER TIME AT THE COLLEGE.**

**GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28**



# Harvard Versus Its Own: Trump's New Cabinet

Harvard alumni selected for Trump's cabinet have repeatedly clashed with the University.

BY SOPHIA GHAFOURI '27

The relationship between Harvard and two alumni appointed to key positions in Donald Trump's administration has been marked by tension and public clashes. R-NY Elise Stefanik '06 and Peter Hegseth '13 have criticized the University on multiple occasions, basing their criticisms on what they view as Harvard's liberal agenda.

Stefanik, nominated as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, played a prominent role in the hearing of former Harvard President Claudine Gay focusing on the investigation of antisemitism on campus. Stefanik fired a series of questions at Gay during the hearing, ending with a call for Gay's resignation.

"Two down. One to go." Stefanik wrote on X following Gay's official resignation, which Stefanik proudly took credit for, stating that "this accountability would not have happened were it not for the very clear, moral questions at the hearing."

When asked about the hearing and Stefanik's involvement, an anonymous Harvard freshman commented, "I do think that President Gay needed to resign. I think that her responses to Stefanik's questions were not okay, honestly, and I'm glad that the questions were direct enough to make the moral issues with how Harvard handled the conflicts on campus clear." However, the freshman opposed the skewed criticism directed at Gay's testimony. "I don't agree with how she spun it into this idea about Harvard's liberal agenda. The idea that what former President Gay said during her hearing had something to do with Harvard wanting to please the far-left, or whatever, I just think is just completely made up."

Intensifying her stance against the University, on Dec. 5, 2023, Stefanik wrote an article for *The Harvard Crimson* titled "Harvard Must Find Its Moral Clarity."

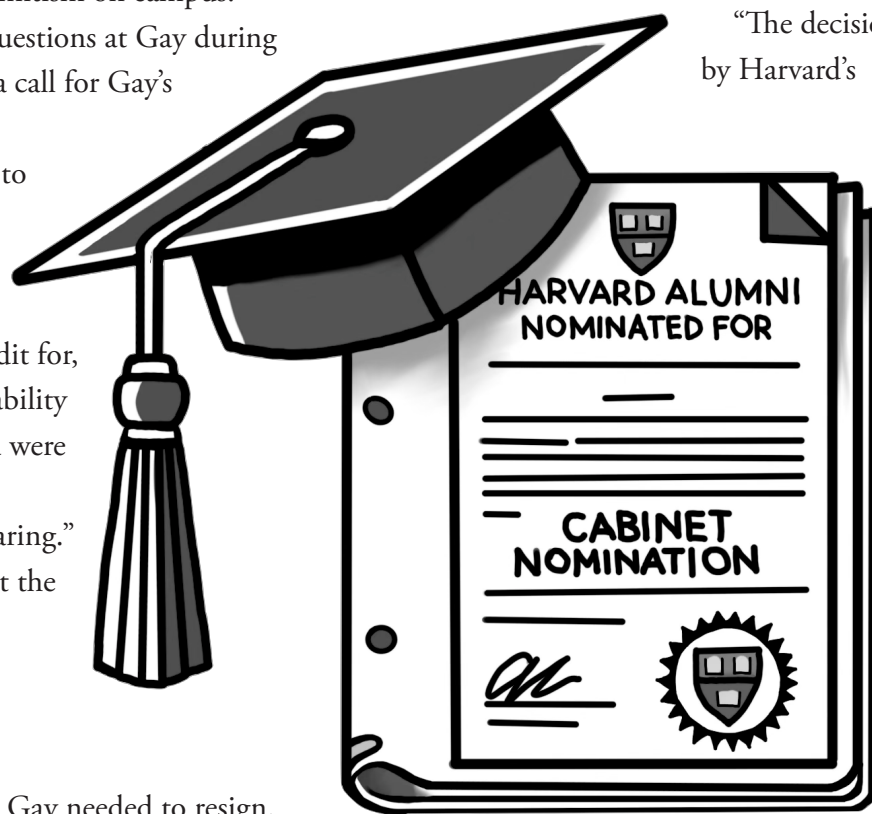
"Harvard University has been so corrupted by its apparent desperation to appease the far-left that its moral compass has been long forgotten," she wrote in response to protests regarding the Israel-Hamas war on Harvard's campus. "Harvard alumni and students are well aware that the University stifles free speech."

"I'm not surprised," the same Harvard freshman continued when asked about Stefanik's public statements against Harvard. "I think that people who are part of this office and who subscribe to Trump's agenda are necessarily going to put down institutions that

appear to disagree with them, or institutions that are more supportive of fact than fiction."

The Harvard community has previously explicitly expressed their disagreement with Stefanik, such as by removing her from the Harvard Institute of Politics' Senior Advisory Committee in 2021. Stefanik's removal was prompted by her actions following the 2020 presidential election, where the IOP pointed to her baseless claims about voter fraud and her inaccurate statements regarding related court decisions. Stefanik declined an initial offer from the IOP to step aside, at which point she was removed. Despite this, she called her removal "a rite of passage and badge of honor."

"The decision by Harvard's



administration to cower and cave to the woke Left will continue to erode diversity of thought," Stefanik wrote following her removal. "The Ivory Tower's march toward a monoculture of like-minded, intolerant liberal views demonstrates the sneering disdain for everyday Americans and will instill a culture of fear for students."

While the Harvard Institute of Politics may not have agreed with Stefanik's behavior, Stefanik is likely to be confirmed when Trump takes office, given the new congressional Republican majority.

Like Stefanik, Hegseth is no fan of his alma mater. In a Fox & Friends segment, the Harvard Kennedy School alumnus and Secretary of Defense nominee made a point of voicing his discontent, writing "RETURN TO SENDER" across his HKS diploma and "Critical Theory" University over "Harvard."

"I hope this is a statement that as conservatives and patriots, if we love this country, we can't keep sending our kids and elevating them to universities that are poisoning their minds," Hegseth said in the segment after destroying his diploma. "And I may have survived it, and thank goodness."

He continued, "But a lot of kids go there and buy into 'critical theory university,' and

that's how we get future leaders, Supreme Court Justices, Senators, others, who see America as an evil place. And Harvard is a factory for that kind of thinking."

Hegseth's tirade against Harvard has gone beyond the Fox & Friends segment. In his book *American Crusade*, he urges his readers to stop supporting the University, citing his reasoning as an inability to continue supporting Harvard's "leftist cause."

"I honestly think it's disappointing to see people like Hegseth who have been elected as leaders of our country denouncing the very place that helped them get where they are," said an anonymous Harvard junior. "I think that Harvard allows students the space to make their own decisions, and that idea that we're all brainwashed or being poisoned is just so far from the truth. I think I'm capable of forming my own opinions, and I know everyone else here is too."

Hegseth's confirmation prospects are less certain than Stefanik's. His nomination triggered immediate backlash, with critics pointing to his lack of experience and concerning history regarding his treatment of women. In 2017, Hegseth was accused of sexual assault, though no charges were filed due to insufficient evidence. While he was not formally prosecuted, a recent email from his mother written in 2018 uncovered by *The New York Times* shed new light on his potentially troubling behavior.

"You are an abuser of women — that is the ugly truth and I have no respect for any man that belittles, lies, cheats, sleeps around, and uses women for his own power and ego," Hegseth's mother wrote. "You are that man (and have been for years) and as your mother, it pains me and embarrasses me to say that, but it is the sad, sad truth."

She finishes the email with a sobering line, telling Hegseth: "On behalf of all the women (and I know it's many) you have abused in some way, I say... get some help and take an honest look at yourself." Following the publication of the email, Hegseth's chances of confirmation have sharply declined.

The ongoing conflicts between Harvard and its cabinet-nominated alumni, Stefanik and Hegseth, show no signs of slowing. With both potentially poised for prominent roles in Trump's administration, their criticisms of the University will likely remain in the public eye and continue to fuel further controversy.

**SOPHIA GHAFOURI '27 (SGHAFOURI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY ALLYSON XU '28**

# Furman Forecasts Trump's Second Term

Professor Jason Furman speculates on the economy under President-elect Donald Trump.

BY JONAH KARAFIOL '26 AND KALVIN FRANK '28

**H**arvard Kennedy School and College Professor Jason Furman '92 discussed the future of the American economy under President-elect Trump's second term at a panel this Monday.

The event was organized by the Charles River Economics Labs (CREL), a team of undergraduate pro-bono researchers. CREL co-presidents Julien Berman '26 and Abhay Duggirala '26 asked Furman questions about Trump's policy plans, particularly regarding tariffs and immigration. Throughout the talk, Furman drew on his experience as an economics professor and former chair of the Council of Economic Advisors under President Barack Obama.

Furman began by sharing what he described as his "metatheory about Trump," which segments Trump's proposed economic policies into three categories. The first category included policies that the stock market is sensitive to and responds to quickly, such as tariffs.

"Most of what we're going to talk about would be in that bucket there," Furman said. "My base case is that he will not do things that dramatically upset the stock market, and so for something like tariffs, he'll pull back quite a lot on it."

However, Furman still expressed concern about what Trump's proposed 25% tariffs on imports with an additional 10% on China would mean for the economy, pointing to two main consequences.

"Number one, you get less imports. That's obvious. The price of things goes up, obviously you buy less of them," Furman explained.

"The second is, you get less exports. There's two ways to think about that. One is the tariffs decrease the demand for foreign currency. That lowers the price of foreign currency, that raises the price of your currency. That's an appreciation of the dollar. And when the dollar appreciates, it's harder to do exports."

With this in mind, Furman proposed an alternate explanation for fewer exports using the example of the clothing industry. Under Trump's proposed tariffs, clothing imports would decrease due to increased prices. Domestic production of clothing would have to increase to meet American consumers' demands—this would require some manufacturers to switch from producing goods for export to producing goods for import.

The second category includes mainstream policies that the stock market is not sensitive to. "There's a bucket of things that the stock market doesn't care much about or might even like," Furman said. "Typical Republican deregulation, less emphasis on regulations for climate change, a smaller budget for what's called non-defense discretionary spending, mainstream Republican positions—I would expect all of that to happen."

The third category of policies hold little bearing on the stock market and are not mainstream, such as the nominations of Matt Gaetz (who later

withdrew) and Kash Patel to direct the Justice Department and FBI, respectively.

Furman then returned to his discussion of tariffs and how he expects Trump to act in the coming months. Furman speculated that Trump's propositions may be mere negotiating tactics and are unlikely to be enacted once he is sworn in.

"Now, when it comes to tariffs, there's two different models," Furman said. "One is he's just in a negotiating position, and you can act like a crazy person and win in negotiations, and you've already seen Justin Trudeau fly from Canada to meet him at Mar-a-Lago, and he's a brilliant negotiator, and we're not going to actually have all of this and the world will be fine."

The other model was not so optimistic.

"A second possibility, though, is that he had industrially looking at tariffs, and this is what gives me pause, and why I'm not certain the stock market is restraining him in the brilliant negotiator model when he says that other countries pay for the tariffs and Americans don't, I think he believes that when he thinks the world is zero-sum," Furman said. "And so on tariffs, you have this conflict between a deep-seated belief and a pragmatism stock market negotiation. I think the pragmatism stock market negotiation, for the most part, wins out, but 20-25% chance I'm wrong. And even in that scenario, I think we end up with tariffs above what I personally would have done, including pretty substantial tariffs on China."

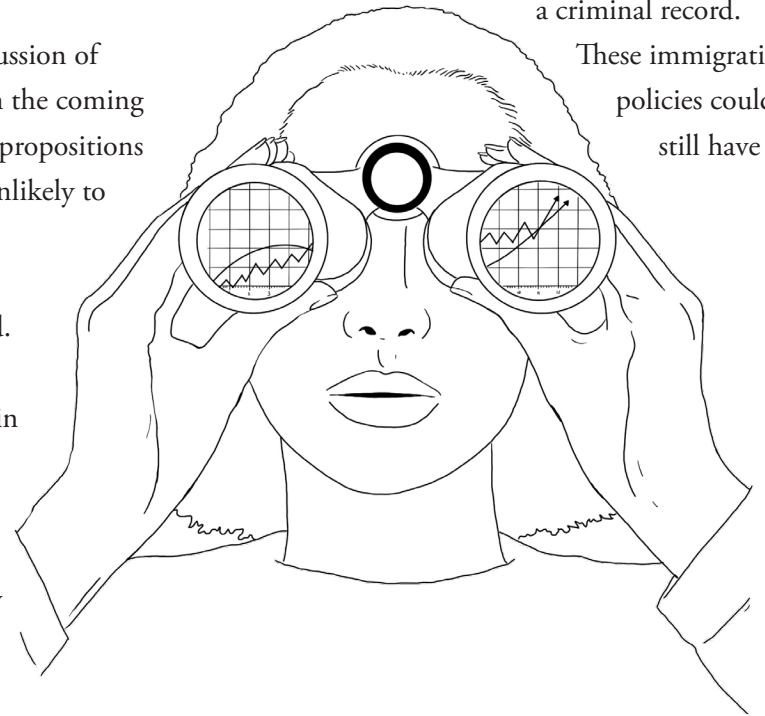
Furman pointed out that about half of U.S. imports consist of intermediate goods, which means that price increases will ultimately be passed on to consumers through higher costs for final goods.

Furman also discussed Trump's immigration policy and the economic impact it will have. Furman acknowledged that immigration has "been a big part of economic growth in the last couple of years." Regarding the impact of the Trump campaign's "mass deportation plan," he answered, "I think removing eight million people would—separate from my moral views on it, which are very, very strong—would trigger the stock market issue." Furman argues that taking eight million members of the U.S. workforce out of the U.S. economy would have big issues on Wall Street—an area which Trump often tries to cater his economic planning to support.

Despite Trump making repeated claims of mass deportations with him as president, this is unlikely to happen. Furman mentioned that Trump does not want to make a decision that will negatively impact the stock market. Removing that amount of people would have adverse economic effects, leading Furman to conclude, "I don't think that would happen." Instead, in Furman's perspective, there would be deportation targeting people with "criminal convictions," which, although it is a broad term,

generally means deporting illegal immigrants with a criminal record.

These immigration policies could still have



economic impacts on the broader U.S., but in Furman's opinion, "not at the scale" to impact the stock market.

Understanding what industries will be affected by a potential deportation plan is "tricky" because "immigrants build houses, but immigrants also need houses." In other words, immigrants grow the economy by helping build (supply) homes, but they also drive prices because they drive up demand for homes. Though challenging, Furman specifically pointed out the primary industries impacted by these immigration policies: housing, farming, construction, leisure, hospitality, restaurants, and retail.

Although Furman doubted much of Trump's economic and immigration plans, Furman was optimistic about Trump's promise to offer green cards to "foreign" students. "The future of AI in the United States versus China depends a lot on which direction he chooses to go with something like that." Furman believes that offering green cards to more immigrants with STEM degrees could have a big impact on domestic AI development by providing the labor force with an additional stream of skilled workers.

By the end of the talk, Professor Furman called for more comprehensive economic analysis—from both Democrats and Republicans.

"I have been quite disappointed, frankly, with the Biden administration, which I think has not done and released good analysis on a number of things they've done. And I could do chapter and verse if you wanted," Furman said. "I think the first Trump administration, and the Trump campaign, were not very good either." Furman is critical of both parties' history with economic analysis, and hopes for improvement upon it in the future.

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**EMBRACE FREE TRADE.**

**GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26**

# Starting School with a Start-Up

How Harvard students maintain (or not) the businesses they founded before college.

BY GEMMA MALTBY '27

Founding a start-up is undeniably hard, but some Harvard students undertake this monumental task before even setting foot on campus—whether to boost their applications, pursue a passion, or make some money. So what happens to these projects once students arrive and get settled at Harvard?

Harvard students have reported that many start-ups fizzle out as students take on heavier college workloads, put distance between themselves and their work, and develop new interests. Regardless, students agree that founding start-ups before college provided them with important lessons and inspiration for future endeavors.

Most start-ups start with a problem. For Clara Rohatyn '27 and her two peers with whom she founded Dear Me, it was noticing how friends discussed food and body image at her all-girls high school in New York City. They decided to take action by designing and implementing curricula about eating disorders in middle and high schools. Alternatively, Sage Shurman '27 heard about her nanny's struggles to navigate the healthcare system. Shurman responded by starting Covering with Care to help low-income California residents file for health insurance.

Despite the immense scale of these problems, Rohatyn and Shurman both felt they had the capacity and time to devote to addressing these issues while in high school. Daniel Villafuerte '27—who founded and sold multiple start-ups before college, including a wearable UV-ray detection technology and a Puerto Rico tourism app—similarly noted how much easier it was to find time to pursue these ideas in high school than at college.

"A lot of people in high school can focus 100% on something else other than school and still do well in high school," Villafuerte said. "But going to college, especially the most prestigious college in the U.S., Harvard, it's hard to work on something on the side, and then to also be competitive in school."

Ricky Rollo '27 started a sneaker resale business called Boston.Sole by sleeping outside sneaker shops the night before a new drop. After the pandemic forced storefronts to close, companies pivoted to

online drops, so Rollo began developing software to buy shoes as soon as they were released. Eventually, he accumulated enough capital to invest in shoes. Rollo pointed out, however, that this work took up a lot of time and mental capacity. It became near impossible to sustain when he started applying to colleges and eventually came to Harvard.

"After I got into college, I didn't really have the drive to finish selling off my inventory, so it kind of just died down, and it turned into more of a [collection]," said Rollo. "More fun, less business."

In addition to the time constraints Harvard students face, they must also contend with the distance separating them from the problems that once affected them so deeply. Rohatyn, for example, discussed the challenges of staying engaged with the mission of Dear Me while at Harvard.

"It's hard to stay connected, because it is based on education for middle and high schoolers," Rohatyn explained. She remembers that when she was in high school, and particularly after the pandemic, eating disorders and body image issues were a topic of conversation everywhere she went. Rohatyn said, "Every single day [I was] reminded about why I have to be doing this." However, at Harvard, she feels somewhat removed from the issue that once came up so frequently.

During her first year at Harvard, Rohatyn retained her position as Co-Director of Dear Me, but as a sophomore, she decided to step

down. Although her two co-founders remain co-directors, they are searching for the right people to pass the program on to. Shurman, too, is struggling to ensure that the work of Covering with Care continues. She tried to hand off her nonprofit to younger students at her high school without success.

"I don't think they were as personally invested in it, because they never really worked on it. I should have distributed the work better to get more buy-in. But what ended up happening was I just kind of did it all," Shurman said. "I'm not exactly sure what's happening to it, but I'm not running it anymore," she added.

Rollo and Villafuerte were more

comfortable letting go of the start-ups they founded before college. Rollo, along with the friends he worked with, gradually closed up his sneaker business to pursue other interests. Rollo now manages a small quant hedge fund called Exeter22, using sophisticated algorithms to buy and trade assets like stocks and commodities. "I graduated from the sneaker world into something a bit more professional," he explained.

For Villafuerte, scaling up a single start-up into a large business was never the goal—coming up with new ideas and laying the foundations for them to become a reality was the most satisfying part.

"I was never totally married to any of my ideas at the time. I just knew that I could move on from this and go into the next big thing," Villafuerte said. "You're young and kind of immature at the time, so you're not really looking to build something out and come up with this big company," he added. "You just kind of want to get the profit, get the money, and get out of it."

Irrespective of the fates of their endeavors, each Harvard student acknowledged the immense value of founding a start-up. "It empowers you," said Shurman. "If you see a problem and you think that you have a solution to it, and it's worked before, then you can expand. You can make it work again. And you can try to help more people in an efficient way."

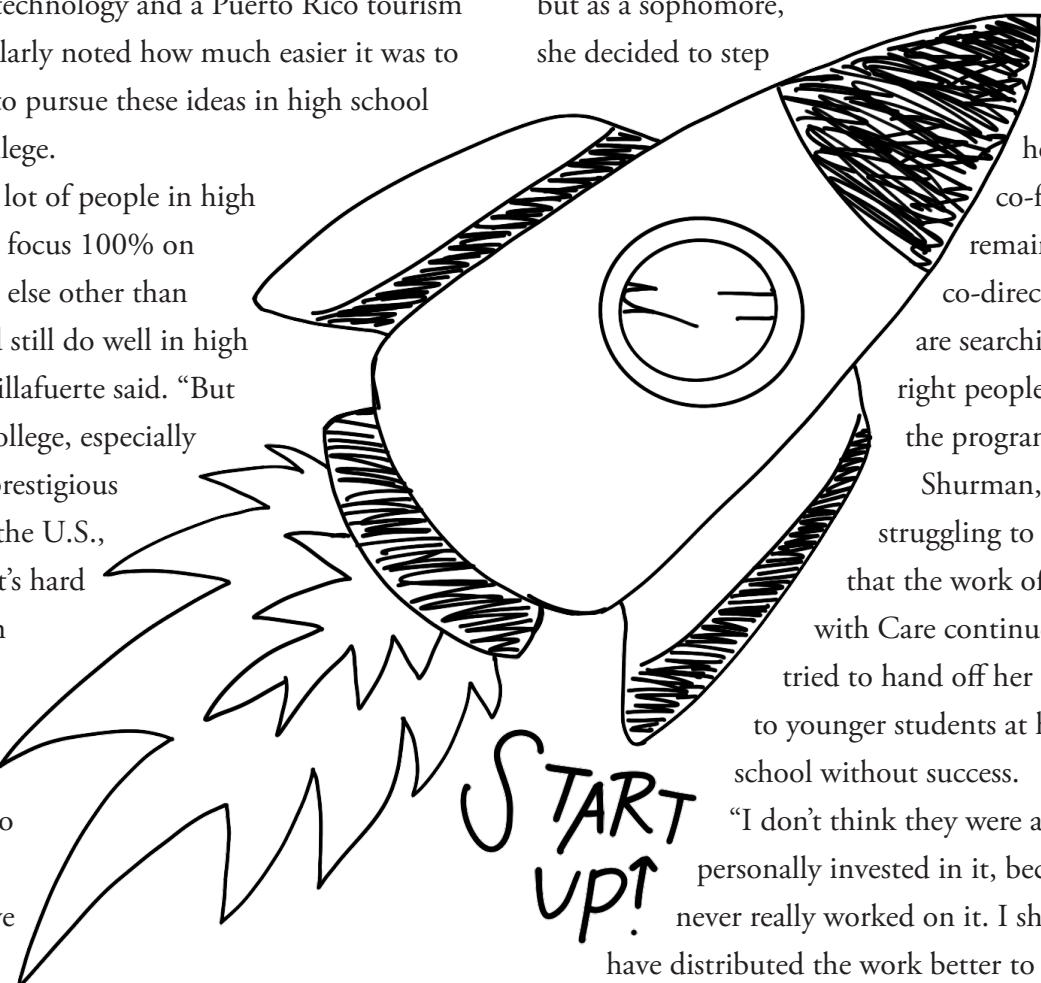
Rollo echoed Shurman's sentiments. "Each [start-up] leads towards another, and the lessons you've learned from one will definitely carry on towards the other." From his sneaker business, he learned the importance of developing interpersonal skills, working in a team, and, above all, taking risks; each of these lessons now inform his work in the investment space.

Villafuerte also shared his belief that working on start-ups enabled him to grow. "What I've learned the most is only pursue an idea if you're certain that even if everything fails, you still learn from it...and become a better person for it," he said.

The student-founders' work was not just fulfilling for themselves. Each made an impact on the lives of others, whether through bringing joy through shoes, sharing fun tourist sites around Puerto Rico, or raising awareness about affordable health insurance or eating disorders. Rohatyn summarized the goal of pursuing these projects. "As long as one person appreciates it, it's worth it."

**GEMMA MALTBY '27 (GMALTBY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WISHES SHE HAD A GOOD IDEA FOR A START-UP.**

**GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26**



# Traditions and Turmoil

A look into the history of celebrating Thanksgiving.

BY PIPPA LEE '28

Every Thanksgiving, millions of Americans gather around dinner tables to celebrate a holiday steeped in tradition and controversy. On the day of Thanksgiving at 8:00 a.m., an army of floats, balloons, and elaborate costumes marched down New York City's Central Park West. This year was the 100th anniversary of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, an annual event with significant ties to the American cultural tradition—around 3.5 million people view the parade live every year, and 30 million Americans watch it on television from home.

For many, Thanksgiving is a day of thanks, celebration, and quality time with family and friends. However, not everyone celebrates this holiday or embraces its meaning. For some, the holiday is a reminder of the centuries of American oppression and bloodshed against Native Americans.

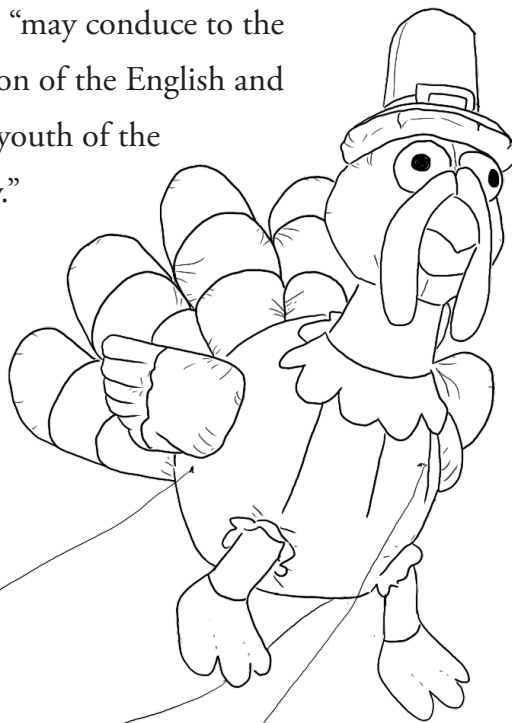
This past November, the Boston City Council adopted a resolution recognizing Nov. 28, 2024, as “National Day of Mourning” in Boston. Since 1970, Native American tribes across the United States have celebrated the National Day of Mourning (NDOM) in lieu of Thanksgiving. For the Wampanoag, the day is remembering Native Americans who have died due to European colonization and remembering the injustices—genocide, land theft, and poverty—that Native Americans faced due to European settlers.

“Thanksgiving Day is a reminder of the genocide of millions of Native people, the theft of Native lands and the erasure of Native cultures. Participants in National Day of Mourning honor Indigenous ancestors and Native resilience,” the United American Indians for New England's website reads. “It is a day of remembrance and spiritual connection, as well as a protest against the racism and oppression that Indigenous people continue to experience worldwide.”

The NDOM protest takes place every year, where people gather at Cole's Hill in Plymouth, Massachusetts, for marches and rallies.

However, the way that Harvard engages with the complicated legacy attached

to Thanksgiving is an ongoing discussion. Harvard has a long and complex history with Native American tribes. Harvard's campus is built on the ancestral land of the Massachusett tribe, the original inhabitants of what is now known as Boston and Cambridge. Native Americans have always been a part of Harvard's history. In the Harvard Charter of 1650, Henry Dunster specifically outlined that the College “may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of the country.”



In more recent years, Harvard has made efforts to rectify injustices experienced by Native Americans. In 2009, the College commissioned a painting of Caleb Cheeshahteumuck, the first Native American to graduate from the College. Alumnus Stephen Coit '71 finished the portrait, and it was placed in the Annenberg dining hall among other famous figures in Harvard's history. In addition, the University published and has continued to re-state a land acknowledgment. In 2019, the Harvard University Native American Program (HUNAP) Faculty Advisory Board members started a series of conversations with the Massachusetts Tribe to discuss the ways that HUNAP could honor the land that Harvard occupies and its continued ties to the Massachusett people.

In 2017, Harvard officially recognized both Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day on the University's calendar. In an interview with *The Harvard Crimson*, Ashley

N. Hamilton '20, a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, explained the significance of the renamed holiday for Native American students. “It's a celebration of our survival in that we're still here, thriving, even though it's not really known,” said Hamilton.

Several years after the official recognition in the school's calendar, in October 2023, Native American students at Harvard College and HUNAP co-hosted an Indigenous Peoples Day celebration in Harvard Yard. In the three-hour event, students served Native foods, recited poems, danced traditional Hula dances, and rapped. There was a keynote speaker in addition to an open mic where students shared their art, ranging from songs to poems, relating to their Native ancestry. The co-president of Native Americans at Harvard College (NAHC), Lena M. Tinker '25, described the meaning behind the event.

“Having a space where we're not just doing education and talking about Columbus and that particular history—where we actually get to bring our Indigenous

presence and celebrate our community and celebrate all of our stories in our very diverse community and ways of walking in this world as an Indigenous person—is really special,” she explained.

Harvard's efforts to engage with its history and support Native American communities reflect a growing acknowledgment of the complexities surrounding Thanksgiving. As celebrations and protests continue to intertwine, the holiday serves as a moment for both gratitude and accountability—a chance to honor traditions while confronting the complex narratives and legacies that shape them.

**PIPPA LEE '28 (PIPPALEE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27**

# Holding Space for Defying Expectations

Harvard first-years share what surprised them about the fall semester.

BY JULES SANDERS '28

It is impossible to ignore the outsized role of Harvard relative to other universities in the minds of people around the world. Its name evokes visions of *The Social Network*, *Legally Blonde*, and, as many first-years learn during orientation week, *Love Story*. Its hallowed place in the American psyche is compounded by over eight million tourists' trips to Harvard Square each year and the high quantity of applications Harvard College receives every application season—over 54,000 for that of the Class of 2028.

Of the 1,647 applicants who matriculated to the Class of 2028, many have had their expectations challenged by realities both unique to Harvard and endemic to all universities. Any scroll through the anonymous messaging app Sidechat will reveal what new aspect of university life has shocked students: “Tell me why it dropped 20 degrees over Thanksgiving break,” complained a user on Dec. 1. “Idk what it is about this place because I was so sure before I got here that it would be so easy for me to find a boy here who likes me. [B]ut that has not happened so far,” reads another post. Others' realizations have been more positive: “You'll have people who, I don't know, want to do something really math-like, or people who want to be an author,” said Ben Kaufman '28. “There's a whole range of strengths that people have.”

Harvard's broad course catalog offers first-year students the chance to develop old strengths and cultivate new ones, but the specific content and experience of each course often differ greatly from expectations. Kaufman is one of over 700 students enrolled in Economics 10A: “Principles of Microeconomics,” a common course for first-years currently taught by professors Jason Furman and David Laibson. The course's famous instructors and manageable workload typically attract hundreds of enrollees interested in finance, government, and statistics. “I knew that, in the past, there was this professor, Greg Mankiw, and he wrote this really famous economics textbook,” he stated. “But I wasn't expecting it to be a normal, intro econ class, and it basically is.”

Claire Michal '28 did not walk into Economics 10A with many preconceived notions. “I didn't really have a ton of specific expectations beyond [the course] being like your basic introductory economics class,” she stated. “I knew it was gonna be really big, so it's kind of lived up to the vibes of what a really big lecture class would be in my head.”

At the beginning of the semester, Kaufman also attended some lectures for Mathematics 55a: “Studies in Algebra and Group Theory,” which is well-known for

the extremely fast pace of its curriculum—it is one of the only courses at Harvard with its own Wikipedia page. However, Kaufman contested such claims. “I heard it's the most rigorous math class in the country; they do all this stuff. And I would say that that's probably true, but it's also pretty doable, so it's become kind of like a myth in recent years,” he said. “I feel like anyone with enough time and background can definitely do it.”

Isaac Hertenstein '28 felt that Harvard courses' difficulty did not differ greatly from what he envisioned. “I expected it to be academically rigorous and [that] it would test my abilities, particularly because I came from a less rigorous high school and did not have as strong a curriculum as many students coming here had in high school,” he explained.

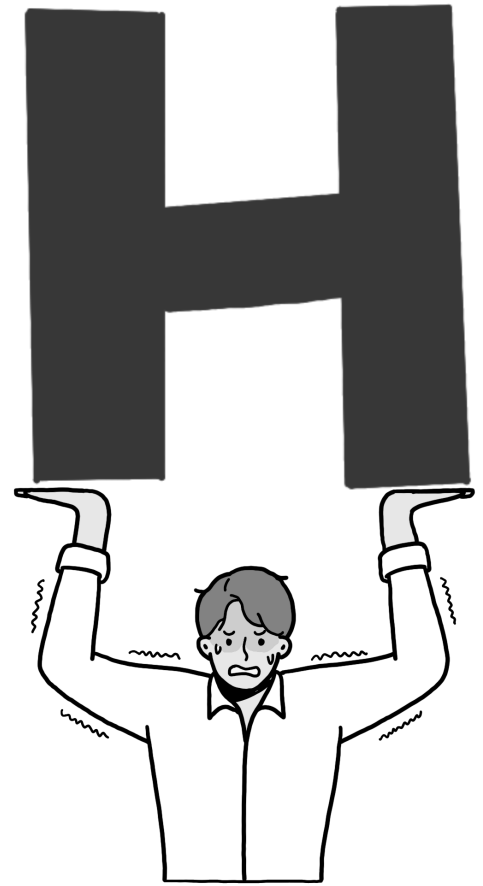
Professor Michael Sandel's General Education 1200: “Justice: Ethical Reasoning in Polarized Times,” boasts over 800 enrollees, including Hertenstein, who described his course load as “probably the most prototypical freshman schedule possible.”

“I would say the amount of class participation in ‘Justice’ sort of surprised me,” he said, discussing the course. “I knew it was a massive lecture-based class, but the level of engagement that I think Sandel effectively garners from his students is quite extraordinary.”

Michal identified General Education 1123: “Islam and Politics in the Modern Middle East” as her favorite course, something she did not envision it becoming. “I really liked my professor, Professor Zeghal. She is a really interested and engaging lecturer and clearly has such a thorough and researched and deep and nuanced perspective on the history that she's conveyed,” she explained. “I felt like we were able to really see thoughts develop and how different thinkers influenced each other and how movements grew.”

Kaufman drew special attention to discussion sections as a setting where his college experience significantly diverged from his secondary education. “People will ask this question, and I'm like, ‘I would have never thought of that,’” he recounted. “And you can just tell that people are passionate about what they're doing and they're actually interested, and also professors are facilitating discussion. And that's just an experience I didn't have in high school.”

Beyond the classroom alone, Harvard is renowned for the breadth of opportunities it offers its undergraduates, but it is often difficult for first-years to grasp just how far the Harvard name can go in attracting big-name speakers to campus. “I've had dinner, for example, with the former governor of Massachusetts, me and ten other students. I've met multiple Supreme Court justices or have heard



them speak,” Hertenstein said. “Being able to go and hear from world-renowned professors on a daily basis is pretty extraordinary, and while I knew it would be like that coming to Harvard, I didn't quite realize the extent of the opportunities.”

Harvard's social dynamics also surprised Hertenstein. “There are a lot more athletes and wealthy students and legacies and so forth who sort of operate or act in their own unique way that's different from other students who don't fall in those categories,” he said.

In contrast to Hertenstein, Michal said that socioeconomic divides were less visible on campus than she expected. “I didn't have a ton of expectations or assumptions coming into [the Harvard social scene],” she said. “I would say one of the main ones that I did have, that I think has been slightly challenged, was I anticipated the divisions on class or wealth lines, or private schools versus public schools, or kids that are from New York City all hanging out with each other. I expected some of these divisions, especially along legacy and wealth...to be a little more apparent than they are.”

Michal also expressed that she did not expect to find as encouraging a community as she did at Harvard. “I didn't anticipate people being rude or unkind or anything like that,” she clarified. “But I didn't anticipate feeling as warm and supportive and full as I thought.”

Surprises—both pleasant and unpleasant—are an unavoidable part of any new experience, but Harvard's global prominence can make the dissonance between expectation and reality harder to swallow. Movies and two-hour tours can only reveal so much.

**JULES SANDERS '28 (JULESSANDERS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT HIS CANADAY HALL HALLWAY SINGLE COULD COMFORTABLY FIT NO MORE THAN THREE PEOPLE AT ONCE.**

**GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26**



# From Harvard to New Hampshire

How nine Harvard students crossed state lines on foot.

BY WHITNEY FORD '28

While the rest of campus was curled up recovering from the previous night's escapades, one particularly ambitious group of Harvard students set out on foot, bright and early on Sunday, Nov. 17 with a clear destination in mind: New Hampshire.

For Asher Montgomery '26 and Uzma Issa '25, the idea for the adventure developed over a series of stages.

During a drive to the White Mountains in New Hampshire with the Harvard Outing Club last year, Montgomery realized that the border to New Hampshire is closer than one might expect, about 30 miles from Boston. A few months later, Montgomery and Issa were inspired by their studies on human evolution and bipedalism while studying abroad in Kenya and decided to turn Montgomery's observation into a plan.

Upon returning to campus this fall, they picked out a weekend for the trip, recruited some friends to come along, and identified a finish line: Mike's

Express Pizza, just across the border in Pelham, NH.

With the help of Google

Maps and some advice

from friends who had completed the walk

from Cambridge to

New Hampshire last

year, Montgomery

planned out the

route, starting

out on Massachusetts

Avenue and traveling along the Minuteman

Bikeway—a 10-mile railroad converted into

a commuter trail that closely mirrors Paul

Revere's historic ride that started the American

Revolution—before continuing north to the

New Hampshire state line.

At 6 a.m., the group of nine students assembled to begin their journey. The Minuteman constituted the first major

segment of the route for the walk. The group then traversed across the Narrow Gauge Rail Trail that stands on the path of the Billerica and Bedford Railroad that runs from the town of Bedford to North Billerica.

The first stop of the trip was Lexington, MA., where the group took their breakfast break, with some relying on food they had packed and others opting for Peet's Coffee or a local cafe.

Considering the daunting task ahead of them, the group found creative ways to provide entertainment during their walk. Issa recounted, "At a point when we were on the shoulder of the road, and we had to walk in a single file line, we were doing 'follow the leader' [and] silly little games to keep us entertained. At a point, they were all singing *Hamilton* for ten minutes."

After arriving in Billerica around 11 a.m., they made another stop at Liberty Bell Sandwich Shop to refuel, where Issa highly recommends the crispy chicken sandwich.

Continuing past Billerica, the carefully maintained and peaceful rail trails quickly gave way to bustling main roads.

Montgomery was particularly struck by the fact that there were no walkable

routes at this point.

"Some people were nice, and they would get into the other lane and move around us, but it's quite scary. You're walking in a line one behind the other, and there's no space for any walking to occur, and the only route for us to get to New Hampshire is on this road, and there are no sidewalks. There's no way for you to get to this place [on foot] in a safe way,"

Montgomery explained.

Nonetheless, the less-than-ideal conditions did not discourage her. "I don't think that should stop anyone from walking. I think that it just means the government should be making more sidewalks, or at least, people should be realizing that we still need walkable routes in these places."

Moving on, the trip proceeded without incident. They navigated the roads to reach Chelmsford Creamery in Chelmsford, MA, for a much-anticipated ice cream stop and their last break before passing through Lowell, MA, during the final stretch of the route.

Finally, seeing the *Welcome-Bienvenue to New Hampshire* sign in the distance, the group ran to cross the border into Pelham, New Hampshire, before marching up to the door of Mike's Express to mark the official end of their walk. After 30 miles, 10 hours, and two states since their 6 a.m. start, it is safe to say that the trip was an undeniable success.

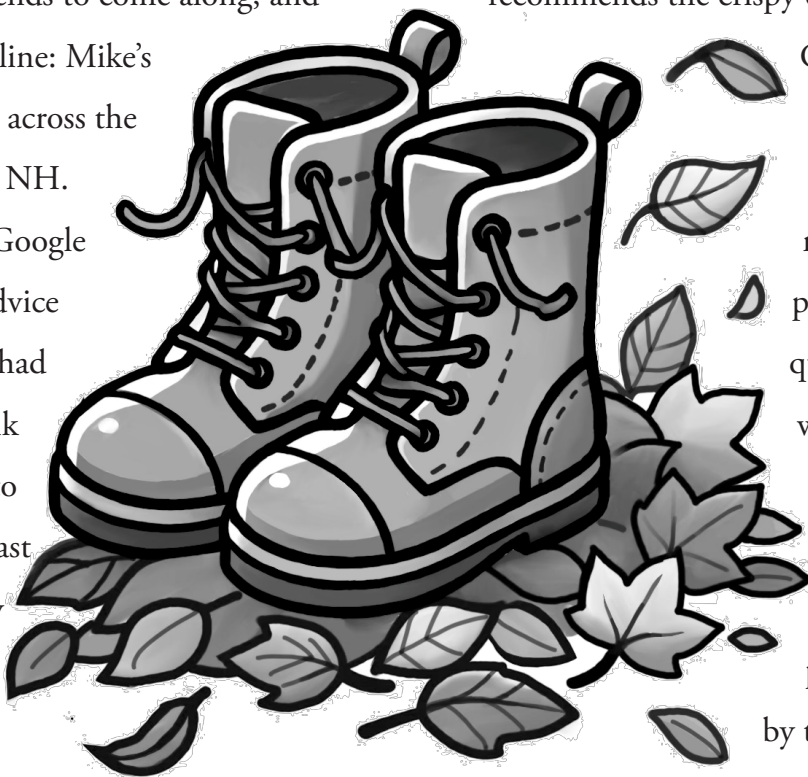
Looking back on the journey, Issa shared, "30 miles may seem scary, but I think a lot of it is your mental fortitude that gets you through it. And I think as long as people believe that they can do it, they can definitely do it. Just get a group together, get some water, a headlamp (in case), some snacks, and open your Google Maps."

Already looking forward to the next adventure, Montgomery is thinking of walking to Rhode Island in the future.

"I love for people to realize walking is so powerful, and it's so healing in many ways, and we were evolved to do it as humans—homo sapiens. That's why we differ from all of our ancestors, and that's an amazing thing to celebrate," she said. "Anytime people want to celebrate that more, I will be happy to give them a route."

**WHITNEY FORD '28 (WFORD@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ALWAYS UP FOR A GOOD WALK.**

**GRAPHIC BY ALLYSON XU '28  
NEWS | 9**



## Dawn Redwoods

The Fifth Treetise, on metasequoia and living ghosts.

BY AIDAN FITZSIMONS '25

I discovered the Dawn Redwoods the old-fashioned way: by walking a new path.

I'd been climbing my favorite tree in Harvard Yard, the Emerson Tree, looking out over the crisscrossing pathways in the yard between Sever and the gate facing the Art Museums. I wanted to walk towards the Littauer Tree near the Science Center, so I climbed down from my perch. Crossing the grass, in the exact direction of my longing, I intersected various social paths beaten by the ghosts of cows and students. To beat a less-trodden path is an individualizing act. These paths of desire collide with the world at a diagonal; what is encountered is always a new world.

Diagonally, I stumbled upon a grove of trees in a quiet corner of the Yard, between Robinson Hall, Memorial Church, and Canaday. Somehow, in all my years of climbing trees around Harvard, I had never truly noticed this grove. Looking around, I realized that not one, not two, but all five of these funky, flaky, light-reddish trees were eminently climbable. Easily grabbable branches lingered low on all of them, and these horizontal branches proceeded consistently towards the top in intervals never taller than myself.

Choosing the tree closest to Robinson, I swung myself in and lost myself climbing, following an instinctive flow of hands and feet upwards. Before I knew it, I was near eye-level with the roof of Robinson. The views of Memorial Hall, Memorial Church, and Tercentenary Theater were incredible. I could see a sliver of Emerson across the Sever yard; I started thinking of overlapping limbs. *There's an Emerson Tree, and there's a Robinson Tree. Philosophy and history, both trees. Trees of trees. The branching progress of ideas is a tree, a dialogue over time that develops organically. The diverging facts of the world's progress, and our evolving stories about this progress—these too are trees. They share a single trunk of trunks with us. Our roots go all the way down.*

The cold November wind, which had been strong as I climbed, blew harder and harder the higher I went. A strong gust blew, and the tree began wobbling like a flicked door-stopper. I held on tight with all four limbs, my torso wrapped around the trunk koala-style. The tree swayed in slow motion, but I was sure of its strength and elasticity. I felt exhilarated, waving as one with the tree and the wind.

John Muir, one of America's greatest nature writers, once described a similar experience atop a Douglas spruce during a winter windstorm in the Sierras. Swinging around, high off the ground, he too felt "no recognition of danger by any tree; no deprecation; but rather an invincible gladness as remote from exultation as from fear." Swaying in the wind, I felt rooted in the same faith as Muir, a faith in the strength of the Earth, the faith that a branch has in its trunk.

So there I was, on the edge of the tree of history, blowing around in the wind of the present.

Since that day, I've been visiting this grove of trees often, climbing each in turn, or just sitting underneath them to read *To the Lighthouse*, as I imagine other Harvard students have and will for many generations. In Virginia Woolf's masterpiece, she slightly rewrites a line from a poem called "Luriana Lurilee:" "And all the lives we ever lived / And all the lives to be / Are full of trees and changing leaves." In the original poem, published after the author's death, it says "full of trees and *waving* leaves." Woolf branches waving into changing, taking a ghost in a new direction. Relatedly, Muir describes trees as travelers just like us: "our own little journeys, away and back again, are only little more than tree wavings—many of them not so much."

Turns out, these particular trees have a fascinating history. They're *metasequoia*, known colloquially as dawn redwoods. They are the only living branches of the redwood family besides *sequoia sempervirens* and *sequoia gigantea*.

*Sempervirens* are the coast redwoods of Northern California and Southern Oregon, the tallest trees on earth, who suck the fog right out of the cool Pacific air. This summer, I spent weeks pursuing a mission to touch the single tallest tree in the world, a mission I completed barefoot, wading up a forbidden creek illegally. *Gigantea* are the giant sequoias of the western slopes of the Sierras, the *largest* trees on earth, who adapted to frequent wildfires. I remember waiting for the tourists to finish their pictures and clear out so I could hop a fence, run to the largest tree in the world, and wrap my arms around it.

But metasequoia are far older than their famous cousins in California. Metasequoia flourished across the northern hemisphere during the Cretaceous period, the time of tyrannosaurs. They stretched from Asia to the northern islands of Canada. Only known by fossils, these ancestral sequoias were long thought to be extinct, until living specimens were discovered in China during the 1940s. Harvard's Arnold Arboretum funded an expedition of Chinese collectors to gather seeds, which were soon sent all over the world. Some were planted here, next to the history building. These 'living fossils' were widely lauded as one of the greatest discoveries in 20th-century botany.

PHOTO BY AIDAN FITZSIMONS '25



The living fossils carry living seeds. It turns out that they grow quite well in this cold climate, and this is the perfect time of year to collect metasequoia seedpods if you'd like to grow them yourself. The giant sequoia seedpods, like the one tattooed on my ankle, only open when they feel fire; they're pyrophytes. They belong in the dry west. But their metasequoia predecessor has flourished here in the wet east, creating what is probably the best grove of climbable trees anywhere at Harvard. It's surprising, what of the Old World will take root in the New. So much of the story of America is this story of various Wests folding themselves back upon the East, making themselves at home in the changing garden.

As I've returned to the dawn redwoods, their green needle leaves have orange. They're deciduous, unlike their cousins. They remind me of British Columbia's larches, but darker. It's interesting how the metasequoia's outside change, while their basic organic structure has remained practically static across the millions of years that the ancestors of California's sequoias spent evolving. They aren't just living fossils; they're evolutionary ghosts, frozen adaptations to a former time.

Late one night, after returning from

Thanksgiving, I walked from the Science Center Plaza into the yard through the Meyer Gate. Next to the gate is an inscription from one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's journals, written after a "College Jubilee" in the Yard: "Cambridge at any time is full of ghosts; but on that day the anointed eye saw the crowd of spirits that mingled with the procession in the vacant spaces, year by year, as the classes proceeded; and then the far longer train of ghosts...the long winding train reaching back into eternity." I walked through the gates, past Canaday, and made my way to the Robinson Tree. I climbed it in the bright dark. At a high perch, I sat in silence wrapped around the still tree. This time, there was no wind. I saw not a single living soul anywhere in the Yard. In the emptiness, I could feel the echoes of Harvard's ghosts.

Imagine seeing Harvard across time and space. Ghosts fill Tercentenary Theater and commence in all directions. They gather in the church and disperse through the library stacks. Ghosts anastomose like the silhouettes of a tree-branch canopy net while the sun sets. Snail trails of evolution, snail trails of cumulative culture, snail trails of the self slither across Harvard Yard. And at the end of all

these ghostly paths, my warm breath fogged in the still night air at the final hour of this November.

Harvard Yard is a palimpsest of history. Overlapping layers of trees, buildings, and people have come and gone, leaving their beaten paths for us to follow and stray from. All these ghostly paths of the past are like metasequoia of the self; they are living fossils, ancestors whose presence reminds us that we are not alone. Historians, like those names adorning Robinson Hall, made it their lives' work to collect and crystallize the ghosts of the past so that we can live a fuller present. Our stories descended in spirit from these thick ghosts—we are their waking dream. Now, every possible path branches from us. One day our own ghosts will fiber the living. I hope we leave good paths to follow; I hope future Harvard students climb these trees even higher, overlapping my own vertical ghost. I hope our seeds grow as long and as large as giant sequoias.

**AIDAN FITZSIMONS '25 (AIDAN\_FITZSIMONS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ROMANTICIZES A NEW PLANT ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR.**



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# Whose Home for The Holidays?

How being a child of divorce can complicate your definition of family in the holiday season.

BY ANONYMOUS

**D**ec. 24, 2020, 11:47 p.m. On my fourth listen of “Snowman” by Sia, I am finally able to scrawl out the phrase I never thought I would write on a tear-stained piece of paper: *Please let them be divorced by next year.* While my dramatics may have been augmented by general teenage angst, the root of my pain was clear: the holidays magnify family issues.

That Christmas was the last one my parents spent “socially” married. By 2021, they were separated, and by 2023, divorced. Growing up, I never imagined that I would be a “two-Christmases” kid. Even now, it is hard to call divorced-dad Christmas a real Christmas when I compare it to the well-decorated and delicious-food-filled holidays my mom put on. But the past few years have taught me how to redefine family and find joy in my surroundings.

Before the divorce, our Christmases were reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell Saturday Evening Post cover. On Christmas Eve, we hosted dozens of cousins, aunts, and uncles, sang carols, and snacked on meticulously decorated cookies in our decked-out living room. With a house brimming with holiday spirit and familial love, it was hard for Christmas to not be the most wonderful time of the year for me. So, how did a holiday symbolic of good tidings become an omen of family drama?

I’ve realized the answer lies in the weight of expectations. The first year of two separate

Christmases, I assumed that my dad would still host his family on Christmas Eve, allowing me to see my cousins. After the evening at dad’s, I planned to drive six hours to spend Christmas Day with my mom’s side. I thought I could have it all, but that day I learned a fundamental lesson about having divorced parents: you can’t. There is always a tradeoff.

Off the bat, no one should spend six hours in the car on Christmas. But when I was devastated to learn that my cousins were not planning to come to my dad’s that year, I chose to leave my dad’s early and drive the six hours to my mom’s on Christmas Eve instead. Tears welled up in my eyes as I embarked on the journey, knowing I had let my dad down. He had made it clear how upset he was at me, and I had chosen my feelings over his when I decided to leave early.

Looking back, I give myself grace: who can blame my 18-year-old self for wanting to be with her mom, grandparents, and all of her siblings instead of just her dad? I had half-jokingly told my dad that I wanted to see my mom because she was a better cook, but truthfully, I knew the entire event would be more enjoyable because of the love and care my mom puts into creating a fun and festive holiday. I reasoned that it was not my responsibility to protect my dad’s feelings when it was his failed marriage that had led to this situation in the first place. I had to let go of the need to be a perfect daughter and instead choose my own happiness. I focused on finding joy in spending time with family, even if it was in an unconventional way.

Finding joy in the holidays now looks a little different given who I spend them with. There is no longer a debate about where I go for the holidays: I am always with my mom, siblings, and grandparents. Because of differences between my siblings and dad, I choose to be with my siblings and forgo the traditions of Christmas past. The thought of shrinking holiday celebrations from thirty people to fewer than ten seems intimidating, but in practice, this was never the case. My family has found that friends are just as important to spend

time with during these special moments of the year.

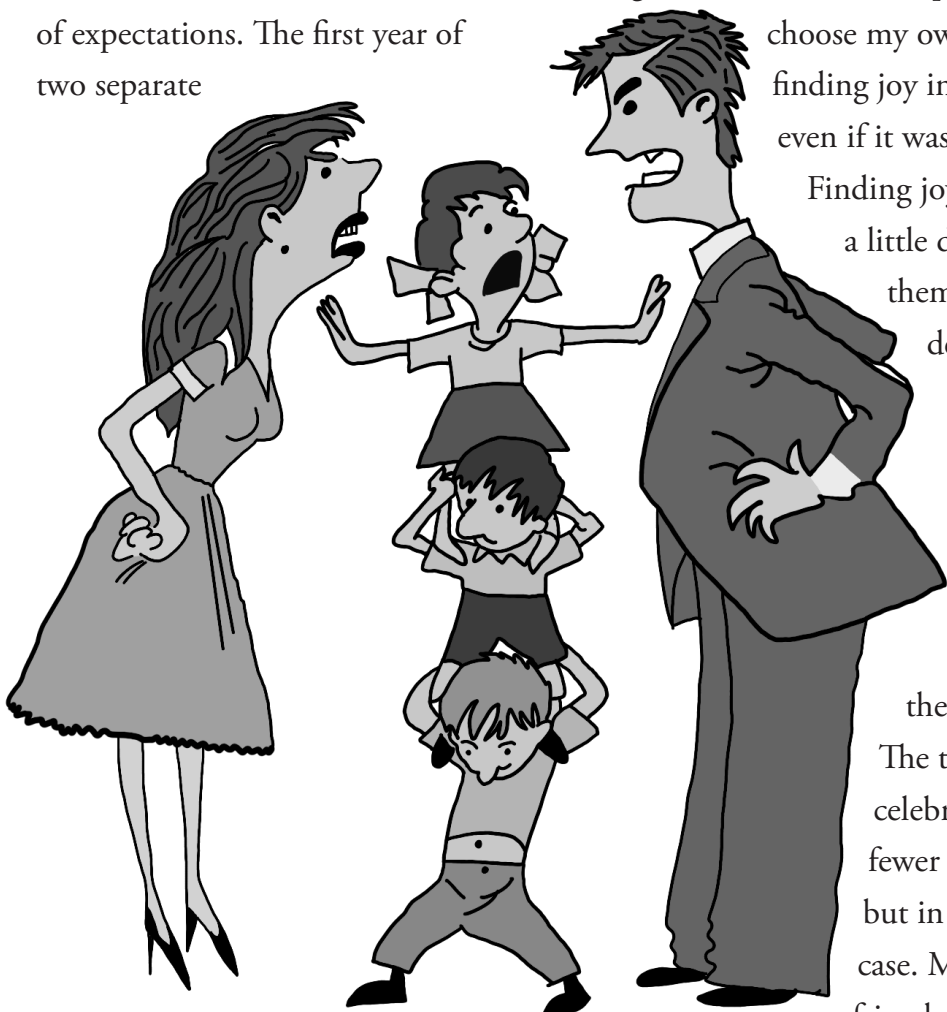
My mom, siblings, and I now break bread with three other families on Thanksgiving, which has led to more raucous and fun holiday celebrations than I had ever experienced. The parents of these families know me better than some of my aunts and uncles from my dad’s side, and their kids were raised like cousins with me. For Christmas Eve, my mom, siblings, and I still have a bash, but again, we’ve swapped blood family for friends who feel like our kin. Our dinner menu has been elevated from the same chili my paternal uncle used to always bring, but I still make picture-perfect Christmas cookies.

Holidays are meant to be spent with the ones that you love. Sometimes that means your family—but not always. The saying “blood is thicker than water” is often misinterpreted to mean family should come before friends, but few know that the full idiom is “the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb,” meaning that the relationships we have chosen are more significant than those we have inherited through our family. Holidays spent with friends instead of family are not any less important or less right than a traditional holiday spent with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Without blood relations, we must actively choose our friends, so to choose to spend time together on the most important days of the year is to reaffirm that we have chosen them to be important in our lives.

If you had told me five years ago that my holidays would be spent with friends over family in a place far away from my childhood home, I would have been shocked. Yet even in this new format, my love for this time of the year does not waver. Although the holidays once symbolized familial divides for me, they now represent the strength of my friendships and family bonds. They remind me that we have the opportunity to create our own happiness through the people we choose to spend our time with, and these relationships make every time of the year wonderful.

**ANONYMOUS IS EXCITED TO BAKE DOZENS OF COOKIES FOR LESS THAN TEN PEOPLE THIS CHRISTMAS.**

**GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26**



# Does Democracy Matter?

What's next for democracy after the 2024 election.

BY JAI GLAZER '27

In theory, above all else, the United States is supposed to function as a democracy. Yet, despite this foundational ideal, the 2024 election showed a stark disconnect between America's democratic values and the priorities of its voters. While 73% of voters agreed democracy was under threat, only 34% considered it as the most important issue influencing their vote. In contrast, 32% prioritized the economy, and 14% focused on crime. These statistics show that almost 40% of the electorate knew democracy was a major issue, yet did not care enough to make it a priority. For many Americans, the fight for democracy, however crucial, simply doesn't feel as urgent as their everyday struggles.

While I am fairly centrist politically, having lived my whole life in reliably blue areas, I've been exposed to many liberals who can't quite understand why former and recent president-elect Donald Trump ever gained traction in the first place. Members of my own family see Trump's greatest flaw as his disregard for the rule of law and conventional governmental processes that they view as crucial to upholding democracy. Yet, this perspective overlooks the grievances and frustrations of the majority that propelled Trump to power, rooted in economic insecurity, cultural alienation, and a deep mistrust of traditional political elites. For many of his supporters, Trump's willingness to break the rules isn't a flaw—it's a positive trait, a symbol of his promise to disrupt a system they believe has failed them.

Trust in political institutions has been in freefall over the past several years, with less than 20% of Americans saying they trust Congress to do what is right "most of the time." *And why should they?* Both political parties have focused their messaging primarily on discrediting the opposition and portraying them as un-American, rather than addressing the issues that directly impact the American people.

Just this past election cycle, Republicans argued that a Harris win would plunge the country into socialism and far-left social policies, while Democrats said that a Trump win would bring fascism to the United States. In the closing days of the election, some of Trump's campaign ads featured "Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you." By contrast, the constant hyperbolic rhetoric from the left-leaning media around President Trump reached a point where he survived multiple assassination attempts over two months. The divisive nature of today's political rhetoric has led to consequences that harm both political figures as well as groups of people caught in the crossfire. Given the high level of tension between the two parties, it's

understandable that uniting the country around a set of ideals crafted over 200 years ago—by individuals who governed a nation with a population of roughly 1% of what it is today—would be a difficult task.

The Democratic Party's 2024 strategy, which focused on portraying Donald Trump as a liar and an existential threat to democracy, ultimately backfired. It failed to connect with voters who were more concerned with issues like inflation, stagnant wages, and rising crime. Despite only 42% of Americans describing Trump as honest, many voters dismissed these concerns as irrelevant to their daily struggles.

On the other hand, Trump's Republican campaign focused on framing Democrats as out-of-touch elites preoccupied with identity politics and abstract ideals. CNN anchor Abby Phillip '10 remarked during a conversation at the Institute of Politics' JFK Jr. Forum that the election reflected voters' sentiments of: "Enough, this doesn't matter as much to us." Trump's ability to connect with voters' lived experiences, alongside a Republican strategy capitalizing on economic and cultural anxieties, proved far more effective than the Democrats' reliance on moral arguments and appeals to democratic ideals.

For many Americans, cries that Trump rejects democratic principles fall on deaf ears. As David Axelrod, a prominent CNN contributor, exclaimed, "If you are talking about democracy over the dinner table, it's probably because you don't have to worry about the cost of the food on your dinner table." Rising costs of living, stagnant wages, and widening inequality have left many Americans feeling that the system serves a select few, cast as the "liberal elite" by the Republican Party. For the Democratic Party, which spent the Trump era trying to position itself as the "normal" political party, this has proved detrimental.

These economic frustrations are compounded by cultural alienation, as rapid social changes leave some voters feeling excluded or even attacked. For these Americans, democracy seems like an ineffective tool to address their problems. This disillusionment is why appeals to protect democratic norms fail to resonate: those norms haven't delivered for them. Instead, voters feel empowered by leaders who espouse disruption, even if it comes at the expense of democracy itself. Trump's appeal lies in his ability to harness and direct this frustration, positioning himself as a fighter for those who feel left behind by the political establishment.

When democracy no longer feels relevant, voters become more willing to support leaders with authoritarian tendencies if they believe it will lead to better outcomes. Trump's voters don't care that he flouts norms, undermines institutions, and consolidates power—in

fact, they reward him for it as long as he promises to deliver on the issues voters care about most. This trajectory is dangerous, not just for the United States, but for democracies worldwide. A system built on checks and balances cannot survive if its participants no longer believe in its legitimacy. Yet, reversing this trend requires more than defending democracy as an abstract ideal. It demands tangible proof that democracy can improve lives, address economic challenges, and bridge cultural divides.

While Trump may not respect democratic ideals as much as previous presidents, his campaign promised to address the concerns that mattered most to voters during this election: economic instability, public safety, and healthcare access. Yet, these issues should transcend partisanship and be addressed within a democratic framework. They are shared challenges that affect all Americans. Ironically enough, despite his cultivated persona as a political outsider, Trump's messaging is the same sort leaders should use to restore trust in the system: focusing on policies that deliver real results. Trump's misstep lies in his aversion to fostering a collaborative political culture over a partisan one.

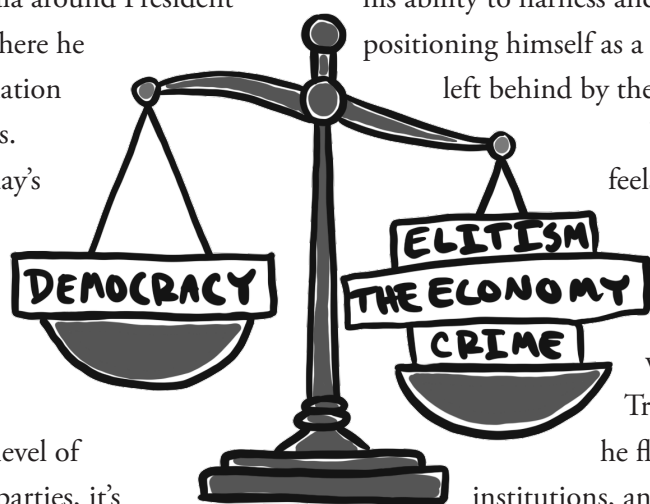
Both parties must step back from hyperbolic attacks and work toward finding common ground. While it is unrealistic and counterproductive to completely abandon ideological differences, they must be framed as debates within a shared commitment to governance instead of existential battles for the country's identity.

The media also plays an important role. By amplifying stories of bipartisan success, highlighting issues that unite rather than divide, and eliminating partisan biases, media outlets can help shift the national conversation away from outrage and toward solutions. Social media platforms, in particular, must take responsibility for the role they play in polarizing the electorate. While divisive rhetoric on hot-button issues ultimately yields greater viewership and clicks, the political future of the country needs to take precedence over profit margins.

The 2024 election revealed a hard truth: for many Americans, democracy feels like an abstract ideal that does not compare to the challenges they face in their daily life. This adversity is not without cause, but it is not irreversible. By focusing on the issues that matter most and rebuilding trust in institutions, the United States has an opportunity to restore faith in its democratic system. By addressing the root causes of disillusionment, America can reclaim its democratic ideals and ensure they remain a guiding force for generations to come.

**JAI GLAZER '27 (JGLAZER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) DOESN'T LOVE TRUMP BUT THINKS THE CLIPS FROM THE APPRENTICE ON TIKTOK ARE ACTUALLY PRETTY ENTERTAINING.**

**GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27**



# From Dusty Shakespearean Relic to Radical Reinvention

A beautiful, reckless, and painful *Romeo & Juliet*.

BY TODD BIDA '87

In the arts, there are rare moments when innovation, vision, talent, and collaboration converge to redefine the creative landscape—watershed moments that signal new eras. In 1920s Paris, Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas helped shape the Modernist movement in their salon. In 1947, Marlon Brando's Broadway performance in *A Streetcar Named Desire* marked a transformative leap for American theater. So too, the recent Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club (HRDC) and Hyperion Shakespeare Company production of *Romeo & Juliet* was more than a milestone at Harvard—it was a breakthrough that dared to reinvent a classic. With bold experimentation, visceral performances, and a fearless embrace of interdisciplinary artistry, this production transcended expectations, setting a new standard for what theater can achieve, and has challenged the very essence of how we experience Shakespeare.

Directed and co-choreographed by Adrienne Chan '25, it was not a typical retelling. Quite differently, it achieved Chan's aspirations of embodying the spirit of "gesamtkunstwerk"—a total artwork—to reimagine the familiar: blending choreography, storytelling, and design into a profoundly moving whole—like no Shakespeare we've seen before.

Paris: A Crucible of Reinvention  
1920s Paris—a city alive with creativity and bold ideas, home to Jean Cocteau, Josephine Baker, Man Ray, Cole Porter, and F. Scott Fitzgerald—was a haven for boundless creativity and free thinking. There, limitations dissolved, collaboration and innovation flourished, and the avant-garde thrived, uniquely redefining what art could be.

Gertrude Stein's salon at 27 Rue de Fleurus in the 6th arrondissement was a pivotal force in this creative upheaval. Her gatherings brought together some of the most daring artists and thinkers of the early 20th century—all willing to push

against the constraints of their mediums. In her salon, Picasso and Matisse debated the essence of form, Hemingway and Joyce explored the frontier of narrative language, and Duchamp challenged the very definition of art itself. It was a catalyst for reimagining creativity—where Cubism, Fauvism, literary modernism, and new conceptual art converged and took off, a spirit vividly captured in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, which brings to life the dynamic energy and cultural revolution of 1920s Paris.

This *Romeo & Juliet* embodied that same creative audacity and dared to defy expectations. Like Gertrude Stein's salon, which fostered unbounded imagination and bold reinvention, this production sought new paths, pushed beyond the familiar, and forged a powerful, intimate connection with each audience member—pulling us deeper into the narrative and inviting a fresh, urgent perspective on Shakespeare.

Chan and her co-choreographer Jimena Luque '25 used Shakespeare's text as a launchpad, transforming familiar narratives into something startlingly new. They broke the story apart and breathed new life into it. They challenged conventions, forged new connections, and created a space where love, rage, hope, and grief felt raw and immediate.

Just as Gertrude Stein's salon fostered radical collaboration and boundary-dissolving ideation, Chan and Luque's production also bridged artistic forms, drawing from an eclectic mix of dance styles—from Afro-Peruvian motifs to Andean folkloric rhythms—to shape a movement language that transcended traditional storytelling. We had no choice: in their presence, Shakespeare became a living, breathing force capable of connecting us to our most human selves, and not just a literary relic of the past.

Chan and Luque's *Romeo & Juliet* blazes a trail of bold reinvention, an example of the boundless possibilities when tradition

meets courageous exploration—exploration that acknowledges fear, yet pushes forward regardless, transforming hesitation into artistic breakthroughs. It celebrates the spirit of collaboration, of art that not only reflects life but transforms it, inviting us to question, to feel, and to rediscover the extraordinary within the familiar.

## Reinvention Demands Courage

It's often the intensity of unrestrained emotion that sparks transformation. Marlon Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* shocked audiences with its raw realism in 1947, shattering the polished veneer of the traditional acting of that generation and those that came before. Brando's performance redefined acting—and the audience's role too, making them complicit in the rawness of the experience.

Brando's performance marked a definitive turning point away from a Hollywood defined by the charm and polish of actors like Cary Grant—into an age of deeply immersive, emotionally volatile performances that broke from tradition. Brando embodied the character's primal, flawed humanity, turning acting from a stylized craft into a visceral confrontation with truth. This paved the way for subsequent "Method" actors to inhabit their roles by fully immersing themselves in a character's emotional and psychological state, "living" the character, to create a deeply authentic performance.

Chan and Luque's *Romeo & Juliet* delivered a transformative jolt, redefining theatrical storytelling with Brando-like raw intensity and fearless artistry, and in doing so has opened up new creative possibilities for theater at Harvard and beyond.

In the hands of its two leads, Sachiko Kirby '26 and Elio Kennedy-Yoon '25, this production radiated a raw intensity, unfiltered and strikingly authentic. Their performances claimed Shakespeare for us, for today, with emotion and authenticity taking center stage. Like Brando's

Kowalski, Kirby and Kennedy-Yoon broke down the barriers between actor and audience, revitalizing the text into a visceral portrayal of the human condition that demanded attention and connection.

It was clear that Kirby and Kennedy-Yoon were not just acting; they were living, feeling, and daring us to join them in their journey. Their embodiment of young love crackled with energy—overflowing with an honesty that refused to be diluted and an intensity that commanded presence. It was a fearless confrontation with the peaks and valleys of human experience, making Shakespeare's characters undeniably real.

Kirby's Juliet, rooted in fierce independence, redefined the character as a force of modern autonomy. Kennedy-Yoon's Romeo, infused with disarming optimism and emotional openness, reflected the courage required to hold on to hope in uncertain times. Together, they embodied the core of the production—an unapologetic celebration of love and loss as transformative forces, redefining the possibilities of theater.

### A Collaborative Vision Realized

This production was far more than the sum of its parts—it was a testament to gesamtkunstwerk, where every contributor plays an integral role in bringing a bold artistic vision to life.

The cast, a dynamic blend of Harvard and other students, delivered extraordinary energy, with performances deeply connected to the narrative that dissolved the line between acting and storytelling. The set, costumes, lighting, and makeup helped this all fit seamlessly together. The sound design subtly underscored pivotal moments—not too big, not too small, not too loud, not too soft...just right—blending tension with Prokofiev's vivid and lyrical music, reinforcing the emotional arcs of the story.

Behind the scenes, precision must have aligned nearly perfectly with creativity. The result that wowed all of us points to seamless integration of stage management, dramaturgy, and production coordination, to give us all a performance that felt flawless.

This dynamic collaboration collectively brought Chan and Luque's vision to life, creating an electrifying, immersive experience that made *Romeo & Juliet* feel vibrantly alive and undeniably painful.

### Shaking the Dust Off Shakespeare: A Revolution in Storytelling

For centuries, *Romeo and Juliet* has endured countless retellings—beautiful and grand, yet often perfunctory productions that fail to ignite the raw human spark at the play's core. Too often, audiences leave unmoved, the language lofty, the tragedy distant. But Chan and Luque's *Romeo & Juliet* shattered these expectations. It wasn't merely performed—it was lived. It bled, breathed, and insisted its audience feel every moment of its urgency and humanity.

In the production's program, Chan described this project as one of her 'heartbeat ideas,' filling her with an indescribable rush of hope, fear, risk, and longing to create something where every element, from choreography to costumes, stands as a masterpiece in its own right. Each of these pieces are essential to the whole—reinventing what Shakespeare could mean to a 21st-century audience. Through its bold creativity and unrelenting immediacy, the production awakened *Romeo and Juliet*, bridging centuries to connect with the audience through its raw, unrestrained humanity.

### Liberating The Classic

Chan and Luque dared to liberate Shakespeare of its dusty conventions, leaving us with a raw, visceral embodiment of the human spirit. They reanimated Shakespeare's work with an immediacy that made it pulse with new life. As Chan shared in the production's program: "There is nothing more liberating than the earnestness of dance, and only with this earnestness can I navigate the wind and weather of being human. Only with liberation can we love and live as we deserve to, and will."

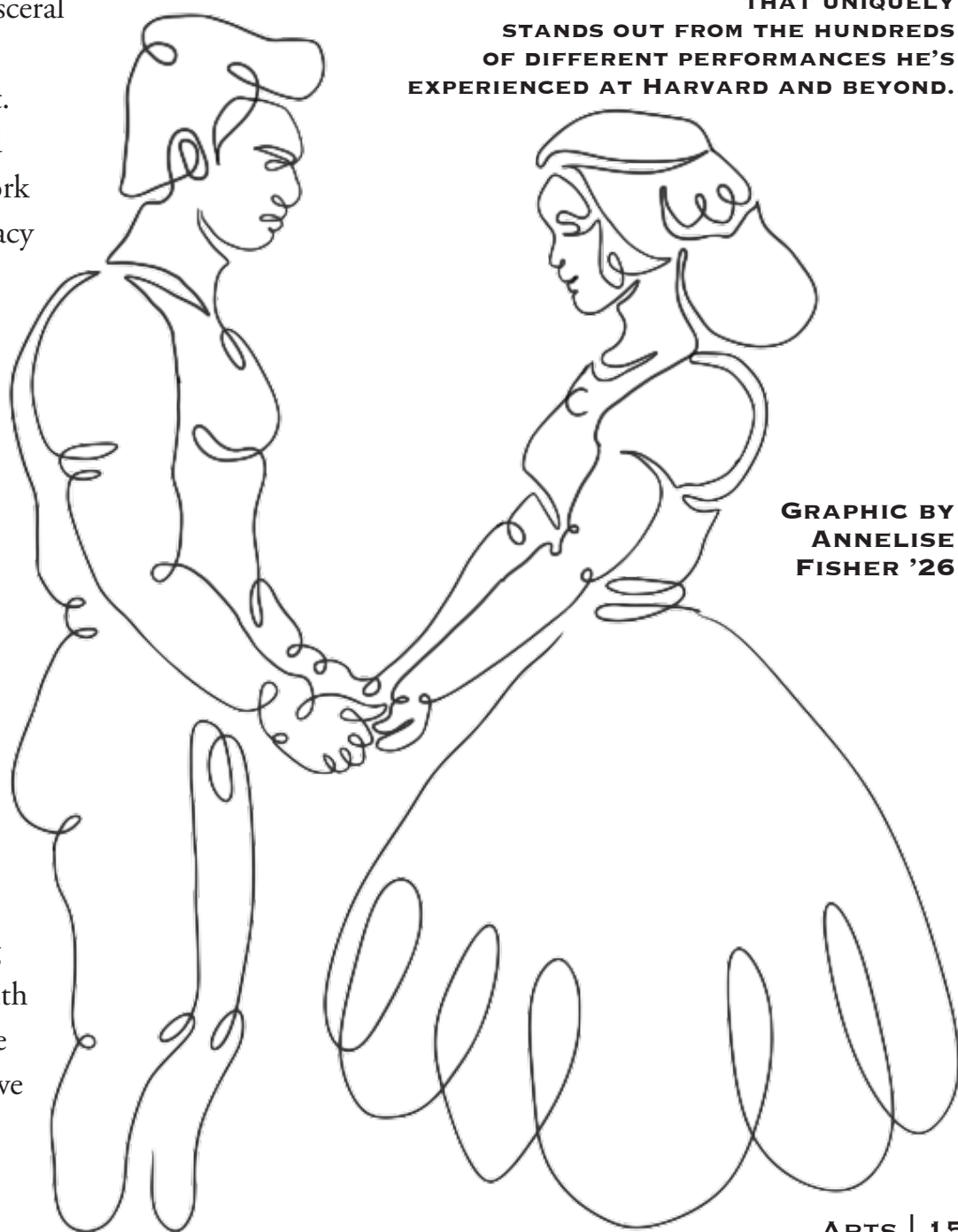
Like

Stein's Paris or Brando's transformative leap in *Streetcar*, this *Romeo & Juliet* will be remembered as a watershed moment—when Chan, Luque, and the entire crew dared to redefine Harvard theater. For those in the audience, it was a journey that commanded our full attention.

Chan and Luque's vision is pure artistic courage—a spark to inspire this generation and the next. It makes us wonder: What does happen when artists step up, take risks, and push boundaries—not just in the stories they tell, but in how they tell them? What happens when they flip the script on classics or dream up something totally new? How could Chan and Luque's bold approach inspire others to dig deeper and create work that deeply connects with others?

Chan urged in the *Romeo & Juliet* program notes: "Feel with us." And feel we did, with every heartbreak, and every impossible hope. Chan and Luque's *Romeo & Juliet* hasn't just rewritten this classic—it's rewritten its audience, leaving us ruined for anything less than extraordinary.

**TODD BIDA '87 (TODDBIDA@ALUMNI.HARVARD.EDU) IS A MEMBER OF THE LOWELL HOUSE SCR, P '26, AND AN ALUMNI OF THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT. HE IS A LIFELONG FAN OF THE ARTS AT HARVARD AND IS INSPIRED TO SHARE THE BRILLIANCE OF THIS GROUNDBREAKING PRODUCTION—ONE THAT UNIQUELY STANDS OUT FROM THE HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT PERFORMANCES HE'S EXPERIENCED AT HARVARD AND BEYOND.**



**GRAPHIC BY ANNEISE FISHER '26**

# Creative After College: “Mai Anna” Pacheco

An interview with an R&B singer-songwriter and music artist.

BY KYA BROOKS '25

If music is a universal language, harmonizing celebrates our shared humanity. “Now it’s more professional, as in I go to sessions and I’m more of a recording artist. But at Harvard, I was definitely more free-flowing, just jamming with people, making songs in our dorms. It just felt way more DIY than it does now. But I love it all anyway,” said Anna Mai Pacheco ’22, who goes by Mai Anna.

Mai Anna is a Japanese-Puerto Rican musician, specifically an R&B singer-songwriter, who grew up in Queens, New York. When she first arrived at Harvard, her father gifted her a piano. She quickly discovered a musicality within herself and became infatuated with songwriting. At Harvard, Mai Anna concentrated in Psychology with a secondary in Educational Studies, but she explored her passion for music both inside and outside the classroom.

“I went into pretty much every piano room that exists at Harvard, and I would just sing the same songs over and over again,” Mai Anna recalled. “My freshman year, I discovered my voice. I got obsessed with making music, and I dropped a five-song extended play that I self-produced, which I have since taken down because it was really bad.”

Still, her extended play project gained her admission to a songwriting class freshman year, taught by Esperanza Spalding, a renowned American jazz musician and five-time Grammy Award winner.

Spalding inspired her to pursue a career in music. “She really gave me the confidence to be an artist, and she taught me really what it means to be an artist. I think before I just was making music. I didn’t really have any background in music, and I didn’t know how to go about it. I almost went about it a little too calculatedly at one point. I think she really broke me out of that spell and was like, ‘Bro, it’s just about creation. It’s just about expression,’” Mai Anna recalled.

During this class, Mai Anna met classmate Gabe Fox-Peck ’20, a musician and producer who performs as Solomon Fox. He had experience with R&B, soul, and gospel music. He soon became her main producer. “He basically recorded my first four demos, and I’ve been making music with him since. We probably have 40 to 50 songs together at this point,” she said.

Mai Anna also took experimental songwriting classes with Professor Vijay Iyer, a Grammy-nominated jazz musician and producer, whose classes culminated with student concerts.

16 | ARTS Through her music education,

she encountered talented classmates devoted to diverse genres.

Outside of academics, she rejoiced in spontaneous musical experiences on campus: “The Leverett Music Room has a Nord Keyboard, and I would just go there with everybody who makes music. We would just jam out, and we would practice the songs that I’ve made,” Mai Anna said. “And I did a lot of dorm shows in my room, and the security guards of Adams House would pull up,



too. It was a vibe.”

She also performed at local gigs, including bar shows and the Middle East Restaurant and Nightclub. At Harvard, she immersed herself in the creative community through informal collaborations. Her friends Treasure “SOL” Faith Brooks ’22 and Shavonna Jackson ’22 produced visuals for several of her songs.

“I think if you search for the community, you’ll find it. By the time I was a senior, I was pretty much exclusively surrounding myself with artists and the queer community,” Mai Anna declared. “I think everyone was always so open to jam. I used to have open jam sessions in my dorm room. Like nine different people would come. People from Berklee would come. Sometimes, we were playing saxophone in my room until 2 a.m.”

Her songs typically feature laidback melodies and ethereal soundscapes, with themes like wistful nostalgia and unrequited love. She covets the intergalactic and otherworldly. Her songs “Jupiter” and “Supernova” capture the sensations of dreaming and floating through their sonic and lyrical quality. She evokes outer space—with its bizarre environments so foreign to humanity—to explain the strange depths of emotions like melancholy and longing.

After graduation, Mai Anna moved to Los Angeles to pursue her music career, while teaching and tutoring on the side. She plans to release her

debut project in Feb. 2025.

“I’ve been working on my projects, dropping songs, just learning a lot from the industry. I’ve been writing songs for other artists. I had to take some time to get my financial situation set up with my side hustles, so that took a few months. But really I’ve just been writing tons of songs, finishing them up, and planning to execute visuals in these upcoming months and drop the project in February,” she said.

Mai Anna is working with producers to polish her music. She explained how it is difficult to decide when a project is ready for public consumption. “I think at this point, it’s really just important for me to put out this project for my own legacy. I think I just have so many songs that I want the world to hear, and I’ve been kind of a perfectionist, but I think it’s time to just put it out so I can move on,” she explained.

She prioritizes her creative freedom and self-authenticity as an artist. “At the end of the day, music is about expressing the honest version of yourself. So I think I always go back to, ‘What is it that I want to say? What is it that I really want to share?’ Don’t get lost in the hype or what other people say you’ve got to do. There’s no right way to do this. It’s up to you. It’s art,” Mai Anna said.

Above all, Mai Anna revels in musical performance as communion. She recalls jam sessions at Harvard and the exuberance of classmates coming together. She is excited to recapture that energy, by taking her songs from the recording studio to the stage. “My goals are to drop this project and go on tour. My favorite part of singing is singing for people, and I feel the most fulfilled on stage.”

**KYA BROOKS '25 (KYABROOKS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**PHOTOGRAPHY AND MIXED MEDIA ART BY ANISHA PATIL**

**GRAPHIC BY LUCIE STEFFANONI '27**





# Break on a Budget

Make your stay-at-home winter break exciting and productive without draining your bank account.

BY NATALIE FRANK '27

This year, we have almost six weeks of winter recess. During finals week, it often feels like those weeks will be the most peaceful, perfect break from school. But after the holidays, things start to slow down, and it is easy to find yourself with nothing to do. When everyone returns to school, while your friends brag about their trips to the Gold Coast and Paris, the only thing you have to boast about is spending 14 consecutive hours on Instagram Reels. For this winter break, we have provided you with a range of budget-friendly alternatives to keep you busy.

## New Year, New You

“Wow! She looks great. What happened over winter break?” “Gosh, he is handsome. That winter break glow-up sure is something!” “I wish I looked like her, she is so stunning!” “Will he marry me?”

This is what people will say about you, too—if you use your winter break wisely. Every year, people create New Year’s resolutions hoping to become the person they’ve always dreamed they could be. Instead of waiting until Jan. 1, get a head start and begin your self-care journey while you are home for break.

Sometimes, being superficial is fun. It can be a new skincare routine, a hair regimen, a workout plan, or a revamped wardrobe. And no, these self-care plans do not need to be expensive. Refreshing your wardrobe, for example, can be fun and done on a budget. Check out your local thrift store for an abundance of clothing options, most under 10 dollars. Pro tip: the coat section at Goodwill is a great place to look in preparation for the winter months at Harvard. Thrifting is a great opportunity to explore your personal style with low risk.

But mental self-care is just as important as physical self-care. Make sure to focus on both your outer and inner well-being: read a novel, start a journal, draw, paint, or meditate. Often, if you take good care of your brain, your body will follow. Come back to school on Jan. 27 with some new knowledge and insights to share! Six weeks is plenty of time to make the positive changes you want to see in your life.

## Movie Marathon

While an abrupt transition from self-care, a movie marathon is a classic way to kill time over winter break. Before you leave campus, write up a list of movies you have always wanted to see or movies you have been dying to rewatch. These can be classic films,

like *Casablanca*, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, and *Pulp Fiction*, or you can finally get around to seeing *Kung Fu Panda 4*. *The Harry Potter* film series has been viewed 1.3 billion times, and you could make that number even larger.

Watching movies can be a solitary activity done on your laptop while in bed or a bonding activity with friends and family. Cook up some popcorn and cozy up on the couch with some blankets. You could even ask your hometown crush on a date to see *Wicked* or *Moana 2* at a movie theater.

During the school year, finding two free hours to watch a movie is more difficult than it may seem. Take the time this winter break to catch up on all of the pop culture and entertainment you have missed because you were busy writing that Justice paper.

## Declutter

Winter break is the perfect opportunity to refresh your space and your mind by decluttering. Imagine returning to school in January feeling like Marie Kondo. Nothing can stop you!

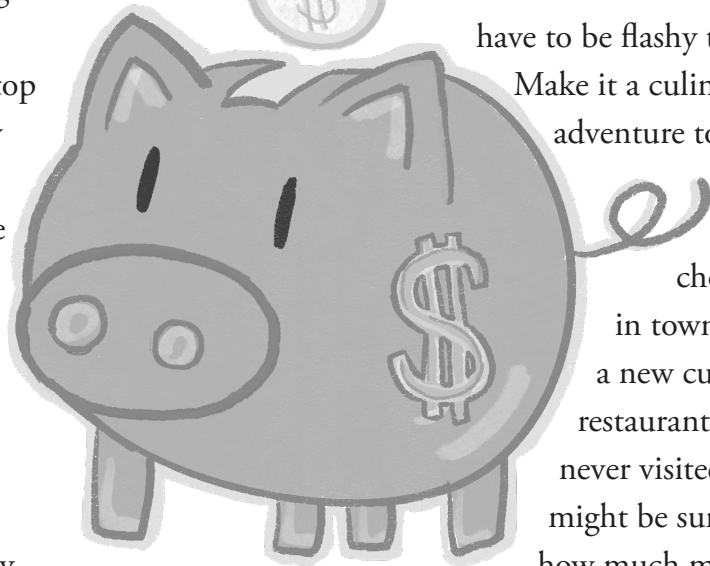
Start by tackling your bedroom at home. Go through your closet and part ways with those jeans you haven’t worn since high school. Donate what you can to your local thrift store. While you are at it, sort through your desk drawers, bookshelves, and any mystery bins hiding under your bed. You might even stumble upon something valuable, like a childhood diary or a missing AirPods.

Once you’ve decluttered, it’s time to organize. Invest in some storage bins or repurpose old shoe boxes to keep everything neat. Label them if you’re feeling ambitious. Create a “back-to-school” pile with essentials like your favorite sweaters, jeans, and that one outfit you keep waiting for an opportunity to wear. You will be ready to hit the ground running when spring semester rolls around.

Decluttering can clear both your physical space and your mind. Come back to school with a lighter load—both literally and figuratively—and maybe even inspire your roommates to do the same.

## Become a Tourist

Winter break is your chance to see your hometown through fresh eyes. Being a tourist in your own city can be surprisingly fun. Start by checking out the spots you have always overlooked. That tiny museum you pass every



day but have never gone into?

Now is the time. Look up local historical landmarks, nature trails, or even quirky roadside attractions. It does not have to be flashy to be fun.

Make it a culinary adventure too. Search

for the best hot chocolate

in town, or try a new cuisine at a restaurant you have

never visited. You might be surprised at how much more

of your hometown there is to discover.

(But if you live in Monowi, Nebraska (population: 1), maybe this is not the suggestion for you.)

## Road Trip

A road trip is the perfect way to cure your winter break restlessness without draining your wallet. You can keep yourself busy while feeling like you are in the middle of a coming-of-age indie film. This suggestion requires access to a car. If you do not have that, consider a Zip Car, which is a (relatively) affordable option for a day trip.

Start by rounding up a few friends and picking a destination within a few hours of home. Think small towns, scenic state parks, or a cool coffee shop that is just out of reach. No need for anything extravagant—a change of scenery can be all you need to shake off the winter blues.

Plan ahead, but not too much. Road trips are about the journey, not just the destination. Build in time to stop at odd roadside attractions, thrift stores, or anywhere that piques your interest.

Keep it budget-friendly by packing your own snacks and drinks. Make sure to prepare a playlist or a podcast that will keep you entertained throughout the drive. When you get back, you’ll have a camera roll full of pictures and plenty of stories to tell.

Whether you spend your winter break staying in luxury hotels and traveling to exotic destinations, or staying in your hometown arguing with your siblings, we hope you get some quality rest and relaxation.

**NATALIE FRANK '27 (NFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL PROBABLY SPEND HER WINTER BREAK SCROLLING ON INSTAGRAM REELS AND NAPPING.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27  
ARTS | 17**

# Celebrating the Holidays with Food

The foods that Harvard students are most excited about this Holiday season.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

It's the holiday season, so we know what everyone is thinking about: food. The *Independent* surveyed students to determine which foods they enjoy most at this time of year. Food during the holidays is more than just fulfilling nutritional needs—it symbolizes togetherness, tradition, and family. As the semester draws to a close and finals loom over campus, students find solace in the comforting meals the holiday season promises.

Whether you gather with family, friends, or others, most people celebrate with a delicious meal. With its diverse student body and thousands of perspectives, Harvard is a melting pot of celebrations and culinary traditions. So, what are Harvard students most excited to indulge themselves with this holiday season?

The foods Harvard students eat depend on the holidays they celebrate. The season begins in early November and late October, celebrating Diwali, the major Hindu festival. Many at Harvard then celebrate Thanksgiving, an American holiday spanning religious backgrounds. However, almost 15% of international Harvard students will be experiencing a holiday that is foreign to them. European students may celebrate Saint Nicholas Day on Dec. 5 or 6, depending on their country.

Hanukkah is the next major holiday for Jewish students, who comprise 25% of

the undergraduate population. Additionally, a significant portion of Harvard celebrates Christmas. Many also honor African culture through Kwanzaa and other cultural holidays. There is a lot to celebrate during this holiday season, and what better way than to eat food?

The *Independent* surveyed Harvard students and asked what food they were most excited to eat this holiday season. 61% of the students surveyed were excited about traditional Thanksgiving foods, including turkey, mac and cheese, apple pie, and stuffing. One student mentioned corn casserole, a popular dish in the Midwest.

For more religiously specific holidays, students shared the traditional foods they enjoyed during Christmas, Hanukkah, and Diwali. Students celebrating Christmas mentioned Prime Rib, Olivier Salad (a Russian dish), ham, and stuffing as their most anticipated dishes. Students were excited about Sufganiyot, an Israeli jelly-filled donut eaten during Hanukkah. One student also mentioned laddu, a traditional Indian sweet eaten year-round, specifically at Diwali.

Respondents reasoning for picking their foods included:

“Tasty and recipe runs in the family.”

“Warm, comforting, and reminds me of the holiday season.”

## As It Fell

A short piece about tea and snow.

BY MEENA BEHRINGER '27

We meet for tea every Thursday afternoon at 3:45 p.m.

Today, though, I am 10 minutes early. I sit at a table by the window facing the street. The taxis drive by, pops of yellow among the otherwise muted winery whites and grays of the building facades. The city moves at its usual pace, rushed and chaotic and incapable of slowing down.

I order our tea—chamomile for me, jasmine for her—as I wait. Two kettles, piping hot, arrive at our table. She walks in late, breathless with a frantic apology and complaint that her work call went over. She immediately sits down and pours tea for the both of us. She's a writer for *The Atlantic*, deeply engrossed in the world of current affairs and culture.



And so, like every Thursday, we talk. She tells me about the article she's working on, I tell her about the latest book I'm reading—one by some famous psychologist about how to make better decisions that I'm barely halfway through. We talk about her best friend who is annoying her and the unsuccessful date she went on last night. That reminds her—she wants to write a memoir on love, or so she tells me. I find this ridiculous, but I say nothing.

An hour has passed, and we both ignore the fact that my flight home leaves at seven. The taxi will be at my apartment soon. But instead, I tell her I want to go on a safari someday, to see a leopard and the constellations. She tells me she'll go with me.

As she complains about the New York pollution, I fixate on the windowsill. Dots of white start to delicately flutter in the sky, sprinkling onto the rooftops. They drift idly in the wind.

She follows my gaze, stopping short in her sentence.

“Look, it's snowing,” I say, an interruption. We sit in silence for a mere few moments, enchanted by the snowflakes in the December air, the first of the season. The city feels quieter, covered in a fleeting veil of white.

“Because it lowkey slaps every time, and it's homemade.”

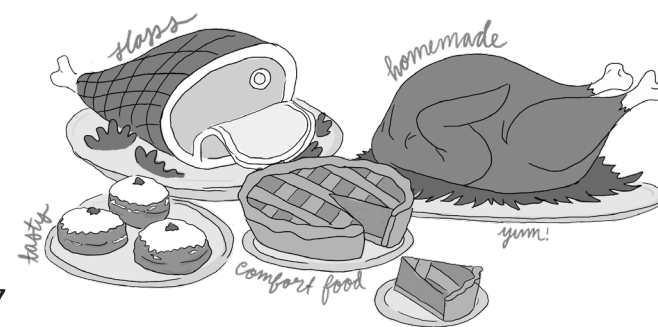
“Love the taste reminds me of trips to India.”  
“It's a comfort food that I've eaten my entire life and can be made in many different ways.”

These respondents highlighted taste as a key factor in their food preferences. However, many other factors were also mentioned. Respondents expressed a personal connection to the foods they eat during holidays, whether through tradition, family, home, or other meaningful ties. While they loved the taste, they also valued the emotions that food brings to people.

The holiday season is a time for self-reflection and celebration with others. Harvard students have much to celebrate this year and will all do so uniquely. As the semester comes to a close, the student body will begin to enjoy a well-deserved break, and hopefully, they will use it to indulge in the foods of their various holidays and cultures.

**KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STUFFED HIMSELF WITH CANDIED SWEET POTATOES AT THANKSGIVING THIS YEAR.**

**GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27**



But it is a lie, an illusion really. The snow melts as it falls; it collapses onto the ground as tarnished sleet and rain. Do we then only consider it snowing when the snow reaches the ground—when in finality, the snow remains? What constitutes, then, snow falling—the beginning or the end?

“No, it's not,” she says. Softly, still entranced. Yet, the question is resolved.

I sip my tea. I am unconvinced. I think the falling is enough, that it can exist in its impermanence, but I do not have it in me to argue with her today.

My tea is now lukewarm, but I haven't finished it, so I stay.

We've run out of things to discuss, so we watch the snow as it gradually begins to settle, coating the ground with a thin layer of white on the street the taxis drive over.

I'll leave tomorrow, I tell myself. It is another lie.

**MEENA BEHRINGER '27 (MEENABEHRINGER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY ALMA RUSSELL '26**

# Happy Harv-idays: A Student Holiday Gift Guide

Crimson cheer during crunch time.

BY ELLIE TUNNELL '27

Oh no! You have four final exams coming up, you're scrambling to complete Course Evaluations, and you completely forgot to buy something—anything—for the people you appreciate in your life.

## For the random friend you got assigned Secret Santa.

You are assigned the *one* person that you have literally never had a conversation with. Honestly, how did they even end up in the gift exchange anyway? Trying to find a cute, personal present is out of the cards. Don't fear, if you go to Harvard, you must go to BerryLine at least once a week, which slowly drains every student's pockets through the semester. No matter who they are, they will appreciate a BerryLine gift card to get them through finals season.

## For your boyfriend who participated in Movember.

Movember (Mustache November) is over. Your boyfriend may still be proud of the facial hair he spent all last month growing, but it has definitely got to go by Christmas. Give him a little (passive-aggressive) nudge and give him the best electric facial razor of 2024: MANSCAPED's The Chairman Pro Shaver. If he refuses to let go of the stache, at least invest in his hair follicle health with some beard conditioner or balm.

## For your new gym friend.

Did you spend this semester sweating away next to the same people in the MAC? Maybe you found a buddy to lift with, and now you have someone to keep you accountable for working out next semester. It's time to support their health and well-being even more by giving them a student

package of yoga, strength, and pilates classes at Breathe Cambridge. The Student Monthly Unlimited is only \$108. That's \$3.85 per class if you go every single day in February. What a steal! While you're at it, get one for yourself.

## For your favorite teacher.

It's the last week of classes and that 30% "participation and effort grade" is looking a little bleak. Need to give your teacher that extra push and fuzzy feeling inside? Go to the Snowport Holiday Market and buy them anything artisanal. During the holidays, there are more than 100 special pop-up stores from Lobster Nativity Scene's local Boston decor to Ashley Eisenman's handmade prints—all found in the Seaport District in Boston. Don't forget to treat yourself to a famous brookie from The Half Cookie to fuel your shopping.

## For your new significant other.

Cuffing season hit, and it hit hard. You're headed into winter break with a new relationship, a getaway road trip planned for J-term, and no clue what to get your new significant other for the holidays. Try Boston Bruins tickets for February. While on the pricier side, it's a good way to show you care. Plus, you'll have a fun date planned for next semester. But be careful, you must survive meeting the family first!

## For your suitemate's boyfriend.

As the semester crept by, your double slowly became a triple. You could bring up the roommate contract and have a mature conversation about personal boundaries with your roommate. But if confrontation is not your thing, buying their boyfriend a bigger bed might be the better option. You're in luck: HSA Dorm Essentials has

you covered with bigger bed rentals available for delivery.

## For the picky sibling.

No matter what you buy them, they will probably hate it and return it. So don't even bother. Just give them quality time.

## For the lover you've been afraid to talk to this semester.

It's formal season and you've finally gotten up the guts to ask your crush as your date. But what do you get? Flowers? Chocolate? A card? If you've made it this far in the article, you should definitely ask them out. To make the best first impression, consider hiring a local Christmas Caroling troupe to accompany you to their dorm. The Olde Towne Carolers are the best in class.

Whether it's the lowest-of-effort gift card, a clever nudge, or your "quality time," this is your reminder to give back something this month. Good luck on finals and may your holiday shopping procrastination pay off!

ELLIE TUNNELL '27 (ELLIE\_TUNNELL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS BUYING HER OWN CHRISTMAS GIFTS THIS YEAR.



GRAPHIC  
BY EL  
RICHARDS  
'26

## Breathing Room

A poem about our brief Thanksgiving break.

BY ANDREW MORRISSEY '26

Life slows down at home, I find  
Like I had been sitting on the remote  
Letting fast-forward run  
Without realizing  
Without rewind

The streets are empty past 8 p.m.  
There are no late-night Jefe's runs,  
Uber Eats,  
Or Ubers at all.  
The garbage truck doesn't come by in the  
morning,  
And there are no  
incessant alarm clocks  
That aren't your own.

It's winter here now.  
A dusting of snow coats the lawn  
The birds have moved south  
The frogs in the pond  
are buried in the mud  
Beneath the ice

I can't remember everything that happened  
These last three months  
Did it even happen  
If you can't remember it?

My bedroom walls  
The same bright yellow that I chose when  
I was twelve.  
The same floorboards squeak  
The house still clicks and creaks  
When the heat comes on.

The sun peaks low  
The shadows are long  
There is summer somewhere else  
It's just not our turn.

I don't know if I want  
The next two weeks to stay  
Or pass in a blur  
I think I'll just let it play.

ANDREW MORRISSEY '26  
(AJMORRISSEY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) JUST WANDERED INTO THE ARTS SECTION.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



# Experiencing the Holiday Season Through the Arts

From *The Nutcracker* to Shakira to small saxophone shows, there is something for everyone this Boston winter.

BY SOPHIE DAUER '27

As we transition into the holiday season, many of us seek new activities to celebrate this special time—whether with friends, family, or just ourselves. Luckily for those of us in Boston, the city brims with activities to enjoy this time of year. Whether it is a Christmas-themed play, a classic theater production, an iconic ballet, or a concert by a small artist, Boston has no shortage of performances to see this December.

A holiday classic, *The Nutcracker* is a must-see. The show tells the tale of a teenage girl who is gifted a nutcracker that comes to life. Numerous variations of this ballet will be performed in Boston. For a classic rendition of the show, check out Mikko Nissonen's production at the Boston Opera House from Dec. 4 to Dec. 28, or the one-time production *Nutcracker! Magical Christmas Ballet*, showing at the Wang Theatre on Dec. 5. Tony Williams' *Urban Nutcracker* takes a more modern approach to the century-old production and can be seen at the Shubert Theatre from Dec. 14 to Dec. 22.

Whether you love the holiday season or think Christmas is overrated, one thing is certain: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a musical that most can enjoy. With beautiful costumes, fun songs, and an outstanding cast, this show displays the heart-warming power of holiday cheer that is strong enough to reach even the green crank. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* will be running between Dec. 10 and Dec. 23 at Wang Theater. Other holiday shows being performed in Boston this December include *Cirque Dreams Holidayze* at Shubert Theatre from Dec. 6 to Dec. 8 and *A Christmas Carol* at Hanover Theatre from Dec. 15 to Dec. 22.

Featuring artists like Tate McRae, Twenty One Pilots, Kesha, and Meghan Trainor, iHeartRadio's iconic *Jingle Ball* concert will take place at TD Garden on Dec. 15. For a more traditional holiday experience, The Boston

Pops' *Holiday Pops* can be found at Symphony Hall between Dec. 5 to Dec. 24. Of course, no discussion of Christmas activities would be complete without mention of Mariah Carey, whose winter tour will be stopping in Boston on Dec. 5 at TD Garden.

For those feeling less spirited this December, there are still plenty of options for non-holiday musicals, plays, concerts, and other performances.

With an all-female cast celebrating womanhood and empowerment, Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss's musical *Six* follows the stories of King Henry VIII's six wives. The phenomenal soundtrack of this musical, running from Dec. 3 to Dec. 29 at Emerson Colonial Theatre, is sure to remain stuck in the heads of all who watch.

For a comedic play, head to the Lyric Stage Company from Dec. 4 to Dec. 20 to watch a local production of *Noises Off* by English playwright Michael Frayn. The story follows the opening night of a play, *Nothing On*, composed of a loveable but dysfunctional cast struggling to remember lines and entrance cues. For those looking for a show that will leave them rolling with laughter and struck by the twists and turns of an unpredictable plot, *Noises Off* is the place to be this December.

For a standup show, accomplished English comedian Michael McIntyre will be performing at the Shubert Theatre on Dec. 3. McIntyre's routine promises a lively experience, and it would be a mistake not to see him while he is out of the UK. Comedian and actor Matt Rife will also make an appearance at TD Garden on Dec. 31.

This month additionally anticipates a variety of concerts, ranging from large pop-star productions to more intimate performances by country artists. Highlights include the Dec. 8 performance of Colombian superstar

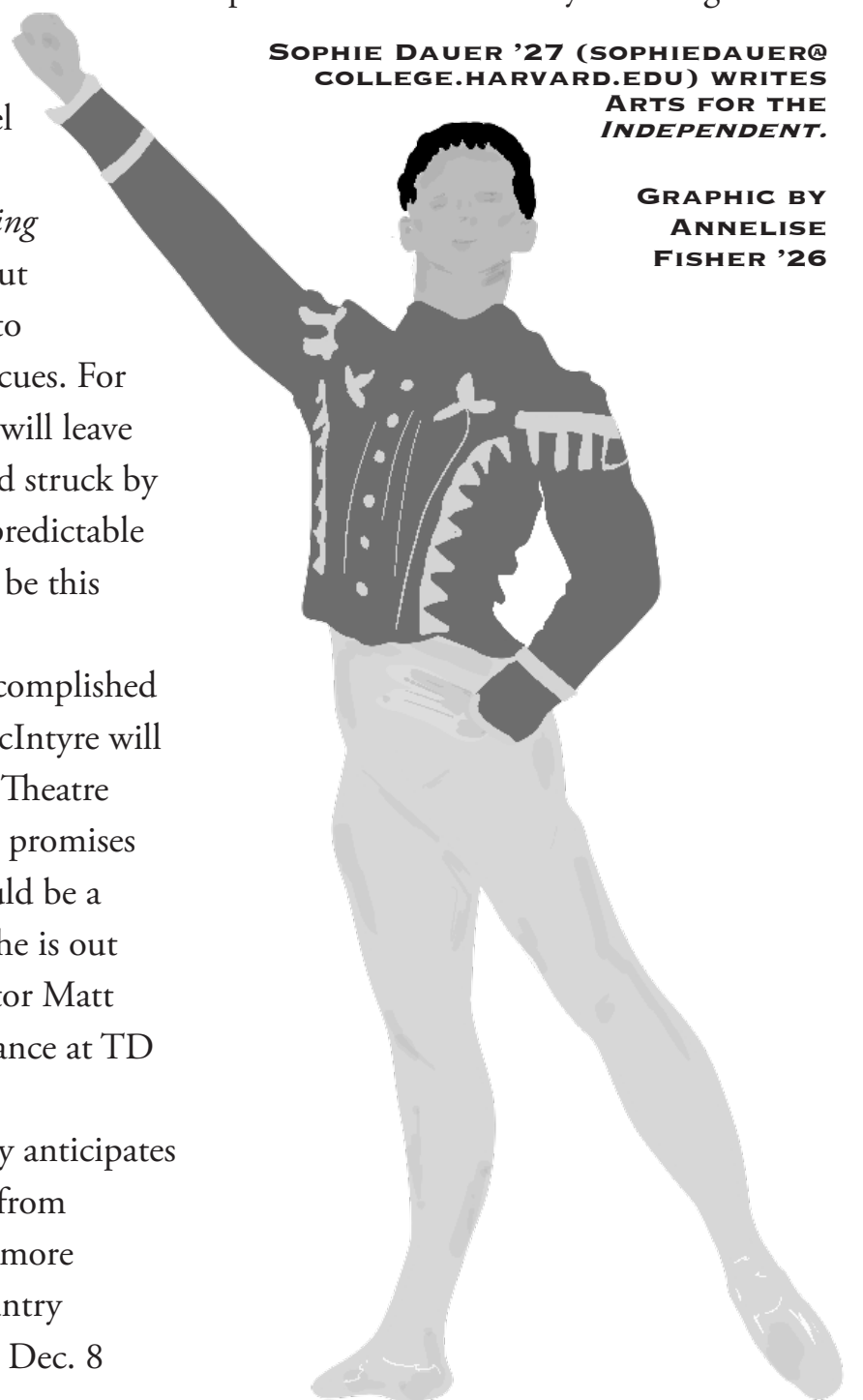
Shakira and the Dec. 14 appearance of world-renowned Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, both at TD Garden. Nordic folk singer-songwriter Aurora will be making a Boston stop on her *What Happened to the Earth* tour on Dec. 4 at MGM Music Hall, where she will sing her hits "Runaway" and "Cure for Me."

For anyone interested in Blues, Americana, Country, and Rock music, the annual live *Allman Betts Family Revival* will be held at the Orpheum Theater on Dec. 5. Featured artists include The Allman Betts Band, Luther Dickinson, Jimmy Hall, Lindsay Lou, Sierra Green, and Robert Randolph. Country singer Kip Moore will also be performing at Royale Boston on Dec. 13 and 14.

In addition to ice skating, baking cookies, decorating, and enjoying special meals, enjoying the arts serves as a wonderful way to celebrate the holiday spirit and soak in the city's offerings.

SOPHIE DAUER '27 (SOPHIEDAUER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26



# How to Talk Politics Over the Holidays

A satire on the do's and don'ts of making your family dinner a political minefield.

BY LUCAS COHEN-D'ARBELOFF '27

The holidays are a time marked by joy, togetherness, and at least a little bit of family drama. With the results of the latest election cycle looming large, political conversations this holiday season are likely to be more charged than ever, so why not lean into the chaos and make things a bit more memorable?

**Do: Assume you know more than anyone else.**

The key to being the champion of any holiday political debate is refusing to acknowledge that other people might have valid points or an important perspective. *Who cares if your cousin majored in this topic in college or works in a related field?* You read half an Instagram infographic on this issue two years ago, so it only makes sense that you'd be the loudest voice at the table. As long as you start sentences with "I'm not an expert, but..." and then proceed to confidently explain everything like you're giving a TED Talk, no one will question your authority.

**Don't: Keep things civil.**

Sure, politeness and civility are generally considered the foundation for successful family gatherings, but let's be honest—that sounds boring. It's best to lean into the tension; it builds character. Nothing says family bonding like shouting about the Electoral College while someone is trying to pass the dessert. Whenever you sense a lull in the conversation, it's your responsibility to throw a conversational grenade. After all, you're just playing your part in keeping the discussion lively.

**Do: Make sweeping generalizations.**

To stir the pot, a good strategy is to offer up overly broad statements and generally avoid thinking before you speak. Conversation starters like "Boomers ruined the economy" or "What's so great about democracy anyway?" are sure to evoke eye rolls and jaw drops that will spark a heated debate. Bonus points if you make these comments while interrupting someone else or during an awkward silence. For an extra flourish, throw in an unrelated historical comparison—just enough to be provocative without making sense.

**Don't: Focus on credible sources or facts.**

The dinner table is the perfect place to

casually make up statistics since no one will challenge you if you're confident enough. Pulling out your phone to verify whether something is true might seem like the responsible thing to do, but it's guaranteed to kill the mood. Plus, why burst Aunt Betty's bubble when she's on a roll about chemtrails? Let her have her tinfoil hat moment. This is also the moment to cite your favorite political podcast no one listens to. These debates are about passion, not precision, so don't let little things like facts get in the way of a bold claim.

**Do: Start sentences with "You don't understand..."**

This is a great way to indicate that you're about to offer up a point so revolutionary it will change the worldview of everyone around you. You'll find that people respond well to condescension. This phrase is such a power move because it implies that no one at the table has ever actually thought about the issue before, and you're the only person who has dared to explore it. It's also a solid conversation filler that gives you a couple of extra seconds to think about what you're going to say next. "You don't understand..." is best delivered with a longing stare into the distance and a slow, disappointed shake of the head.

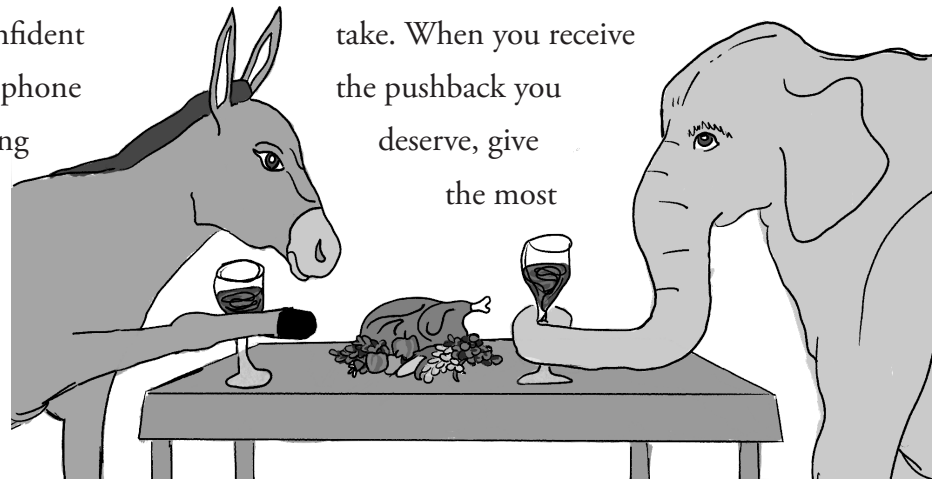
**Don't: Bring up local politics.**

Is it true that as a citizen, you can have a lot more political impact on the local level? Maybe, but for the dinner table, it's not as exciting as focusing on national or global issues—preferably the most polarizing ones. Your city council's zoning regulations or recycling initiatives may have a more significant impact on your life, but they're not great fodder for debate over the holidays. It's best to pivot toward more complex issues over which you have little to no control, like inflation and foreign policy crises.

**Do: Play devil's advocate for no reason.**

You may find that you and your family largely agree on many key issues, but what's the fun in that? This is your time to slyly smile and say, "To be fair..." before defending an insanely

controversial, ridiculous take. When you receive the pushback you deserve, give the most



incredulous look you can conjure before throwing up your hands and exclaiming, "I'm just saying!" The art of playing devil's advocate lies not in providing a neutral, logical perspective, but instead in how far you can push the discussion until someone explodes.

**Don't: Let anyone "agree to disagree."**

It's best to play out arguments until people are storming off, clutching their pearls, or threatening to remove you from the family group chat. Tabling the conversation when things are just getting heated is certainly the safe choice, but it's essentially an admission of defeat. Everyone should leave the table more fired up than when they sat down. Lean into the chaos, let the grudges form, and remind yourself that the holidays are all about creating memories. If all else fails, you can always wrap up the discussion with some passive-aggressive muttering and the thought that you've at least done your part to keep the spirit of the season alive.

Spending time with family over the holidays inevitably leads to moments when personalities and opinions collide, especially when politics are brought to the table. These moments are also a rare chance to test your rhetorical skills and see how long you can keep the discussion going before things unravel completely. Even if chaos sometimes ensues, these debates remind us of the challenges—and importance—of engaging with diverse perspectives.

LUCAS COHEN-D'ARBELOFF '27  
(LCOHENDARBELOFF@COLLEGE.  
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THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27

# SPORTS

## Sports Spotlight: Women's Rugby

A look into one of the most dominant sports teams on Harvard's campus.

BY KATE OLIVER '26

Harvard women's rugby has become a consistently dominant Crimson program in recent history. In the last five years, they have won the National Intercollegiate Rugby Association DI Championships in 2019, 2023, and now 2024, and are currently the defending national champions for rugby sevens. This past weekend, while most undergraduates were busy at the long-awaited Harvard-Yale football game, the rugby team was in New Hampshire preparing to defend their NIRA championship title. Missing the Harvard-Yale game was certainly a disappointment, especially given that the team found themselves in the same situation last year. However, their sacrifice paid off in a big way as they triumphed over Dartmouth.

The revenge game against Dartmouth highlights the budding rivalry between the two programs over recent years. Previously, on Oct. 12, Harvard fell to Dartmouth in the final minutes of the game with a final score of 26-19. The game saw both teams fighting back and forth going try for try until the very end; the NIRA finals played out in similar fashion, but saw the Crimson emerge victorious.

In America, rugby is often eclipsed in popularity by other professional league sports, such as soccer, football, basketball, or ice hockey. However, rugby has steadily grown in prominence, especially with the 2016 inclusion of rugby sevens in the Olympics. Collegiate rugby programs like Harvard's in particular play a crucial role in elevating the sport's profile in the United States. At Harvard, rugby has not only been a platform for athletic excellence, but a space for building a tightly-knit community of players

of teamwork, resilience, and strategic brilliance.

Despite the growing publicity of the sport, many Harvard students who venture to Mignone Field for a match are often confused by the structure, style, and rules of the game. During rugby 15s, two teams of 15 members have a continuous 80 minutes to score as many tries (a rugby touchdown) as possible. The ball can only be thrown laterally or backward, erasing the possibility of any last-second hail marys. That being said, teams are allowed to kick the ball forward, similar to punting on 4th down in football. While there are no pads, rugby defense involves tackling the offense in attempts to turn over the ball; there is no down system or period to force a change of position.

Powerhouses like championship MVP Tiahna Padilla '26 delivered standout performances for the Harvard Crimson as they avenged their Oct. 12 loss to Dartmouth, securing a victory in the championship and reclaiming their spot at the top of the Ivy League. The final score of 19-12 reflected the strength of the Crimson's defense, and their offensive battle ultimately won the day.

With their recent championship, the Crimson have cemented their legacy as one of Harvard's most successful athletic programs.

But the team is already looking ahead, with an eye on building for the future. Incoming recruits are excited to join a program with such a rich tradition of excellence, and the current players are focused on maintaining their edge.

Harvard women's rugby is more than a sports team; it's a symbol of progress and inclusivity in college athletics. Rugby's roots at Harvard trace back to the women's club-level team at Radcliffe College, which fought for years

to gain recognition as a varsity program. Since achieving varsity status in 2011, the team has become a powerhouse, inspiring young athletes and fostering a sense of pride in women's sports at the College. Their success comes at a pivotal moment, as women's sports are experiencing a surge in visibility and recognition both nationally and globally. The team's dominance is not just a point of pride for Harvard, but a beacon of what's possible when institutions invest in female athletes.

These athletes miss tailgates, endure grueling practices, and pour everything into representing Harvard on the national stage. Their story is one of commitment and triumph, and they deserve more than just a passing glance. So, the next time you find yourself free on a weekend, grab a friend, head over to Mignone Field, and witness the magic of rugby firsthand. You might not understand all the rules at first, but you'll leave with a newfound respect for the athletes who make it all look effortless.

**KATE OLIVER '26 (KOLIVER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A BANDWAGON ALL BLACKS FAN THANKS TO HER KIWI GRANDFATHER.**

**GRAPHIC BY  
ANNELISE  
FISHER '26**



# Indy Sportsbook: Football's Winding Down

A few NFL predictions with playoffs are on the horizon.

BY ANDREW CHRISTIE '26

The days are getting shorter, the temperature is getting colder, and as the end of the year approaches, this can mean only one thing—NFL playoffs are almost here. With the Wild-Card round commencing on Jan. 11, 2025, we have little over a month before some of the most exciting (and coincidentally, most “bet-table”) football is played. Last year, we watched as the Kansas City Chiefs made their fourth Super Bowl appearance in the last five years and took home their 3rd championship in that timespan. Will we see them again on Super Bowl Sunday? Or will we see new teams vying for the coveted title of NFL Champion?

After 13 of the 18 NFL game weeks, there is no obvious favorite for who may win the Super Bowl. In this Sportsbook, we will cover a few teams we think have good odds of hoisting the Lombardi Trophy come Superbowl Sunday.

**Detroit Lions (+270):** The Lions are the current favorites according to the many sportsbooks, and it is clear to see why. Boasting a record of 11-1, and with the League's highest points per game average (31.9 ppg), it's hard to imagine they won't make a run in the playoffs. Their dual-threat backfield of Jahmyr Gibbs and David Montgomery causes headaches for every defensive coordinator who has the displeasure of playing against them. At the same time, their passing game is nothing to be scoffed at either. Amon-Ra St. Brown is at the top of the charts in several receiving categories (2nd in touchdowns, 3rd in receptions, 6th in receiving yards, 1st in first downs), while Sam LaPorta, Jameson Williams, Tim Patrick, and the remaining offense complete a very well rounded, and very dangerous receiving core. However, they currently have a concerning amount of injuries on the roster, and coupled with some less-than-convincing games this season, some wonder if they'll be able to stay consistent when the pressure is highest.

**Kansas City Chiefs (+550):** The Chiefs have the second-best odds, and for good reason. If you are the two-time defending Super Bowl champion, have an 11-1 record, and the individual talent on the roster to back it up, it's hard to justify not making you one of the favorites to win it all. While this is all true for the Kansas City Chiefs, there are significantly more doubts about this team compared to years past. Their record may

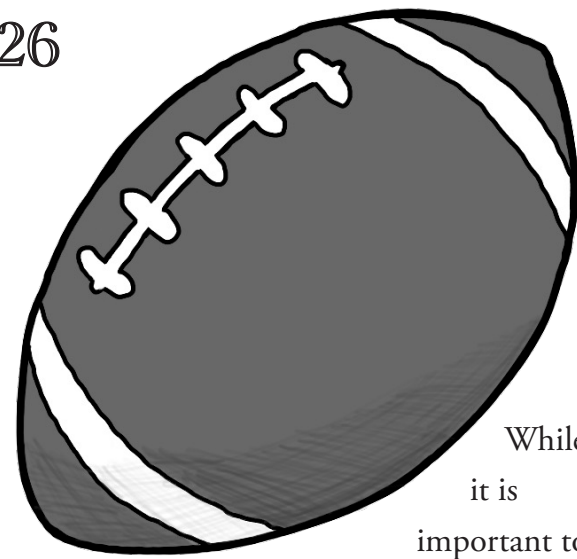
be impressive on paper, but wins by three points or less against the Bengals, Broncos, Panthers, and most recently, the Raiders do not instill confidence in prospective Kansas City Super Bowl bettors. All but two of their wins have been by one score, with many feeling unconvincing.

Whether it is atrocious clock management by their opponents, blocked field goals, or questionable referee decisions, the Chiefs find themselves lucky to be in the position they are in. However, you can never count out a Kansas City Chiefs team with Quarterback Patrick Mahomes coached by Andy Reid, so keep an eye out for the Chiefs to continue their unconventional winning ways in January.

The Ravens (+600), Eagles (+650), and Bills (+650) all have superstars surrounded by pro-bowl-level talent, making them well-qualified candidates for the title of Super Bowl Champion. While they aren't outright favorites, all of these teams have put up dominating performances this season that make one hard-pressed to count them out. Yet, don't just stop here—though with much longer odds, other teams across the League may be able to pull ahead and close out the season with a win.

**Minnesota Vikings (+2100):** The Vikings are in a tier below the odds-on favorites. While nobody is expecting a Vikings Super Bowl victory this year, it is most certainly not out of the question. Coming into the season, many analysts counted them out. A general lack of faith in quarterback Sam Darnold, who had yet to establish himself in the NFL, along with a roster that contained less obvious talent than their competitors, gave rise to significant doubt about the Vikings. However, they have silently moved to a strong record of 10-2, tying the Eagles for the second-best record in the NFC. They definitely aren't the favorites, but if Sam Darnold can continue his connection with star wide receiver and former Offensive Player of the Year Justin Jefferson, anything can happen.

Other teams like the Steelers (+3000), Chargers (+3200), and Texans (+3000) also fall into the category of potential dark horse candidates to make a run in the playoffs. All have shown flashes of being able to compete but haven't yet proven the consistency to be considered a front-runner.



While it is important to keep in mind bets for the future, Gameweek 14 is on the horizon, and there are a couple of games in particular to watch out for. The Lions will clash against their bitter NFC North rivals, the Green Bay Packers, in a Thursday night contest that is sure to have playoff ramifications. We think the Lions will use their home-field advantage to complete the double over the Packers this season. The Chargers will take on AFC Leaders Kansas City Chiefs in another fierce division battle. The AFC West has been one of the strongest divisions in football this year, with three teams currently in the playoff picture, so both of these teams will be looking to win and carry momentum into the playoffs. Playing at Arrowhead Stadium against a league-leading Kansas City team may prove to be too much for Jim Harbaugh's Raiders, but if Los Angeles can take an early lead, then they may be able to carry that to an upset.

With the playoffs on the horizon, the race to the Lombardi Trophy is wide open, making this one of the most exciting NFL seasons in recent memory. Whether you're rooting for favorites like the Lions and Chiefs, rallying behind underdogs like the Vikings, or betting on dark horses to surprise the league, there's never been a better time to dive into the action. So grab your popcorn, place your bets (responsibly), and get ready for the high-stakes drama that only the NFL playoffs can deliver. February will crown a champion—but until then, every week is a story waiting to unfold.

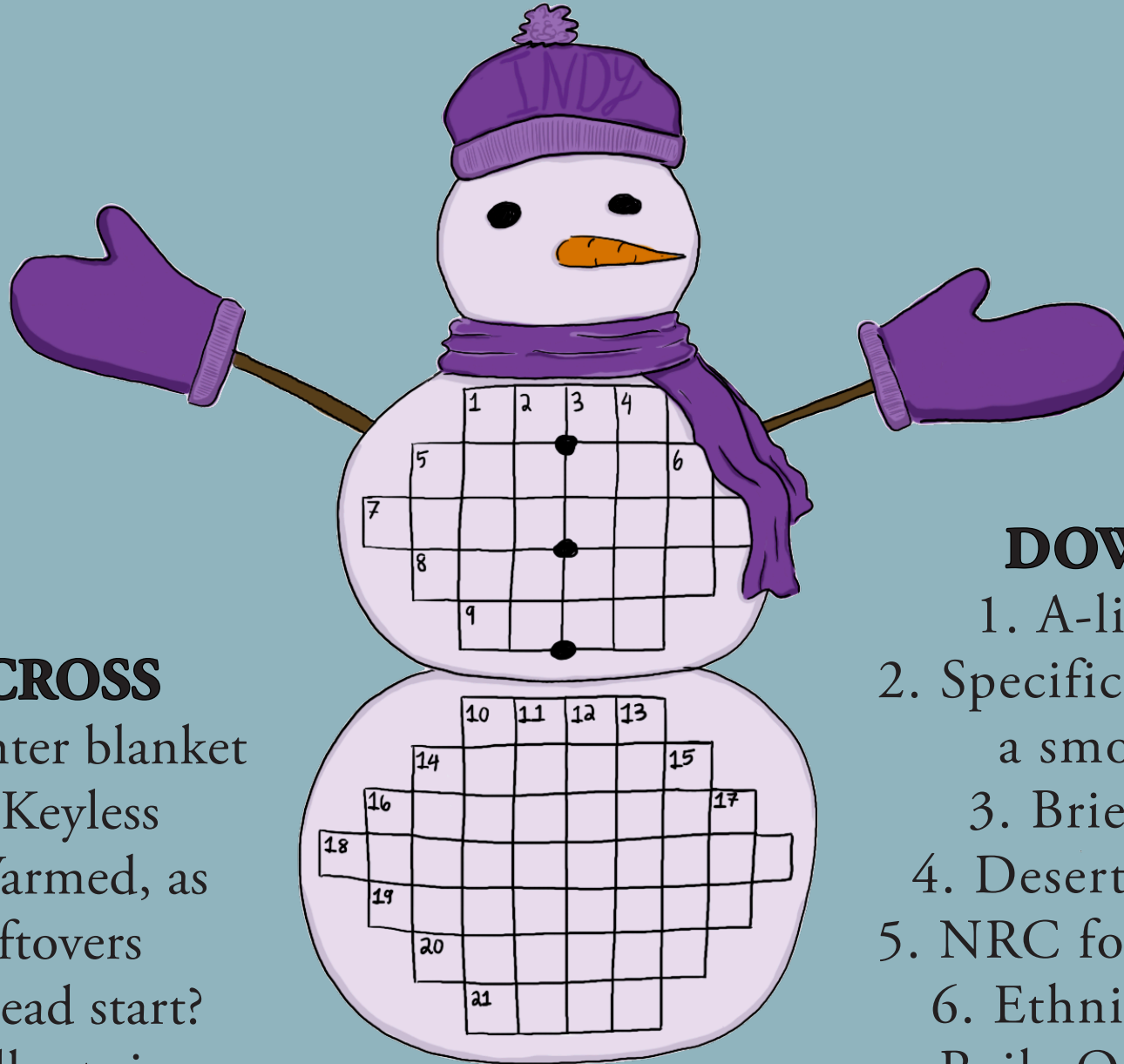
**ANDREW CHRISTIE '26  
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HARVARD.EDU) JUST WANTS  
TWO THINGS FOR CHRISTMAS:  
THE CHARGERS NOT TO BE  
EMBARRASSED IN THE PLAYOFFS  
AGAIN, AND TO SEE HIS PLAYOFF  
PREDICTIONS COME TRUE.**

**GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27**

OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE  
WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES  
OF THE *INDEPENDENT*.

# BRRR

BY HAN NGUYEN '27  
GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



## ACROSS

1. Winter blanket
5. Keyless
7. Warmed, as leftovers
8. Head start?
9. Sellout signs
10. Popular avocado variety
14. Team listing
16. Sandwich counter offering

18. Task for a kebab maker
19. Press agents?
20. Durable buff fabric
21. Recently: Abbr.

## DOWN

1. A-listers
2. Specification for a smoker
3. Brief bid
4. Desert gullies
5. NRC forerunner
6. Ethnicity of Raila Odinga, Kenya's second Prime Minister
10. Vacation
11. Foolish
12. Venice tourist attraction
13. Make sure
14. Aired again
15. Wilson of "The Office"
16. "\_\_\_ Kapital"
17. Heavy wts.

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