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INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



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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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Harvard's Hold on Housing

Cambridge's recent zoning reform may reduce Harvard's real-estate dominance and its negative effects on University affiliates.

BY SARA KUMAR '27

Across 17 freshman dormitories and 13 upperclassmen residential buildings, Harvard undergraduates have the privilege of guaranteed housing during their four years on campus. However, graduate students, faculty, and University affiliates struggle to find housing as Harvard's property acquisitions distort the Cambridge and Allston markets.

Harvard University Housing owns approximately 2,900 apartments and 100 buildings, serving as the landlord for over 5,400 tenants. Such residential accommodations are available to all full-time Harvard graduate students, faculty, and other University affiliates. To HUH, there is a central goal to this mass possession. "Finding housing and moving can be a huge challenge. Harvard University Housing is here to help with exceptional housing services for buying, selling, or renting in Cambridge and across Greater Boston," HUH explains.

Their mission to offer affordable residential accommodations conveniently located near campus is seemingly perfect in areas where real estate prices are incredibly steep and land is difficult to come by. However, as a nonprofit owning such a considerable portion of land across Cambridge and Allston, HUH detracts from city resources, particularly through its tax exemption. Moreover, HUH unfairly dictates property costs for community businesses, gives the University immense power over its tenants, and shapes a system where only some individuals benefit from their services.

As a resident of 5 Copperwaite St., Economics Ph.D candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Jeffrey Yang was lucky to secure a unit in such a coveted building. "These kinds of units are in relatively high demand amongst the grad students, so not everyone is able to get them," Yang reflected in an interview with the *Independent*.

"There's a bunch of people in my department who live in this same unit, so I think we're all kind of relatively fortunate."

Most students are not so fortunate. Student displacement at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed HUH's tumultuous landlord practices. Between March 10 and 22, 2020, all students living in Harvard Law School housing were instructed to

vacate immediately. For the international and low-income student population who needed residential options during this time, such a notice left them stranded.

"That put a lot of students into panic, anxiety, emotional distress," HLS student Felipe Hernandez said in a 2020 interview with the *Harvard Crimson*. "Students couldn't sleep overnight, couldn't eat. People broke down crying because they thought that they had to move out as early as Friday."

While most landlords must give their tenants 30-day notice before revoking housing, Harvard tailored its contracts to resemble licensing rather than rental agreements, meaning these "evictions" were fully within the University's jurisdiction. Furthermore, since HUH controls most of the properties in the area, there are few alternatives for individuals hoping to find increasingly stable options.

These issues affect more than just University affiliates.

As a nonprofit, HUH is exempt from paying taxes on its holdings, meaning its extensive properties do not contribute to Cambridge and Allston's taxable real estate profits. Some argue that, although the city cannot levy taxes on buildings used for educational purposes, Harvard's expansive portfolio now extends far beyond its academic mission. Critics have contended that not only has the University shifted their goals from institutional advancement to real estate investments, but its acquisitions are now also driving up real estate prices and rents in the area.

In 1997, *The Daily Pennsylvanian* revealed Harvard's eight-year effort to spend \$88 million obtaining 52.6 acres of land in Allston. While these land gains are advantageous for the University, they have adverse effects on neighboring communities who struggle to find affordable housing in a now depleted market. When

questioned about their motives at the time, then-Vice President of Harvard Administration Sally Zeckhauser had clear reasons for the purchase. "It is essential, with an educational institution, to ensure that there are enough physical resources to sustain future academic programs," Zeckhauser explained. Thus, in her eyes, these holdings were "an investment in the future of both Harvard and Allston."

These problems persist. In an interview with *The Boston Globe* in 2021, Boston City Councilor Liz Breadon commented that Allston is at risk of becoming "a playground for folks who are mostly white people who have a lot of money," with Harvard already owning close to one-third of the city.

"I haven't seen this level of frustration in the neighborhood in over 10 years," Breadon continued. "[Harvard is] doing this one project at a time ... [It] really is a war of attrition."

However, recent developments may offer a solution to this real estate market crisis influenced by HUH.

On Feb. 10, the Cambridge City Council reformed existing zoning mandates and legalized the construction of four-story buildings, with an additional two-story bonus for qualifying units. This ruling represents a significant shift in the city's limited affordable residential accommodations, with this change projected to add 3,590 homes. Eight out of nine councilors were in support of this amendment.

"You know, we are going through a housing crisis. It's the No. 1 issue from everyone from the governor to the former Vice President Harris, former President Obama, to all of our senators. A huge part of that is building housing and actually allowing for that in a way that really means something and will lead to change," Councilor Burhan Azeem said in an interview with *Cambridge Day*.

Community members compounded the councilor's sentiment. "With housing scarce and costs exploding, it's clear that real action is needed to allow more housing to be built here in Cambridge," local resident Ty Wilson added.

While these comments suggest the reform will have rapid benefits for general Cambridge residents, Harvard affiliates will have to see how this dramatic change in housing volume affects their relationship with HUH. It is unclear whether HUH plans on acquiring up-and-coming buildings or if they will leave new construction open to the public market. However, most graduate students, faculty, and other University affiliates are likely waiting, hoping this amendment will open the door for more sustainable residential options.

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GRAPHIC BY KELLY TUNG '27



The Trouble with Tariffs

Harvard economics students react to the Trump administration's new tariffs.

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

One cornerstone of President Trump's 2025 campaign was his "America First" foreign policy plan. Part of that vision centered around levying tariffs against U.S. trade partners, most notably Canada and Mexico, in the hopes that economic pressure would force America's neighbors to address the steady influx of illegal immigrants and dangerous drugs like fentanyl, which the White House has labeled an emergency situation. The Trump administration believes that this force on American neighbors could force them to take action. China is also a target of these recently imposed tariffs, although those are an additional 10% on top of an existing tax.



has pledged to enact new 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminum entering the U.S. on March 12. Canada is the largest exporter of both of those metals to the U.S. The Trump administration believes that "steel import levels and global excess were weakening our domestic economy and threatening to impair national security."

Economics 10a: "Principles of Microeconomics" professor Jason Furman '92 does not share the President's enthusiasm. "The question is, 'Did he help his leverage by looking like he was willing to do really, really, big things, or did he hurt his leverage by making massive threats and getting really, really tiny things in exchange for them?'" Furman asked at an Institute of Politics Forum earlier this month.

Many Harvard economics concentrators have similarly felt unmoved by the last few weeks. "A lot of the tariff rhetoric that we're seeing is mostly posturing," said Michael Shaari '27. "It's probably going to have a lot of effect on the Fed's decision to cut interest rates in the future, because tariffs are inflationary. And I think a lot of that comes with how Trump approaches deportation, because that's also inflationary, but I think it's mostly posturing."

Aayush Kadakia '26 was similarly unphased. "From an economic perspective, I think that the tariffs are more of a one-off, transitory increases in prices, rather than a true catalyst for reviving rampant inflation, so they might be better viewed as a pass-through tax on consumers with little expected response from the Fed," he said. "Politically, there are so many different viewpoints out there... Thus far, tariffs have

proven an effective negotiating toolkit."

Looking at the human costs of Trump's tariffs, there remains uncertainty around whether the President's actions will help or harm these crises. In an interview with Business Insider, Laura Guzman, the executive director of the National Harm Reduction Coalition, voiced concern that the tariffs could make drug overdoses go up even if they are successful in slowing the influx of fentanyl into the country. "The biggest fear I had when I saw the negotiation to postpone the tariffs, immediately, my reaction was, 'that is not going to be good for the folks that are impacted by both the war on drugs, but also by this tainted drug supply,'" Guzman said.

Guzman went on to clarify that, while slowing the rate of fentanyl entering the country is a good idea, there is still a large amount of fentanyl that is produced inside the United States. Disrupting the flow of drugs can create a situation where addicts are mixing narcotics that they don't normally use, which can be fatal.

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico voiced similar frustration. "If the United States government and its agencies wanted to address the serious consumption of fentanyl in their country, they can combat the sale of narcotics on the streets of their main cities, which they don't do," she said.

Ultimately, the impacts of Trump's tariffs, while far-reaching, probably will not materialize for some time. Canada, Mexico, and the United States will continue to negotiate over the next three weeks, and the President's course of action come the March 12 deadline will likely be a response to whatever happens during that period. Regardless of one's stance, it is clear that President Trump is deploying the full powers of his office to enact the vision for America he so heavily boasted about on the campaign trail.

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GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26

In statements made by the White House staff, Trump suggested that substantial tariffs were necessary to force China, Canada, and Mexico to take action against illegal immigration and fentanyl inflow to the US. "More than 10 million illegal aliens attempted to enter the United States under Biden's leadership, including a rising number of Chinese nationals and people on the terror watchlist," read a memo released by the White House when the tariffs went into effect on Feb. 1. "Last fiscal year, Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 21,000 pounds of fentanyl at our borders, enough fentanyl to kill more than 4 billion people."

By President Trump and the GOP's standards, these tariffs have been a resounding initial success. "@POTUS knows tariffs can bring countries to the negotiating table. It's the art of the deal—using economic leverage to secure better outcomes for the American people," tweeted the House Committee on Agriculture. Within a few days of their implementation, Mexico and Canada both brokered deals with the United States. As part of their deal, Canada has created a new "fentanyl czar" position, pledged \$1.3 billion to secure its border with the U.S., and will list Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations. Mexico pledged to station 10,000 members of its National Guard along its northern border. In response, the tariffs will be paused for 30 days, but President Trump

Hot Takes from Harvard Students

Harvard undergraduates share their “hot takes” after a month back on campus.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

Harvard's extensive list of accomplished alumni is teeming with figures who have been a part of global controversies for decades. From politicians like Al Franken '73 and Henry Kissinger '50 to business magnates such as Mark Zuckerberg '17, Harvard graduates can be counted on to change history—for better or worse. Even the infamous Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski '62, finds himself on Harvard's polarizing alumni list.

However, disputes on Harvard's campus are not limited to the faculty club, boardroom, or office. Harvard students ensure their voices are heard through journalism or Sidechat, regardless of whether their contributions receive positive reactions. Consider the top 100 students that left Sidechat reeling for days or the *Harvard Crimson* article proclaiming that “Harvard's too easy.” The *Harvard Independent* polled a random sample of students on their hottest takes—here are some of the answers we received:

“HUDS banana bread pudding is pure fuego.” - Anonymous '28

“Peanut butter is gross.” - Emma '27

“Silver jewelry is better than gold.” - KO '28

“I do not think email should exist.” - Anonymous '25

“Pineapple belongs on pizza.” - Sandra Smith-Johnson '28

“Mac is better than Hem.” - Mackenzie Ainsworth '27

“We should have grapefruit spoons in Berg.” - Aya Shwartz '28

“Yale guys are nicer than Harvard guys.” - Anonymous '27

“Converse are ugly, IMO. Vans too.” - Anonymous '28

“I'd rather eat foods with Red 40 because I think they're more visually appealing. I eat with my eyes.” - Haley Muñoz '27

“Domino's is the best pizza in the Square.” - Anonymous '27

“I really, really miss Oatly. The new froyo tastes artificial and sad.” - Grace

E. St. Laurent '28

“I don't like Beyoncé. She's overrated.” - Anonymous '26

“Arranged marriages are good for society.” - Anonymous '26

“Babylon is one of the best movies of the 21st century.” - Anonymous '28

“Finance will be the first thing to be replaced by AI.” - Anonymous '28

“Android phones are better than iPhones.” - Anonymous '28

“Harvard has too many fruity straight men.” - Melanie '26

“The Quad isn't *that* bad.” - Anonymous '28

“Canaday is crapped on for no reason.” - Anonymous '28

“Most men are worse at skiing than they think they are.” - Anonymous '27

“I think ADHD is a scam created by capitalism.” - Anonymous '27

“Cereal is a soup.” - Tyler Dalton '28

“Pasta with ketchup is better than pasta with marinara sauce.” - Anonymous '27

“There is already a cure for cancer, but someone hid it.” - Anonymous '28

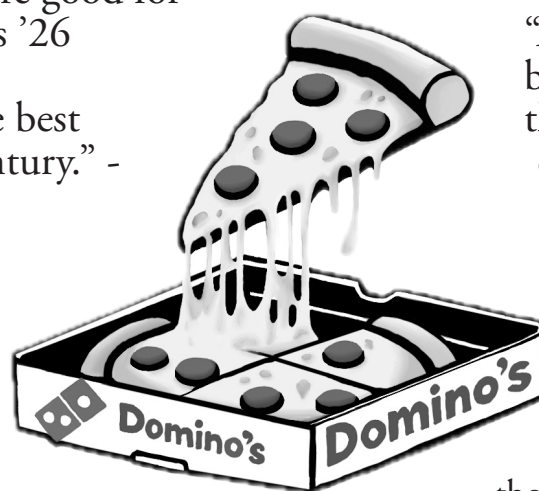
“I kind of like HUDS food.” - Michael Maines '27

“There shouldn't be competitive comps at Harvard.” - Anonymous '28

“I would do coke before I used nic.” - Anonymous '28

“Let's get sporks in Berg.” - Natalie Bernstein '28

“America's problems can be primarily attributed to the fact that 95% of the country thinks they will be millionaires one day.” - Hunter '27



From first-years to seniors, Harvard students offer a broad range of thoughts and perspectives.

Many students offer views about improving HUDS, while others poke at society as a whole. However, considering Harvard draws students from countries all over the world and states throughout the U.S., such a range of opinions should be expected. These varying thoughts create a campus that enacts various schools of thought both inside and outside of the classroom.

KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) SAYS, "THANK YOU, BEYONCÉ."

GRAPHIC BY ALLYSON XU '28

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FORUM

Love as Defiance: Celebrating Valentine's Day in 2025 Amid Political Uncertainty

How acts of love are serving as resistance in a time of divisive politics.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

As I sit cross-legged on my common room sofa, it's hard not to notice the vibrant Valentine's Day decorations adorning each corner of the room—strings of heart-shaped “Be Mine” notes and pink tissue paper are draped across the walls. But as I settle into the room, the ambiance is interrupted by the abrasive comments of Fox News reports discussing the “dangerous” rise of “undocumented immigrants” and the “threat” of transgender youth in schools. My mind is torn between the cheerful decor and the harsh political rhetoric coming from the TV.

A few minutes later, a recent Instagram post from the official White House account caught my attention. The post, featuring a photo of President Trump and Tom Homan's faces against a backdrop of Valentine's Day decor, masked a trashy political jab under the guise of humor: “Roses are red, Violets are blue, come here illegally and we'll deport you.” The post ended with the phrase “Happy Valentine's Day.” The sheer absurdity of pairing a holiday about love with such an openly hostile message left me stunned. The post was a reminder that, in today's climate, even something as pure as Valentine's Day can't escape the gravitational pull of politics. The contrast between a day meant to celebrate love and a message designed to divide underscored just how deeply entangled love and politics have become.

In recent years, sweeping political changes have upended lives and reshaped the nation's social fabric, leaving many uncertain about their rights and futures. The latest surge in mass deportations has sent shockwaves across the nation. At the same time, activist groups have raised alarms about the exclusion of transgender individuals from government programs, and legal scholars have been challenging the wave of federal worker layoffs. These political developments not only threaten basic rights but also make it harder for many to express love openly, without fear.

The arrival of a holiday traditionally centered on love is especially poignant at a time when many groups fear they are losing the freedom to express love openly. Over the years, expressions of love have

taken many forms—from an undocumented couple rising early to perform backbreaking labor to finance their children's education, to the joyful tears of someone completing their gender transition journey, to the quiet resolve of students fighting for racial equity on campuses across the country.

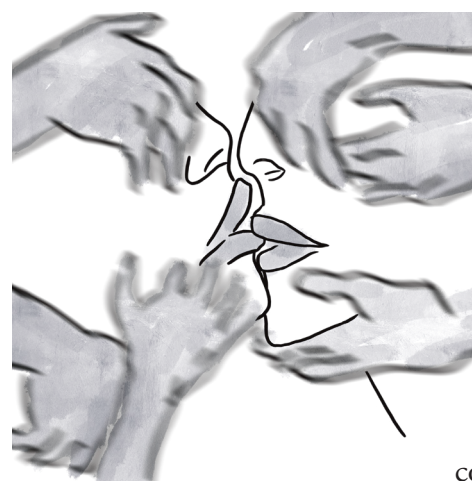
What strikes me most during this time is the incredible courage displayed by these groups. I think of the coffee shop barista who recently shared his Valentine's Day plans with me—how he and his husband were going to celebrate his recent transition with a special dinner in Boston followed by ice skating. They made this choice despite the overwhelming noise surrounding the new administration's recent attacks on transgender individuals.

I think of undocumented individuals who are, right now, picking out flowers in anticipation of February 14 for their loved ones, daring to love fully in the present, even as they know their physical connection may be at risk the following day. My heart is touched by the thought of recently laid-off federal workers, still choosing to celebrate their loved ones with a meal, despite having watched the career they built their lives around evaporate in just a matter of days. I also think of the transgender individuals who, despite the heightened discrimination they face, are still finding moments to celebrate love and authenticity, persevering through challenges that threaten their existence.

This dynamic is not a novel one. Demonstrations of affection amid times of uncertainty have characterized human history for a long time. Love during periods of persecution has served as a means of survival. As Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently said, “Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God.” The historical examples that testify to this truth are innumerable. From activists singing songs of love in the quiet of church basements during the Civil Rights movement to individuals crafting protest signs

during South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, the capacity for love to transcend suffering has been a powerful force for change across the world.

Nowadays, it can be challenging to fight political rhetoric that seeks to undermine the humanity of countless groups. Yet, it is precisely through love—love that is deeper, bolder, and



more defiant—that we can begin to confront this hate.

While many fear that the coming years will be fraught with heightened anxiety, I believe that they should be defined by

concrete acts of resistance

and resilience, fueled by love. Love is not just an abstract emotion—it is the force that drives us to confront injustice, speak out against hate, and build coalitions that challenge divisiveness. When the mountain ahead seems insurmountable, the most powerful thing we can do is take collective, deliberate steps toward change, supporting each other through every act of solidarity and moment of care.

This Valentine's Day, to love in the face of uncertainty is one of the most radical and liberating acts we can embrace. The audacity of love is an undeniable force, one that defies the odds and overcomes fear. So, tell that person you love them, even when the world doesn't reflect that same kindness. Buy those flowers, even when tomorrow feels uncertain. Laugh as loudly and freely as you can, even when the weight of the world presses down. It is only through love that we will uncover a light at the end of the tunnel.

In 2025, celebrating a holiday built on love has become an act of resistance. As long as hardship persists, so too must our ability to see beyond the fears it brings, choosing instead to celebrate our shared humanity.

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HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28

Point/Counterpoint: Remy the Cat vs Sasha the Dog

Tackling the age-old Harvard debate, once and for all, who is Harvard's most supreme pet?

BY BEN KAUFMAN '28 AND WHITMAN PETERS '28

At Harvard, competition is everywhere, extending beyond student organizations and rivalries with lesser-known colleges in Connecticut. Even Harvard's most beloved animals have become the center of a fierce debate: Who is the true sweetheart of campus? The first contestant is Sasha, the Harvard University Police Department's charismatic K9 officer, whose appearances at campus events, sports media days, and on social media has made her a Harvard celebrity. However, there is also Remy, an ever-present feline, who roams the Yard with the quiet confidence of a professor and has won over students through library visits and spontaneous encounters. For years, Harvard students have debated their favorite animal, and right now is no different.

What's your pitch for why your chosen pet is Harvard's best?

Ben: Let's face it. Sasha's a pet who instantly appeals to students, ultimately convincing everyone crossing her path that she's the signature campus canine. I first understood this during the Class of 2028 Orientation Pep Rally, a characteristically meager attempt by Harvard to ignite school spirit. But when Sasha came up on the stage, the crowd finally erupted in cheers, louder than those for even Dean Khurana! As a Harvard micro-influencer with a verified Instagram account, Sasha has touched thousands of lives.

Whitman: Sure, Sasha has made waves on the internet, but at the end of the day, she is just that: an influencer. Posing for the perfect picture or coming out only to peacock with Harvard athletics teams, Sasha is clearly only focused on clout, not Harvard's student body. Remy, on the other hand, is a true cat of the people. He has been there for us at our lowest, milling around the Yard and keeping us company during our late-night studying.

Remy's special place in Harvard's heart comes from his remarkable longevity, made possible by the collective efforts and support of Harvard students. On multiple occasions, I have seen students take Remy into Cabot Library on cold nights or even give him treats in their dorm rooms. Remy is a testament to the empathy and adoration that Harvard students share for their community.

Who else can vouch for the greatness of your chosen Harvard pet?

Ben: I have just one source to direct you to: Sasha's legendary Instagram. Sure, Sasha's a dog on the daily, but online she's the DAWG—whether it's athlete media days or nights at the Art Museums, you'll see appearances of our school's beloved police protector. If Sasha's there, it's a big deal. However, if public events are not enough for you, through her Linktree, you can schedule some

quality one-on-one time whenever you want. Just make sure you respect her sleep schedule—Sasha isn't pulling all-nighters on the third floor of Lamont Library. Anyone who's had one of these appointments or looked into her big, brown eyes can assure you of how great this dog really is.

Whitman: What makes Remy so special isn't just that he's always there, it's that he reflects the Harvard student experience in a way no one or nothing else does. Like us students, he navigates the Yard with purpose, weaving through tourists and rushing between destinations. He finds moments of rest in the library, just as students do between classes. His candid, student-submitted photos on Instagram capture something real: a presence that is deeply connected to the College's community.

While Sasha is technically tasked with "community engagement," Remy is on the clock 24/7. There's no need to schedule an appointment or find time in your busy schedule to hang out with the ubiquitous Remy. Remy's impact is organic and constant, representing the spirit of Harvard's student body. He represents the companionship and thoughtfulness that define life at Harvard. Seeing him isn't just comforting, it's a reminder that we're all in this together.

What weaknesses do you see in your partner's chosen pet?

Ben: Remy? Think about it. He's small, scratchy, and mean. He's greedy, always begging for your food when you're just trying to get to your 10:30 class. I just know that when he's walking down the halls, he's thinking, "I'm the king, and there's nothing you can do about it"—that prideful ego our feline "friends" get when they're unwarrantedly fed a snack too many. Why unwarranted? Let me tell you: lured by his innocent-seeming purrs and soft, ginger fur, I invited the cat into my lowly Thayer dorm a few weeks ago. Minutes later, I looked around the room only to see him scratching up my sheets and refusing to leave my bed! As if I weren't victim enough, he jumped onto my roommate's bed and climbed on his desk! The chaos seemed like it would never end, but there's hope it would if someone set the record straight on the true nature of this Ron Weasley wannabe.

And outside of Cabot Library goes, who even cares about Remy? While you can catch

Sasha at any happening place on campus relevant to the entire student body, the only place this sad sack of ginger fur roams about is in the Science Center and the Yard. If you try finding him at the time you're most likely at the Science Center, the 15-minute intervals between classes, chances are he's making himself scarce or you'll lose him among the sea of people rushing to their LS1b section. On the other hand, Sasha is consistent, and her actual job is to serve! "Any Harvard student" would back you up, Whitman? Well, not this one.

Whitman: Honestly, who can blame Remy? Captured in a student's dorm with no escape or food, it would be foolish to judge any of his behavior in a situation like this. More than chaos, this scene sounds like a desperate attempt to be freed from his imprisonment in an unfriendly human dorm.

Now, don't get me wrong. I fully see the appeal of having a police dog on

campus. However, Sasha's focus isn't necessarily on investigative work. In her time on the force, she has yet to sniff out a bomb or find the thief who took my phone charger in Lamont. Like the most annoying

member of the group project, Sasha just takes credit for HUPD's hard work as a figurehead of the organization. While Sasha is busy posing for photos in front of her ring light with neatly combed fur, Remy is outside in the cold, greeting every student with wide eyes and a welcoming purr.

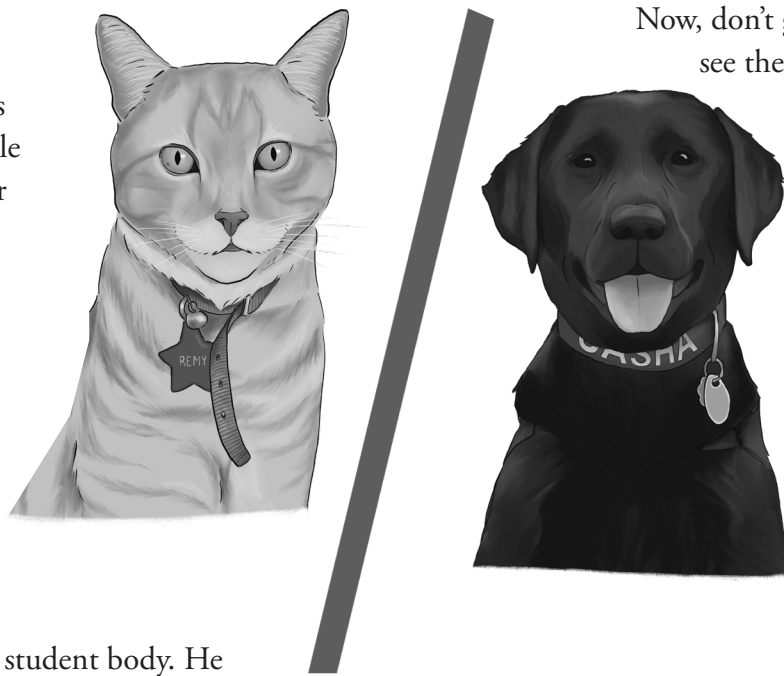
Ben and Whitman: Regardless of how we stand on whether Remy or Sasha truly triumphs as Harvard's prime pet, we both concede that there are benefits to both. Want a support animal? Sasha is there for you. Need a late-night Cabot pick-me-up? Remy's lurking around for your amusement. Clearly, the debate is still lively, but we hope this article has added some clarity to this discussion.

Ben: And by that, of course, we mean Sasha's on top.

Whitman: A man of the people and a clear winner: Remy.

BEN KAUFMAN '28 (BENKAUFMAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ALLERGIC TO CATS, WHILE WHITMAN PETERS '28 (WHITPETERS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ALLERGIC TO REMY'S HATERS.

GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28



Point/Counterpoint: Should You Take “Gems?”

A discussion on how students’ perceptions of gems reflect a broader academic mindset.

BY TYLER DANG ’28 AND RAINA WANG ’28

At Harvard, the term “gems” is used by students to describe courses that, like a gemstone, are desirable to all: minimal work for an easy A. With a hungering survival instinct to maintain the highest possible GPA, it is no wonder that Harvard students might prefer the easiest classes.

Often, students turn to General Education (Gen Ed) courses—part of the graduation requirements—to find this. Beyond concentration-specific courses and electives, every student must fulfill a language requirement, expository writing, quantitative reasoning, three divisional distributions, and four general education courses. Because Gen Eds must be taken by every student, regardless of class or concentration, they have garnered a reputation for being on the easier side, and, eventually, have become associated with being some of the “gemmier” classes that students take. So to get the requirement “over with,” students generally choose to take a “gemmy” Gen Ed, with no regard to the class subject.

However, the question of whether or not to take gems isn’t as simple as it seems. It calls into question: Is there more to education beyond the rigor of the course? Or is taking a class that fails to test your limits essentially wasting your precious time at Harvard?

Tyler: Before we tackle why taking gems is acceptable, we should attempt to define the purpose of higher education. Should college prepare students for their ability to take tests? Maybe introduce them to the hassle of hundreds of assignments? Or perhaps actually give students the proper foundation necessary for an educated opinion on a variety of topics?

The degree that an undergraduate finally walks out with is not just a stepping stone to a well-paying job (though obviously, it very much helps). Instead, a Harvard degree represents an understanding of the liberal arts curriculum. Forcing oneself to take only the hardest known courses

in an attempt to buff one’s transcript fails to take advantage of the vast range of topics offered at Harvard.

Instead, students should take advantage of the opportunity to branch into various subjects and form a strong knowledge base regardless of their intended concentration. While a mechanical engineer may not need Kant or Rawls to build machinery, understanding the basic philosophies allows that person to broach those topics and still have beneficial, educational discussions.

Other than the required courses one must take for their concentration, classes should be taken based on interest, not rigor. If a student is curious about a physics course on string theory, they should take the course, regardless of how many problem sets are assigned. Coursework one is passionate about can be more fulfilling than a class that looks good on a transcript, even in the face of potentially strict grading. A “harder” class does not equate to better. Larger course load classes prove one’s work ethic but may not be intellectually stimulating.

Often, learning to learn is exalted as the primary motive behind education—understanding one’s own processes and methodology for achieving success. While self-discovery and discipline are a must in education, they cannot completely replace creating a diverse foundation of knowledge and vice versa. Challenging classes are respected because they indicate a student’s mental fortitude and work ethic. Working through assignments that were made to distill some understanding of the material, students identify the limit of what they can accomplish (if there is one). These developments are just as significant. Taking only gems may remove the self-actualization gained from college. However, taking only difficult courses to prove one’s resilience may restrict them from accessing expansive education. Gems that offer insight into a new subject should be taken alongside more difficult and focused courses.

There is another argument for gems: making life easier. It is no secret that

Harvard has many amazing opportunities, ranging from joining an a cappella group to writing for a certain purple newspaper. Making time to comp every club or student organization is not easy when taking four problem-set heavy classes, but having even one slightly easier class can be freeing for the busy and work-ridden student. The pathways that may open from joining Harvard’s different communities or networks outweigh the stress of overloading one’s schedule.

The student body is made of people from diverse communities, backgrounds, and levels of preparation. Some were fortunate enough to have received an education that focused on preparing them for college course expectations. Others simply were not. Expecting all students to have the same proficiency in a class alongside a packed schedule is to unfairly penalize those who did not have access to the same level of preparation. Gems allow students to find their own balance while still engaging in extracurricular activities.

Certain pre-professional clubs offer excellent resources to gain experience and make connections that may lead to summer internships or jobs. These same clubs may also be substantial time commitments. Some organizations even offer financial aid since students may be unable to work a job in tandem with the workload. Making use of Harvard’s opportunities would see students extending beyond just graduation requirements as they take advantage of the alumni connections or the ability to gain experience. If taking a gemmy course increases one’s chances of gaining a prestigious internship, then utilizing that opportunity should not be seen as misusing one’s education.

Some may argue that the option to take classes pass/fail is enough to lighten the load. However, a student without worrying about the grade (beyond achieving a C) may not properly engage with the material. There would be no guarantee that the student pays attention; instead, they may just do enough to scrape a passing grade. While gems may be easier than other

courses, there is still work to do to confirm that the student understands the concepts.

Raina: The discussions surrounding gems at Harvard endorse the idea that classes should be taken simply because they're easy. Are they genuinely substantive and engaging classes? Well. That comes second.

But it shouldn't. Tuition costs \$56,550 this year, which is \$7,068.75 per class.

Especially with tuition this expensive, education should not just be about grades. There is far too much emphasis and dialogue placed on GPA and not enough on the quality of education. While this is unfortunately unavoidable for some students—pre-meds, I sympathize—hyperfixation on grades can create unnecessary stress and pressure for students. However, the solution shouldn't be to create easier classes so that people can “balance out” their schedules.

Students looking for a class to balance their rigorous concentration requirements can take an elective course pass/fail. Under Harvard's pass/fail policy, students can take 44 credits—eleven 4-credit classes—pass/fail, which is more than enough for one pass/fail class per semester for all four years. If alleviating the stress and pressure of maintaining a near-perfect GPA is the concern, the problem should not be addressed by systemically upholding this category of “easy-A” courses. Instead, students should opt to individually take classes pass/fail if they want a less stressful semester; Harvard gives undergraduates the option to take courses pass/fail for this reason.

The existence of gems was not always this controversial. In fact, gems were initially meant to represent classes that are both easy and provide intellectual stimulus. The best gems would be classes that have a light workload, but also have an amazing teaching staff, engaging learning activities, and are well-structured—think of CS 196 taught by professor Karen Brennan. According to the anonymous QGuide, it's a “guaranteed A” with a “warm, engaging, creative, relaxed, [and] fun” classroom environment. Students wrote that they felt free to explore their interests and were inspired by the teaching staff and community as a whole.

While gems may have started with this intention, the discussion around these courses has evolved to primarily refer to the

easiest of the easiest Gen Eds—those that require no work, even for a good grade. Originally, General Education courses were designed to be just as rigorous as any other class, and they were meant to have at least 12 hours of work a week—class time included. That calculates to around eight hours of work outside of class a week, which is way more substantial than the two to four hours of work-outside-of-class time.

The culture around taking gems has evolved to prioritize the wrong things when it comes to taking classes, as demonstrated by the existence of platforms with the sole purpose of finding a class with minimal work and a guaranteed A or A-. Some argue that this shows Harvard's education has deteriorated and classes have become too easy. To remedy this, Harvard does not necessarily need to “degemify” courses. It's not the existence of easy classes that is the problem, but the culture of taking a class just because other people report it being a “gem.” For example, how many people took “Gen Ed 1038: Sleep,” thought it would be easy, and then got blindsided?

With Harvard's academic deans cracking down on gems and requiring Gen Eds to meet the standard 12 hours of work a week, the discussion around gemmy courses becomes all the more pertinent. For example, the heart disease Gen Ed that I took last semester enforced a strict attendance policy. If a student were absent from class (either lecture or section) more than one time, the highest grade they could receive would be a C. The professor insinuated at the end of the semester that this policy was intended to make up for the easy grading, since too many students were getting high grades in his class. This, compounded with the culture around gems, where students can report “success stories” about classes they've determined to be easy, indicates that Harvard students aren't taking classes as seriously as expected.

It makes sense that the administration is trying to enforce a stricter standard, especially when it comes to Gen Eds, which have earned a reputation for being gemmy. I know from my own experience last semester that the statement from the QGuide rings true, and many students, shamefully myself included, rarely put in the work outside of class to do readings, which led to a worse experience

in discussion sections. So the issue isn't the existence of friendly professors who assign easy classwork; it's students thinking they can get away with not putting in the effort and still receive a high grade.

Far be it from me to tell you, or anyone, not to take an easy course—or not to take a gem, for that matter. I'm not so hardcore that I don't believe in easy classes; I just don't believe that we should take classes just for the sake that they're easy. So when March rolls around, and the stress of course selection hits me once again, you'll find me on Q-guides, Sidechat, and crowd-sourcing from upperclassmen, as expected, but if there's any mistake I won't repeat from freshman fall, it's taking a class only because it's “gemmy.”

Tyler and Raina: The debate regarding gems arises not from their lack of difficulty but from the reputation they have earned for being a guaranteed A, like a participation medal. Students scour forums and QGuides for gems to achieve the easiest course load, not because they have an interest in the course or hope to gain a foundation in that subject. In this sense, gems are not utilized correctly. Taking a course simply because it is easy is just as bad as avoiding an interesting one because it is considered a joke.

Harvard is more than just education. There are too many opportunities on campus outside the classroom to justify spending all four years in the library. However, the many avenues of subjects that one can travel through should not be wasted. Gems should act as the bridge between these two extremes: offering a balanced course schedule to explore the many extracurricular offerings while still providing students with an opportunity to engage with topics that they otherwise would not explore.

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GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '27



Point/Counterpoint: What's Your "Type?"

A point/counterpoint on hand-writing versus typing notes.

BY ILANA FEDER '26 AND KATE OLIVER '26

Kate: I refuse to take notes on paper in class. The moment I walk into any lecture, my bag hits the ground and I quickly open my computer. My Google Drive tab is already pulled up, and within seconds, I create a new document in its assigned folder and begin pre-formatting the page. On the next tab, I open up Canvas, navigate to the course's posted lecture slides, and split the screen so I can see my notes at the same time. This process, though it may seem a bit excessive, has been fine-tuned over five semesters of college to ensure that as soon as a professor starts speaking, I am prepared to capture every word.

Ilana: In a classroom full of laptops, my notebook stands out. Even when the professor asks for minimal screen time, many devices manage to stay open the entire lecture. While some students argue that typing is the most efficient way to take notes, taking hand-written notes is superior, and that is a hill I will die on.

Kate: I firmly believe typing my notes is the most effective use of my time in class. By having the slides open next to my notes, I can catch up on anything that I missed, avoiding clogging my camera roll with endless pictures of Powerpoints I will forget to delete. Instead of struggling to move my eyes from screen to page if I were copying the notes by hand, all of my attention can be focused in one place so I am less likely to miss anything the professor has to add. Furthermore, I am not stuck trying to understand my sloppy handwriting and inevitably misspelled words that resemble chicken scratch when it comes time to study. My system of notes ends up saving me from my inability to spell (thank you Grammarly!) and keeps all the information correct.

Ilana: Having neatly typed notes is a plus, but the distractions that come with the screen aren't worth it. Look, I'm not some sort of superhuman who's immune to distractions. In fact, I'm a daydreaming pro. In times of boredom, you may argue that having a laptop open is the most convenient solution. But being bored with a pen and paper allows you to have way more of a creative outlet than you've been led to believe. After checking your email five times and playing through all of *The New York Times* games, you're stuck.

When hand-writing notes, the opportunities are endless. Doodles should not be framed as a negative thing. What ever happened to writing your name in bubble letters? Or practicing your signature, but with your crush's last name? Doodles are far more productive than constantly checking iMessage to see if they texted you back.

I got my first laptop the summer before freshman year of college, knowing it would be essential for homework. It never crossed my mind that I would have to carry it around and use it

my surprise when everyone pulled out their laptops on the first day. Opening up your laptop at the start of class is also a nightmare when you forget to close your tabs from the night before. Oh, what's this—Love Island instead of my p-set?!

At the beginning of every class, I take out my 3-subject, college-ruled, Five Star notebook, (this semester it's royal blue) and a mechanical pencil. My phone stays securely in my pocket. I write the date in the top left corner of the page, and I am ready to take notes.

Kate: While many others could easily get distracted by their computers in class, I take several precautions to avoid problematic multitasking. All my devices are set to "Do Not Disturb" when I sit down, and I do my best to flip my phone over so the only notifications I can receive are texts from my parents. If I only had a pencil and paper in front of me, I have no doubt that my notes would be filled with small drawings of flowers and geometric shapes layered on top of each other while listening to my professor drag on about the Gauss-Jacobi method. As a child, my parents kept me occupied at dinner with their friends by handing me coloring books; the urge to draw tends to take over when I am stuck listening to people speak, longing to be anywhere else but Science Center Hall B. These doodles will later come back to haunt me as I attempt to cram the night before a midterm.

Ilana: When you take handwritten notes, your professor and TFs notice. They have tried to share with the class that there is scientific evidence to prove that hand-writing notes helps with information retention, but most students just roll their eyes. I have received emails from TFs acknowledging and showing great respect for my notes. Handwritten notes also give you the opportunity to refine your handwriting. This may not seem important in today's world, and I think that is quite sad. When girlfriends get hand-written letters from their boyfriends instead of a "You up?" text, it's the most romantic thing they've ever seen. It is something that should be cherished and conserved. Handwriting is a unique skill that should never be lost in modernization. I understand that having messy handwriting is sometimes uncontrollable, but just get over it and work your finger muscles. When I am falling asleep in class, my notes start to fall off the lines. Not to worry! I just click a few times on my mechanical pencil and then stab myself in the thigh to wake myself up. Bet you can't do that when you're typing away!

Kate: If I start falling asleep while studying, I turn my brightness all the way up and let the

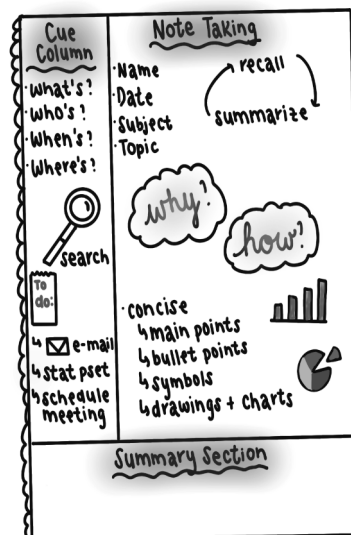
blue light stimulate my brain. I definitely can't do that while staring at a piece of paper. Additionally, my biggest problem when attempting to take handwritten notes is the inability to reorganize once I've started writing. It's especially frustrating when a professor introduces three key points, dives deep into the second, and circles back around to a point from the first. How am I magically supposed to create space on a page crammed full of notes? On a computer, I can easily go back to the previous section and insert new material. In fact, one of the ways I study is to reorganize my notes by combining all my pages from the semester into one massive document. And if I want to make Quizlet flashcards, I can just copy and paste instead of retyping everything from scratch.

Ilana: I must admit that I am an avid user of Quizlet and I appreciate its effectiveness. However, there is something that just feels more authentically academic about making your own flashcards. But, you're right. Who has time for that at this school?!

Growing up, shopping for school supplies was one of my favorite things to do. I know—true nerdy shit, but that's why I'm here. It would be late August, the air would smell like the last few nights of summer, and my Dad would drive us to Walmart. As we wandered the aisles he'd always say, "Why didn't we do this earlier?" He'd climb up the shelves to find the notebooks in the colors I wanted. On the way out, we would pass by the Paper Mate Inkjoy Gel Pens that only the really cool girls had. I'd ask to get them even though I already knew the answer: "\$20 for crappy pens? No." Now that I'm in college, I can buy those sick ass pens myself. I make my 13-year-old self proud every day by using them in class.

Kate: Typing your notes is the superior method because you are able to optimize your time spent in class, retaining the information presented visually and audibly. You leave class with a document primed to help you during all your late-night cram sessions, all without the possibility of misplacing your notes.

Ilana: Hand-writing notes is the superior method because you gain respect from your professors and pay homage to generations before us who only knew pen and paper. You will feel more engaged in class and walk out feeling like you actually learned something that's going to stick with you.



VS.



KATE OLIVER '26 (KOLIVER@HARVARDINDEPENDENT.COM) HAS EVERY SINGLE FILE IN HER GOOGLE DRIVE ORGANIZED. ILANA FEDER '26 (ILANAFEDER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS EVERY SINGLE PAPER MATE INKJOY GEL PENCOLOR.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27

Thoughts From New Quincy: A New GOAT

An examination of why Future is the greatest rapper of all time.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

Last March in “Family Matters,” Drake famously said, “Kendrick just opened his mouth, someone go hand him a Grammy,” during their back-and-forth diss tracks. When the Grammys rolled around, Kendrick Lamar’s “Not Like Us” won five Grammys, including awards for both song and music video. While “Not Like Us” was widely praised, Drake’s comment raises a broader question about how greatness in hip-hop is measured—some artists seem to receive significantly more favoritism from music critics than others. The same debate exists in professional sports: this NFL season, Lamar Jackson outperformed Josh Allen in nearly every statistical category, yet Allen won the MVP award. This begs the question: what truly makes someone the greatest in their field?

Future, born Nayvadius DeMun Wilburn in 1983, is an Atlanta-based rapper, singer, and songwriter known for pioneering modern trap music. His signature blend of auto-tuned melodies, raw lyricism, and dark, hedonistic themes have reshaped hip-hop’s sonic landscape. As 50 Cent, one of the most popular rappers during the early 2000s, once noted, “[Future is] way bigger [than Jay-Z]. There’s consistent music from him that didn’t chart that [are] huge records that people love and appreciate.” When you consider the evolution of Future’s discography—from early mixtapes like “1000,” “True Story,” and “Astronaut Status” to breakthrough projects like “Monster” or “DS2”—you see a blueprint that not only changed the sound of rap but also redefined what it means to consistently innovate.

While modern debates over rap’s greatest artists often include names like Jay-Z, Drake, and Kendrick Lamar, their influence and consistency pale in comparison to Future’s. Jay-Z, for instance, is hailed as one of hip-hop’s greatest businessmen. He has a billion-dollar net worth, yet his musical evolution was largely built on foundations laid by Tupac and Biggie. Jay-Z’s influence on the genre’s sound is minimal compared to Future, whose album “Monster” introduced a new era with hits like “Throw Away” and “Codeine Crazy,” and is considered by *Firebird Magazine* to be the greatest trap album of all time. This record marked the beginning of an era where melodic, auto-tuned trap music would dominate, a trend that continues today.

In this evolving musical landscape, individual artists have taken distinct approaches to

adopt and innovate within this newly established genre. Drake, undoubtedly one of the most commercially successful artists in history, has built his career on adaptability by constantly borrowing from emerging trends and styles, while Future has been responsible for creating and cementing new sounds. His collaboration with Future on “What a Time to Be Alive” illustrates this dynamic perfectly: Future was the trendsetter whose innovative sound propelled the project, while Drake capitalized on its commercial appeal after Future released his greatest album: “DS2.”

DS2, considered one of the greatest trap albums of all time by the rap community, demonstrates a consistent evolution that continues to define hip-hop’s mainstream sound. This album was Future’s first to peak at number one on the Billboard Top 200 and spent 300 weeks in the top 200. Tracks like “Where Ya At,” “Thought It Was a Drought,” and “F*ck Up Some Commas” became trap anthems.

Two years later, Future’s versatility was on full display in 2017 when he released two back-to-back albums that again peaked at number 1 on Billboard’s Top 200, “Future” and “HNDRXX,” just a week apart. While Future leaned into hard-hitting trap anthems like “Draco” and “Mask Off,” his album “HNDRXX” explored a more melodic, R&B-infused side, giving us introspective hits like “Comin Out Strong” and “My Collection.”

While Drake’s sound often follows the trends, Kendrick Lamar takes a different approach—one that prioritizes depth and narrative. Kendrick Lamar is celebrated for his lyricism and storytelling, but his impact on hip-hop’s daily evolution is significantly weaker than Future’s. Lamar releases music sporadically, often disappearing for years between albums. While his projects receive critical acclaim, their influence is primarily felt in intellectual and analytical discussions rather than in the actual sound of mainstream hip-hop.

Future, on the other hand, has consistently delivered music that defines and shapes contemporary rap. His presence in the industry is constant, ensuring his influence is always felt. Lamar’s storytelling is powerful, but Future’s ability to craft both anthems and deeply personal records gives him a more comprehensive grip on the culture.

Lamar’s most recent album, GNX, received mixed reviews with Pitchfork arguing that the album’s authenticity is marred by a “heavy-handed, brand-conscious narrative,” and the production feels “too clean and synthetic.”

Regardless, this lackluster performance still landed Lamar the biggest performance of the year—the Super Bowl halftime show. While Lamar’s albums are monumental, their cultural saturation fades between releases. Future’s consistency and the sheer volume of high-quality music ensure that he remains more relevant to rap listeners and hip-hop evolution on a day-to-day basis.

Beyond individual records, Future’s influence is felt across the entire genre. Artists such as Young Thug, Lil Uzi Vert, Travis Scott, and Playboi Carti all bear traces of Future’s blueprint. His pioneering use of auto-tune, atmospheric beats, and the blending of rapping with singing has changed how hip-hop sounds, adding emotional depth to a genre once criticized for surface-level bravado. Moreover, Future’s role in popularizing the surprise drop culture and rethinking digital distribution has forced the industry to adapt—another testament to his forward-thinking approach.

By developing this culture, where artists or brands release new content, such as albums, singles, merchandise, or sneakers, unexpectedly or with minimal promotion, Future has changed how artists structure albums and mixtapes, making this once unconventional method now a standard practice in the industry. His mixtape-era dominance has made free music an expectation, forcing major labels to rethink their approach to digital distribution.

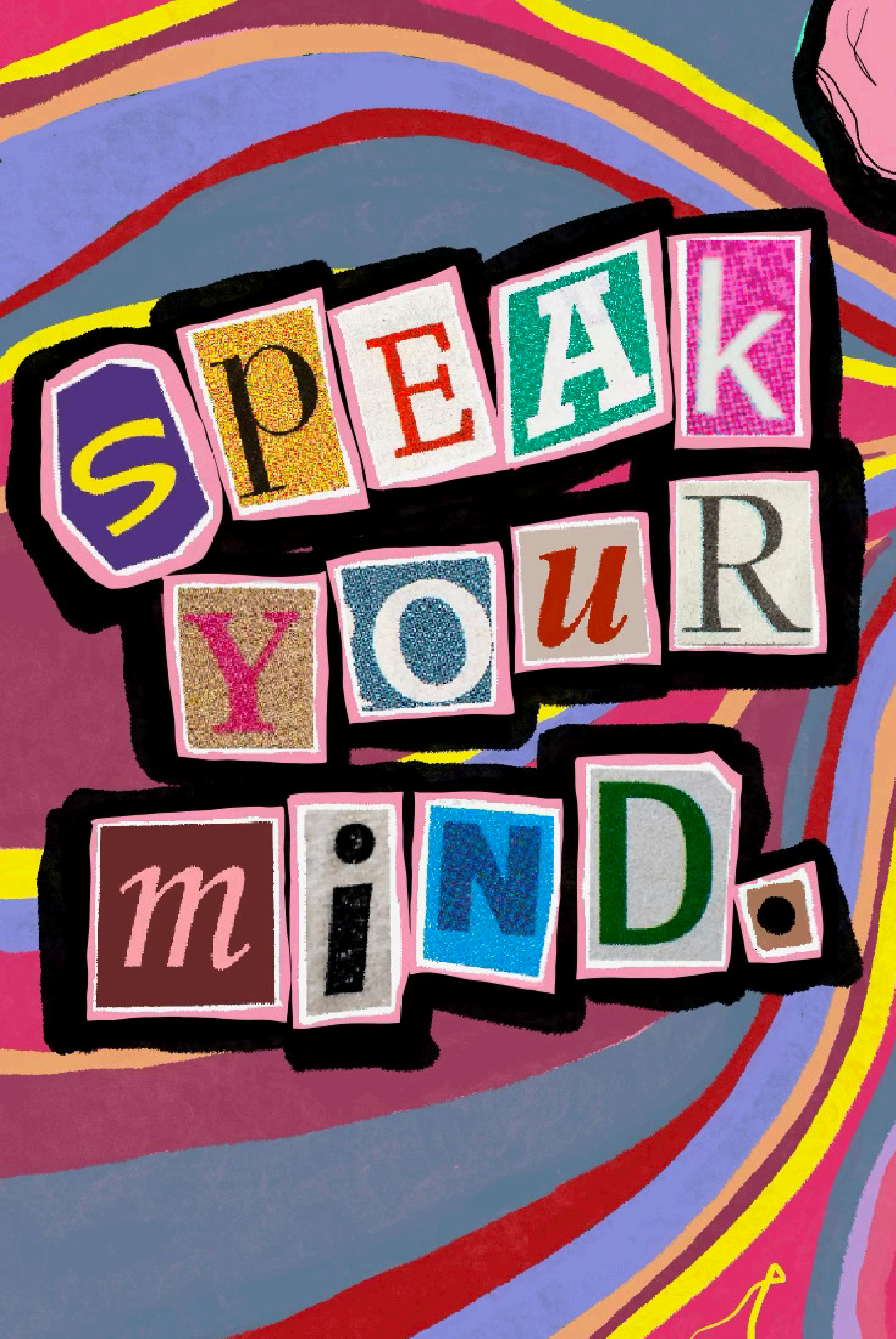
Future’s career is a case study in redefining an era. His early mixtapes laid the groundwork, “Pluto” announced his arrival, and albums like “Monster,” “Beast Mode,” and “56 Nights” solidified his place as the architect of the modern trap. The landmark album “DS2” set a precedent for how trap music could evolve into both anthemic club hits and introspective records.

Ultimately, the debate over greatness in modern rap isn’t solely about lyrical prowess or critical acclaim—it’s about influence, consistency, and the power to reshape an era. While Kendrick Lamar’s intermittent brilliance and Drake’s commercial adaptability have their merits, Future’s unyielding stream of innovative music, as evidenced by his extensive discography, proves he is the true architect of modern trap. His music not only defines a generation but continues to influence and propel the genre forward every single day.

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GRAPHIC BY JOYE WINGARD '28





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The Controversy of Altered Consciousness

The Harvard Undergraduate Psychedelics Club demystifies the modern conversation on psychedelic policy.

BY CHASE BOURBON '27

“Turn on, tune in, drop out.” In other words: use your intuition, connect, and never conform. This mantra of psychedelic counterculture was coined by Harvard Psychology professor Timothy Leary, who taught from 1959-1963. Leary was in charge of the Harvard Psilocybin Project, a set of experiments where often both researcher and subject ingested psychedelic substances. His controversial behavior, which included scandalous research methods, poor teaching abilities, and even distributing psychedelics to undergrad students, caused psychedelic studies at Harvard to be shunned for decades. However, these substances have now leaked their way into modern academia.

The seal is broken; money and resources are pouring into this uncovered stream of consciousness, even at Harvard. Moreover, U.S. federal and state laws surrounding psychedelics are being called into question for the first time since the 1980s. Massachusetts residents, despite the recent failure of ballot Question 4, will soon have the opportunity to make new rules and regulations around these substances. Now, we must carefully figure out how to proceed.

A book released in 2010 called *The Harvard Psychedelic Club* explores the problematic lives of some of Harvard's most infamous psychedelic explorers, including Leary. This reflection on the past, however, is not just history—it is alive, and I'm living it.

I am Co-President of the Harvard Undergraduate Psychedelics Club, formerly known as the Harvard Psychedelics Club, and even more formerly known as the Harvard Science of Psychedelics Club. Founded in 2019, the numerous name changes signal a tumultuous past. It's not easy to follow

in the footsteps of professors who dealt drugs to students and hosted parties fueled by LSD and a number of other psychoactive substances. Though Leary could never be a part of the Harvard Undergraduate Psychedelics Club I know today, his history looms over us as a warning of what not to do.

When I first saw a sign for the Harvard Undergraduate Psychedelics Club during my freshman year's club fair, I was struck by a range of emotions: confusion, curiosity, intrigue, and surprise. As a native of Kansas, a notoriously harsh state regarding drug use and possession, drugs have always had a simple connotation: bad. How, then, could a club like this exist at Harvard?

I joined the club and found a grounded community of brilliant, interdisciplinary students committed to advocacy, discussing current scientific research, and exploring human potential. I invite you to join us for a meeting, collaborative poetry party, or art show and decide for yourself if we've transcended the controversial reputation my club inevitably inherited.

Psychedelics are more than mere Schedule I substances. They are culture, revolution, technology, and art. They are consciousness expansion and spiritual exploration. Psychedelics are medicine.

Due to my executive role within the Harvard Undergraduate Psychedelics Club, I worked closely with proponents of a Massachusetts bill to decriminalize psychedelics last fall. I spoke on virtual panels with Students for Sensible Drug Policy, gave an interview to *The Crimson*, hosted public information sessions, and even tabled on Massachusetts Avenue outside of Harvard in support of the ballot. The bill, known as Question 4, was titled

“Limited Legalization and Regulation of Certain Natural Psychedelic Substances” and eventually failed on Nov. 5: 57% No, 43% Yes. This bill should have passed.

If Question 4 was established, four natural psychedelics would have been decriminalized statewide—ibogaine, psilocybin, DMT, and mescaline. Furthermore, a new state licensing board would allow recognized therapists to administer these psychedelics to their patients as mental health remedies; they've all shown immense healing potential in early studies, despite that research being federally illegal for decades. During the Obama administration, a science and technology memorandum loosened the regulations on experiments in the name of science. New rules allowed scientists to obtain permission from the DEA to study psychedelics, and universities like Johns Hopkins and NYU started groundbreaking research. Much like how cannabis is still federally illegal but some states choose to allow their citizens access, Question 4 would have been a progressive state-wide measure to allow psychedelics as mental health treatment and end arrests for possession.



Although I put a lot of effort into procuring votes, I nonetheless recognize some of the bill's shortcomings. For example, Question 4 would have allowed adults over 21 to grow these natural psychedelics in their homes within a 12-foot-by-12-foot space. The ambiguity of this measurement, such as the lack of a height specification and therefore a theoretically limitless amount of space, was cause for concern. However, such technicalities are not enough to outweigh the implicit benefit of offering key options for mental health treatment. Psychedelics have power where typical pharmaceutical drugs do not. For example, a recent study on psilocybin found that patients who ingested psychedelics only twice compared better on a wellness scale than those who received anti-depressants daily over the same six-week trial.

Another concern, regarding children or pets accidentally consuming these substances, is valid. That said, criminalization does not affect the rate of drug consumption. In 2001, Portugal decriminalized personal use amounts of all drugs. Contrary to popular belief, the Portuguese decriminalization did not lead to a major uptick in drug use. In fact, research indicates that "drug-related harms" decreased, at least in the short term.

Coming from Kansas, I had higher hopes for Massachusetts. Other states, including Colorado and Oregon, have passed similar measures to what was proposed here. Is this initiative to allow more plants for medical use *that* different from the decriminalization and legalization of cannabis, an issue Massachusetts put to rest almost ten years ago?

Curiously, there are eight cities where psychedelics have already been decriminalized in this state. There are eight cities where possession isn't prosecuted, where people are free to self-medicate as they please, as is their human right; where police can stop

wasting their efforts controlling what plants people eat. Cambridge is one of these cities, and I am grateful to live in a place that takes this issue seriously. Decriminalization is a great starting point, but this city-wide level of regulation still prevents the existence of centers for psychedelic-assisted therapy that Question 4 would have allowed. Therefore, more steps forward are necessary to truly reap the benefits of these substances.

A major selling point of psychedelics, and one of the core reasons why Harvard has started to accept psychedelic research back under their umbrella, is that they have the potential to treat the untreatable. According to the National Institute of Health, psychedelics can combat PTSD and chronic depression, also known as 'treatment-resistant depression.' I use the word 'combat' modestly because, in reality, psychedelics are blowing modern pharmaceuticals away in their ability to treat these illnesses.

The U.S. government classifies Schedule I substances as those that have no known medicinal purpose and have a high risk of abuse. Psilocybin, objectively, does not fit either of these descriptions; neither do LSD, MDMA, and many other psychedelics. In contrast to what the federal government preaches, scientific analyses explain the benefits of psychedelics for a plethora of brain ailments, including addiction disorders, PTSD, and chronic depression. Moreover, these substances do not act on dopaminergic receptors and users attain a quick tolerance, making it almost impossible to become physically or psychologically dependent.

It's clear that psychedelics are still receiving criticism for their stained history. Regardless, these substances are here to stay. Even though Question 4 failed in November, the legal march for psychedelics is well underway. Other local initiatives are sprouting across the nation, including more already in Massachusetts. The Federal

Government may not openly recognize the benefits of these atypical drugs, but that does not mean we, the people, can't.

If we want to live in a world of wider liberty, then it's time to take action. I am only human so much as I am able to make choices for myself and act independently. I am not trying to argue that psychedelics are a universal panacea, or that Question 4 had no issues, or that these substances have no negative effects of which to be cautious. I simply believe that everyone deserves a choice on what they ingest, how they want to seek medical treatment, and how they spend their free time. Psychedelics have been slandered and lumped in with 'hard drugs.' A more rational modern conversation would group them with societally accepted substances such as marijuana, nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and some pharmaceuticals.

A common idiom is that the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, but the second best time is right now. Luckily, the roots of psychedelics are ancient; most scholars agree that humans have used psychedelics for thousands of years. Now, we have the power to nurture this ancient tree. Hindrances, like the failing of Question 4 and the spread of misinformation, are like vines we can slowly prune away. Soon, the blossoms of autonomy will propagate, and modern society will realize what we have been missing. Is there any other similarly promising field of science that has been illegal to research for 50 years? Don't wait to support psychedelic research—grab on now, and rise with the canopy. The longer we wait, the more we will inevitably have to climb.

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GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27

The Add/Drop Period

The social warfare of picking a blocking group.

BY JOCELYNE DELGADO '28

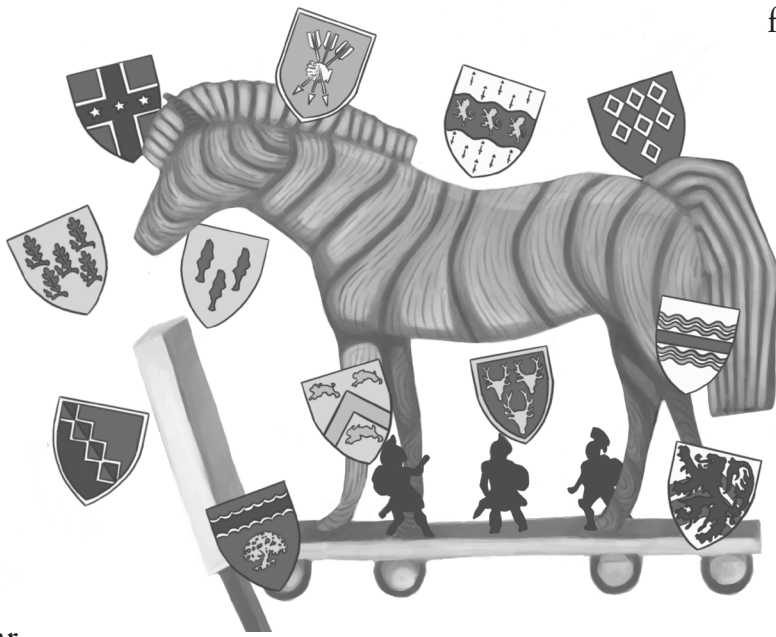
Gruesome battles, horrific confrontations, broken alliances, and the looming threat of another world war? Nope, it's just blocking season for Harvard first-year students. With Housing Day just around the corner, it is time for this year's batch of first-years to scramble around looking for their ride-or-die squad. What seems to be a simple decision is laced with complex power dynamics and the ever-present fear of exclusion. Trying to find the right group can turn a simple housing application into a strategic battlefield. At a time that should be filled with happiness, friendship, and unity, the first-year class instead finds itself increasingly divided. Picking a blocking group is not just about housing and roommates—it's about survival. Will you survive the add/drop period of friendships?

An elaborate game of social chess disguised as Harvard's housing process keeps first-years on their toes. Though the housing application doesn't open until the end of February, the whispered negotiations in the corridors of Annenberg Hall have been circulating as early as last semester.

Ki Yeon Chung '28 has had his ideal blocking group in mind since the beginning of last semester. "I obviously knew since the beginning that I'm going to block with these one or two people that I'm closest to," he shared.

Despite feeling confident in the process from the start, complications can always arise in this high-stakes political minefield. Chung explained how, in a group of five, just having a personal conflict with one person could leave you exiled from the blocking opportunity. "I feel like it's really hard because, in order for us to add a person into our blocking group, I think we all have to unanimously agree," he explained. Be careful who you cross; one bad encounter could blacklist you from finding your forever home.

Forming a blocking group is an intricate dance of betrayals,



loyalties, and the occasional hostage situation. It is always entertaining to see how the battles play out and which role a soldier falls under. Who will be the loyal Tory who sticks with their friends? Who will be the annoying social climber trying to form the ultimate supergroup? And who will be the poor victim blindsided by a nasty betrayal?

A first-year boy living in Matthews Hall described his blocking experience as being a simple, ordinary occasion. Each pick in his blocking group was made with confidence and mutual respect, which is quite the opposite of what he's seen in other groups.

"There's always some messiness with people dropping a friend group when they weren't supposed to or, even worse, a full-blocking group dropping someone," he said. Ah, the ultimate betrayal and paranoia of being the odd one out, leaving you thrown into the ominous, terrifying world of random blocking. One day, you could be happily planning your future in Lowell, and the next, you could be receiving that dreaded text saying, "Hey, we need to talk." Or even worse, you don't receive any indicators that your so-called friends have moved on, and you slowly get ghosted and fizzled out.

Suddenly, Annenberg is no longer simply a dining hall; it's a recruitment center. You begin to notice the people sitting at the tables, and some seem a little too... suspicious. Those people are whispering, looking around. Are they talking about you? Has someone been dropped? Traded over? What alliances merged together? Just how

far are you willing to go to avoid the world of random assignment?

A first-year girl living in Thayer shared her opinion: She would prefer that Harvard not allow anyone to choose their own group in the housing process.

"I would rather Harvard assign random dorms and have people stay in them the whole time. I don't agree with blocking. I don't think it's really conducive to anything good because these people have to self-select their friend groups basically, and [it] causes a lot of drama," she said.

Her viewpoint challenges this long-standing tradition, and offers a valid critique. The process of blocking does inevitably lead to social hierarchies, exclusivity, and a strategic battle of alliances. But despite all this, the blocking system is a fundamental part of Harvard's commitment to community and tradition. The housing system has been a fundamental Harvard Tradition for almost one hundred years. It was first established in 1930 by Harvard President Abbott Lawrence Lowell. It can generate drama, but then again, it also can create deep, long-lasting friendships—if you survive the battle of the selection process.

At the end of the war, when the battle is done and the housing application is sent, you breathe a sigh of relief. Many make it to the other side unscathed; others leave with battle scars and knives in their backs. As time goes on, friend groups will shift, adjust, and adapt, reminiscing about the wars they fought and mostly survived.

So, as blocking season inches closer, good luck, soldiers. May the odds be ever in your favor. Here is my last piece of advice: choose carefully, move in silence, and whatever you do, trust no one. Class of 2028, may you survive this social warfare.

**JOCELYNE DELGADO '28
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EDU) HOPES TO MAKE IT
THROUGH THE BLOCKING SEASON
UNSCATHED.**

GRAPHIC BY KAYLA LE '28

Un Cambio de Aires: A Solo Weekend in Madrid

What I learned on my first weekend trip away from Paris.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

More often than not, I love spontaneity. However, a weekend getaway spontaneously becoming my first-ever solo trip was not the type of spontaneity I typically embrace. As a person who “doesn’t usually seek out alone time,” I was about to embark on a four-day weekend in Madrid, Spain completely on my own. I confronted this reality as I sat dreary-eyed in the Charles de Gaulle Airport at 5 a.m. last Friday. My lack of sleep did not deter me from feeling excited, albeit anxious, for the coming weekend. After four days of tapas and tapping into my confidence, I realized that solo travel is an amazing way to have an adventure and learn more about yourself.

After landing in Madrid on Friday morning, I got into the city at 10 a.m. and had a few hours to kill before my 3 p.m. hostel check-in. As I stepped out of the Metro station, the colorful buildings were the first things to catch my eye. In temperature and color palette, Madrid was already much warmer than Paris. My first stop was Natif Coffee, a spot a friend had highly recommended. As excited as I was to lounge in their café, the Friday morning brunch rush and the small size of the café quickly sent me searching for somewhere with an open table. I decided to head to Toma Café, and I reveled in my ability to make such a quick decision without needing to consult anyone else. The tone of the trip was set: I was on my own schedule. I pushed any thoughts of anxiety out of my head and embraced the opportunity I had to explore a new city.

Natif’s lack of tables turned out to be a blessing because I fell in love with Toma and pan con tomate, Spain’s famous tomato toast. For the first time, I truly understood how olive oil and salt can enhance a flavor as they brought out a perfect brightness in the tomatoes. With every bite of the warm, toasted bread and crushed tomatoes, I was in heaven. I savored the toast, pacing myself so that I finished it right before I finished the work I had in the café.

After breakfast, I meandered around the neighborhood, guided by both art gallery locations on Google Maps and my heart’s desire. I turned down streets that looked interesting and popped into bookshops and vintage clothing stores with intriguing window displays. When I was finally allowed into my room at the hostel, I promptly slept for three hours. So what if I was losing time to explore a new city? I was tired, so I needed to sleep. Having full control over my time in Madrid brought me immense satisfaction, and I relished the freedom of not being burdened by the need to follow someone else’s ideal timeline.

After waking up, I faced the first real challenge of my solo adventure: eating dinner alone. “¿Una mesa para uno?” “A table for one?” I asked the waiter at Lamiak, a tapas spot in the bustling La Latina neighborhood. After a few minutes of waiting, he sat me in the middle of an eight-person communal dining table—a good spot for talking to new people, I thought.

At first, I felt awkward. What are you supposed to do when dining solo after placing your order? Loneliness started to creep in as I looked around at all the groups of friends sharing laughs and enormous tapas spreads. I feared that strangers were judging me for sitting alone. My solution to these feelings was to get busy. I whipped out my pocket sketchbook and started drawing the plants and lamps on the table across from me, which bided the time until my tapas arrived. I had ordered a chicken taco and an olive and chili skewer with an anchovy filet, but the restaurant soon served me something far more fun in the form of new tablemates.

A few bites in, three French people sat next to me, and one of them asked me in English which tapa my taco was. I answered them in French. They were delighted to meet another francophone, and we were off to the races. We spent the next two hours chatting in a mix of French, English, and Spanish about Madrid, Paris, cultural differences, and life in general. Ironically, I was finally putting my 13 years of Spanish classes to use with two French expats living in Madrid. French ended up being our lingua franca—our common language—since the third Frenchman was the only other English speaker. I felt a deep sense of pride at the fact that I was confidently becoming friends with strangers halfway around the world in a language that I only started learning two years ago.

It seemed that French was following me around the city because the next day, in a cooking class, I met two girls from Paris studying abroad in Madrid. Because they didn’t speak English, they only talked to me and another student who knew French. After the class, we all got churros con chocolate nearby. Had I not been alone, I probably would not have invited them along. I learned that friends are easily made when you choose to start talking to people. It also helps to speak another language or two!

It was no surprise that traveling alone would test my confidence, but I did not realize that it would develop my self-assurance as well.

Setting one’s schedule is a double-edged sword. When you have ideas for plans, no one can knock you off your course, but when you don’t have ideas, no one can set you on the right path. Indecision plagued me on this trip. On Sunday evening, I wanted to drop into the Prado Museum after an awe-inspiring visit on Saturday, but the line wrapped halfway around the building because of free entrance on Sundays. I got in line but was torn between staying or leaving to find a rooftop to watch the sunset. The clock was ticking as I struggled to make up my mind, wishing I had someone there to choose for me. At last, I left and speed-walked to somewhere with a higher altitude. I was rewarded with the most beautiful sunset of the trip complete with El Palacio in the background, and immediately, I knew I had made the right choice.

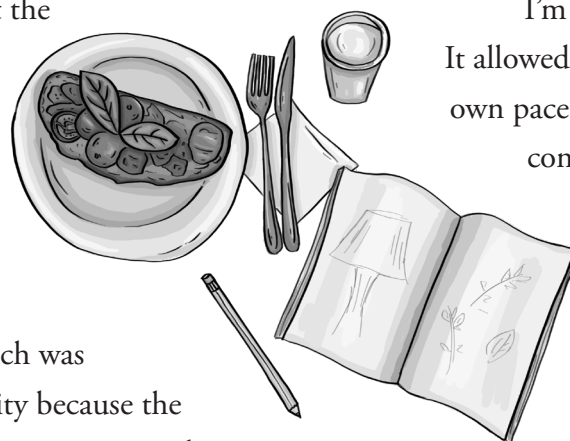
This trip prompted me to think a lot about how I make decisions in my life. So often, indecision arises from a desire to maximize positive outcomes or minimize pain. We fail to realize that when two choices are good options, we can be happy either way. The stress of choosing can take away from this happiness, and we’re better off picking one and putting our energy towards making it the best it can be. I made countless decisions about how to spend my time while in Madrid, telling myself each choice would be amazing because I had made the decision myself. I still faced indecision, but I learned to become more sure of myself while on my own. Now that I’m back to life in Paris, I’ve maintained that self-assuredness, focusing on what can go right with every decision.

I’m glad I went to Madrid alone. It allowed me to explore the city at my own pace, and it pushed me to seek out connections in new ways. I left the trip feeling more confident in myself and my ability to do hard things and make decisions. For the rest of my time abroad, I don’t have any more solo trips planned, but I’m

looking forward to the joys of traveling with friends and family. While I explore new places with the ease of company, I’ll take the lessons learned from solo travel to enjoy each trip as a better version of myself.

FRANCES CONNORS '26
(MARYFRANCESCONNORS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ALMOST STARTED PRONOUNCING THE LETTER S WITH A SPANISH ACCENT AFTER THIS WEEKEND.

GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28



Tunes and Touchdowns

Kendrick Lamar's halftime performance was a powerful homage to culture and society.

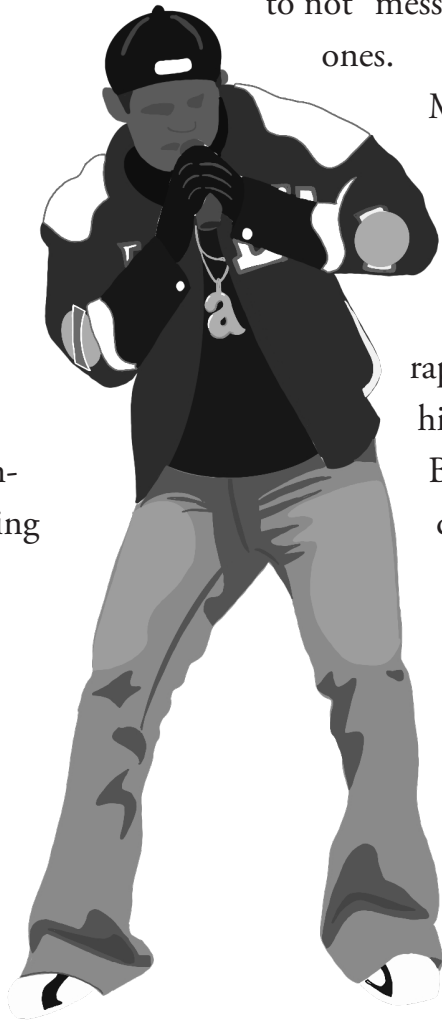
BY BRITNEY AMPADU '28

This year, for the first time in my life, I *voluntarily* tuned into the Super Bowl. I am probably the furthest one can get from a football fan, but after days of listening to the frequent murmurs of excitement that Kendrick Lamar would be taking the stage during halftime, I decided it would be worthwhile to watch *just* his performance. However, after viewing a lively and engaging production, to hear it had been receiving extreme criticism was honestly surprising to me—especially as an African-American. Lamar not only delivered an entertaining set, but also paid homage to African-American culture while addressing timely societal dilemmas. So, if you happen to be one of the halftime haters, perhaps this article will change your perspective.

The choreography, lights, and cinematography, coupled with Lamar's stage presence, came together over 13 minutes to create a captivating scene. From the opening note and introductory sequence, my attention was caught by the stage arrangement, which resembled a game controller: at each of the four corners lay shapes resembling joysticks and buttons. The camera zoomed in to reveal Lamar's backup performers, donning America's red-white-and-blue and acting as the working and supporting components of the controller. This, alongside the opening declaration of actor Samuel L. Jackson as Uncle Sam that "this is the great American game," immediately illuminated a parallelism: the game is a metaphor for the functioning of modern America, with some being controlled and others doing the controlling.

At its premise, the show was a testament to combating assimilation, one of the many societal pressures that we, Black Americans, face as a group. We are constantly being controlled by American society—expected to conform to societal standards rather than our culture. Uncle Sam thus represented various

subsets of American individuals, specifically those with more traditional views on the American persona. In contrast, the all-African-American backup performers were a representation of Black America. Uncle Sam pressured the performers into conformity, calling them "too ghetto" following more intense performances and imploring them to not "mess this up" following simpler ones.



Meanwhile, Lamar performed hits including "DNA" and "HUMBLE." These two songs in particular are from his hip-hop/rap album *DAMN*, which highlight the experiences of Black Americans. Ironically, despite being so significant to Black culture, this album was extremely commercialized and appropriated without regard to its underlying substance—a phenomenon which often extends past music to fashion, hair, and language. Above all, based on the prevalence of messages of self-expression

and self-acceptance contained in the setlist, this was his way of encouraging minorities to stay true to themselves and their cultures in a time when cultural clashes are only intensifying. By closing with a culminating performance of "tv off" in response to Uncle Sam's pushes for conformity, Lamar only further emphasized this theme by implementing it as a blunt rejection of Uncle Sam's attempts.

The show also referred to rising socio-political instability in the United States, with Lamar stating, "The revolution 'bout to be televised. You picked the right time, but the wrong guy," accentuating the resistance and activism currently rampant in our country. Lights in the bleachers were also coordinated to exemplify his messages. For instance, near the middle of the show, the lights read, "WARNING: WRONG WAY,"—my favorite occurrence of this. This artfully called to attention the negative trajectory along which our country is headed, with gaps of division widening and tension increasing. With the current state

of our society due to the various actions of our administration, a major performance including such significant messages is substantial.

Alongside this, the show contained a highly anticipated feature. "Not Like Us" is the most popular of several diss tracks by Lamar against rival artist Drake. After back-to-back repeats of the song's trademark melody, Lamar appeased his viewers' appetites at last—and the performance did not disappoint. At one point, Serena Williams, Drake's former girlfriend, was shown crip-walking to the track, both a jab at Drake and a nod to her hometown of Compton, CA. Outside of being a testament to his banter with Drake, the song challenges Drake's devotion to Black culture in an artistic sense, emphasizing the embrace of cultural uniqueness even further amidst the excitement.

Also on the stage with Lamar, albeit briefly, were special appearances by Mustard and SZA. SZA performed two of her features with Lamar: "luther" and "All the Stars." Her mellow voice was a beautiful touch to the upbeat energy the show boasted throughout, and it was the only instance Uncle Sam reacted positively. SZA, whose popularity has grown exponentially in the past few years, thereby embodied the calm-and-compliant character Black Americans are pressured to be. Alongside this, DJ Mustard, Lamar's grammy-winning producer, appeared briefly on stage during "tv off." Together, they had the effect of highlighting Black icons and Black excellence in America.

Ultimately, regardless of what you may think of his performance, Lamar's controversial halftime performance is officially the most watched show in history (live and streaming). Whether this is deserved or not is widely debated, but I can confidently say I believe it was one of the most impactful halftime performances in Super Bowl history.

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GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26

Encountering “A Complete Unknown” at Harvard

My semester of studying Bob Dylan culminated in a surprising counterpart: a new cinematic success.

BY LULU TROYER '26

Last December, my classmates and I had the privilege of attending the Boston premiere of “A Complete Unknown,” the Bob Dylan biopic starring Timothée Chalamet.

We had just spent an entire semester in “Bob Dylan: The Classic” exploring the man, myth, and legend. True to its name, the course was housed in the Classics department and taught by beloved Harvard professor and world-renowned Dylan scholar Richard Thomas—an icon in his own right, as many of us came to realize. Although the course had been offered before as a first-year seminar, this was the first time it had been open to students in other years. The timing was uncanny: the semester I took this class happened to coincide with the release of a major Hollywood adaptation of Dylan’s story.

As our class filed into the theater for the early screening, our expectations were low. How could Hollywood do justice to a figure we had barely scratched the surface of after months of rigorous academic study? We analyzed Dylan’s roots, influences, cultural context, and social impact. Despite intensive scholarship, many aspects of Dylan remained elusive. The more we studied, the more layers of ambiguity we seemed to uncover. To us, a Hollywood biopic could never capture the depth of someone we spent months struggling to parse.

However, alongside most of my classmates, I was pleasantly surprised by the film. I did not expect to be captivated by its storytelling whatsoever—let alone impressed by the portrait it painted of Dylan.

“A Complete Unknown” encapsulates Dylan’s socially awkward, intense, self-conscious presence, highlighting his peculiarities as an individual while portraying his ascent from an unknown folk singer to a defiant folk star gone rogue with the electric guitar. At the same time, it conveys the almost mystical quality of a genius channeling something beyond himself—delivering messages that articulated the cultural consciousness of a generation and continue to reverberate today.

Yet, while our class left the theater enthused and enlivened, reactions from Hollywood have been more divided. Some hail the film for its acting performances, direction, and musical integration, while others critique its narrative depth and historical fidelity, dismissing it as a “conventional Hollywood biopic”—one that manipulates timelines and characters to compress a complex reality into a limited narrative film of only 141 minutes. Ironically, in “The New Yorker,” Richard Brody wrote that the film “offers answers that range from empty to artificial.” The very idea that any biopic should provide “answers” struck me as odd—as if a life story

is some kind of murder mystery with a definitive resolution.

Who goes into a movie called “A Complete Unknown” and expects clear-cut answers? The film never claims to provide them. If anything, it left only vague questions entirely up to interpretation. This openness was precisely what I believe helped the film feel authentic to Dylan’s legacy. It captured an essence, rather than a pre-analyzed understanding of Dylan with conclusions carved out for us.

The biopic inspired lively and rich discussions back on campus, with my fellow Dylan aficionados voicing different theories, curious observations, and new questions they’d walked away with. This matched the course, as every day of our class inspired more questions than it answered.

Studying Dylan through an academic lens deepened my appreciation for the artist, even as it amplified feelings of uncertainty and perplexity. This is part of what made the course so compelling: the deeper we got, the more mysteries and contradictions seemed to surface. Dylan’s legacy appeared to lie less in answering questions than in expanding the space in which they can exist. Meaning is not found in finality but in the openness of interpretation—the refusal to let a single definition dictate an entire reality.

The mindset of demanding perfect cohesion and meticulousness not only feels unnatural but also discourages creative minds from contributing priceless, inevitably ‘incomplete’ works. No single piece of art can encapsulate every insight, answer, or question. Not everyone mirrors Dylan’s audacity to turn up an amp in the face of boos. For every loud rebel, there are softer voices—no less brilliant—who might self-censor rather than confront controversy. Some, when faced with the risk of having their labor of love dismissed as inadequate, might prioritize acceptance over raw authenticity in their creative endeavors. And yet, perhaps their imperfect, genuine message was exactly what was meant to reach someone. The goal of communicating through art is less comprehension than it is connection.

By the semester’s end, I had a sense of Dylan’s guarded, enigmatic persona—one that seemed deliberately designed to evade labels or any attempts to pin him down.

Dylan was not a simple man, nor was his work’s literary and historical value. Hence, the Nobel Prize Committee made him the first musician in history to be awarded in Literature—for “having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.”

But to intellectualize Dylan’s work as purely an academic or literary achievement risks missing

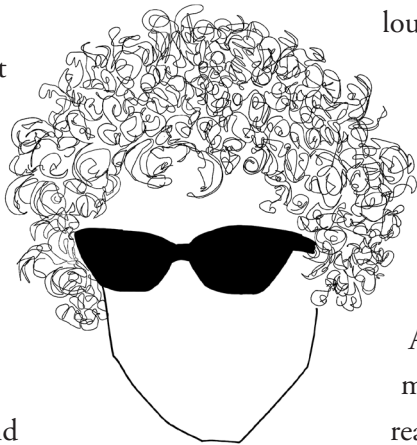
another fundamental truth: some minds, like Dylan’s, do not conform to the rigid structures we impose on understanding. Instead, they channel something untamed, something closer to the divine—a creative force that moves beyond rational categorization. So much exists beyond our perception, slipping through the cracks of language—some truths seem content to keep moving, unbothered by the constriction of computing minds. Dylan’s songs move people tremendously without total understanding, undermining the paradigm of intellectualism’s supremacy over intuition.

Any Dylan fan has likely seen some archival footage of his interviews from his early rise to fame, where he was comically evasive, sometimes even hostile, toward the press and fans trying to describe, understand, or in any way box in his art. He often responded to questions with sarcasm, counter-questions, or completely nonsensical answers.

One of my favorite, easily missable, but subtly electric moments in the film came from what was essentially a fluke—Al Kooper on organ. Kooper wasn’t supposed to play the organ. He had shown up expecting to play guitar, only for Dylan to shut him down on the spot: we already have the best guitarist. Most people would take that as their cue to pack it up and leave, but Kooper wasn’t most people. Determined to be part of the session, he scanned the room, spotted the organ, and—despite never having played one before—decided he’d figure it out on the fly. He didn’t even know what key the song was in—someone had to switch it for him mid-take. And yet, somehow, that improvisation became legendary. His playing on “Like a Rolling Stone” and “Queen Jane Approximately” is so embedded in Dylan’s sound from that era that I’d always assumed he’d been hired for it specifically. That it was pure chance and sheer nerve made it even more remarkable. It was one of those moments that perfectly captured the spirit of the era: improvisation, creative risk-taking, and the right kind of delusional confidence that turns accidents into history.

I considered the movie a resounding success. Despite the constraints of a biopic, the film distilled Dylan’s idiosyncratic mix of aloofness, supercilious wit, and unequivocal brilliance. It resonated across generations, from those who grew up with Dylan to younger audiences unfamiliar with the ethos of the 1960s-70s.

It’s standard artistic practice to convey the essence of a story through feeling rather than strict factual accuracy—something Dylan himself, known for spinning tales, understood well. We know this as consumers. For comprehensive historical precision, we know to watch a documentary. For an artistic rendering of a legend, we turn to a Hollywood adaptation.



As our class imprinted upon me, Dylan was and is a phenomenon—one that people witness, feel, and interpret rather than fully understand. The need for definitive “answers” misses the point of getting lost in the traveling circus of Dylan’s rich mind. Throughout his career, Dylan has been a multidimensional figure with a contrarian attitude, resisting definitions of his work and identity—choosing instead to drift through the vast and vague.

The film honored this by refusing to impose artificial clarity on a person who, in real life, characteristically defies explanation.

I commend “A Complete Unknown” for not seeking to provide neatly packaged explanations or make silly attempts to unravel a poet and performer

whose very essence is built on adamant mystery, multiplicity, and constant reinvention. Instead, the film immersed us in Dylan’s legend, allowing us to bear witness to his contradictions. It left us pondering, just as Dylan would prefer. He even shocked people by tweeting an endorsement of the film: this coming from a man who did not attend his own Nobel Prize award ceremony.

When intellectuals like Dylan subvert the assumption that knowledge is best measured by the accumulation of facts rather than spiritual or creative intelligence, they challenge our compulsion to make sense of life in perfectly cogent terms. Perhaps this is why Dylan continues to intrigue, confound, and inspire—he reminds us that understanding does not

require mastery. Meaning is often found in what evades definition. Sometimes, the wisest thing we can do is learn to sit with the unknown.

LULU TROYER '26 (LULUTROYER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WROTE THIS ARTICLE WHILE LISTENING TO BOB DYLAN'S "PRECIOUS ANGEL," "STUCK INSIDE A MOBILE HOME," AND "POSITIVELY 4TH STREET" ON LOOP.

GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26

Your Guide to the Arts on a Snowy Day

A guide to artistic happenings this February and March in the Cambridge area.

BY SOPHIE DEPAUL '27

We’ve reached the bleak midwinter here at Harvard, where all students are tempted to stay in bed and out of the icy winds until spring break. It’s what I like to call “museum weather”—perfect for spending the day inside appreciating the arts. Here’s how you can get up to that in Cambridge this winter:

Spotlight Tours

Where: Harvard Art Museums

When: Weekends, starting at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Spotlight tours are free and open without registration, starting outside the Harvard Art Museum shop. Tours are created and led by Harvard students. Each tour explores the collections through a different lens using two to three artworks in the museum. Some that caught my eye were *Portraiture by 19th-Century Black American Artists* with Sophia Scott '25, which discusses “the contributions of Black artists whose labor and skill were central to shaping American art,” as well as *Art and Law* with Hannah Gadway '25, which explores the intersection of art and law from Nazi Germany to the famous work of Van Gogh.

Kuumba Singers at the Harvard Art Museums

Where: Harvard Art Museums

When: Sunday, March 2 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Listen to the magical sounds of gospel, African folk songs, and contemporary music at the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College’s short concert in the Harvard Art Museums’ Calderwood Courtyard. This hour-long performance is offered in conjunction with the current exhibition “Joana Choumali: Languages of West African Marketplaces.” This exhibit showcases “12 life-size hand-quilted and embroidered portraits created from combinations of photographs taken in the marketplaces of Côte d’Ivoire (the Ivory Coast) and Ghana.” If you’re not available for the concert and still want to see the exhibit, it is open through May 11.

Open Mic Poetry Night

Where: Little Crepe Café, 102 Oxford St., Cambridge, MA

When: Feb. 21, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Come for a serving of hot chocolate and community at Little Crepe

Café. Whether you’re looking to test your new material on a receptive audience or read a piece you love, Cambridge Arts has put together the perfect space for you. If the crowd’s too intimidating, you can join over Zoom!

Show Tunes Drag Brunch

Where: Summer Shack, 149 Alewife Brook Pkwy, Cambridge, MA

When: Sunday, Feb. 23, 11 a.m.

It’s hard to say no to songs from “Mamma Mia,” “Grease,” “Wicked,” and “The Lion King” rolled into one fabulous performance. Especially if oysters and mimosas are being served. Drag Brunch, a weekly show featuring different drag performers from Boston, is held every Sunday at Summer Shack for anyone looking to beat the Sunday scaries.

Postcard from Morocco

Where: Lowell House Dining Hall

When: Feb. 21 - Feb. 23

Looking for a pensive way to spend your weekend? Apart from their coveted Thursday Tea and annual Glowell celebration, Lowell House has yet another hit on their hands with this opera. Directed by Haley Stark '25, “Postcard from Morocco” is a cathartic experience for viewers as they watch a group of strangers search for meaning in their lives while waiting at a train station. Each character explores their identity and reconciles with the multidimensional realities of the present while guiding audience members through their internal thoughts. Lowell House residents can get free tickets, and all other students are offered the discounted price of just \$10.

The Odyssey

Where: Loeb Theater

When: Feb. 11 - March 16

This play turns a contemporary lens on Homer’s “Odyssey,” reimagining the classic story of Odysseus and examines the process in which we “learn to embrace healing and forgiveness in order to end cycles of violence and revenge.” The playwright, Kate Hamill, has done similar work with classics such as “Pride and Prejudice,” “Sense and Sensibility,” and “Dracula.” Plus, Harvard students get a \$5 discount! Related events include free puppetry workshops inspired by the design elements of “The Odyssey” at the Malden Public Library and The

Odyssey’s Night at the Museum at the Harvard Art Museums, which offers food, drinks, and a Grecian-themed scavenger hunt before you head on over to the show.

SPACE

Where: Central Square Theatre

When: Through Feb. 23, 2025

Written by L M Feldman, SPACE is a play about the 13 female pilots who (almost) became some of the earliest astronauts. Pulling from Congressional transcripts and the stories of these women’s ancestors and descendants, SPACE examines the fates of women and BIPOC during the Space Race.

RPM Fest Presents Mountains Meet the Sea

Where: The Brattle Theater

When: Feb. 23, 4 p.m.

The RPM Festival will welcome Kathy Rugh to the Brattle Theatre for a screening of ten of her films. The films run for 90 minutes each and will be followed by a discussion with experimental filmmaker and visual artist Brittany Gravely and Rugh herself. Rugh creates experimental 16mm films that explore “double exposure, pinhole lenses, and hand-processing techniques.” Her visually intriguing work is well suited to the Brattle’s taste for arthouse films, but if you’re looking for something more mainstream, David Lynch’s “Mulholland Drive” is being shown at the Brattle on Feb. 26.

The days are getting longer, so it’s the perfect time to add a bit of culture to your weekend. You don’t have to go far, or spend much, to be a patron of the arts this winter. Whether you’re looking to visit the museums or catch a play, there’s something in Cambridge for everyone.

SOPHIE DEPAUL '27 (SOPHIE_DEPAUL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) LOVES THE HARVARD ART MUSEUMS.

GRAPHIC BY ANNA SHAO '28

The Mahomes-Brady Debate Is Over — For Now

After Super Bowl LIX, Patrick Mahomes's GOAT case takes a major hit.

BY DAVID DANIEL '28

Super Bowl 59 was defined by AI halftime commercials, celebrity cameos, and a betting line of 6.5 appearances for Taylor Swift—nearly double Travis Kelce's total receptions for the night. However, the most important narrative shift of the night had nothing to do with Drake, Kendrick Lamar, or Travis Kelce's love life. When the green and white confetti fell as the Eagles completed their revenge tour, the Mahomes-Brady comparisons ended.

For the past few years, the question of whether Patrick Mahomes could ever surpass Tom Brady as the greatest quarterback in NFL history has overtaken lunch tables, writers' rooms, and sports news shows. Patrick Mahomes has had one of the most dominant starts to a career since the inception of professional football. After becoming the Kansas City Chiefs' full-time starting quarterback in 2018, Mahomes led his team to five Super Bowls in just eight seasons, tying Brady for the second-most appearances by a quarterback in NFL history.

With this impressive start, Mahomes was on the path to being crowned as the greatest quarterback of all time. However, with this exciting expectation came an equally potent disappointment, as Mahomes delivered one of the worst statistical performances by a quarterback in Super Bowl history against the Eagles. This wasn't just any other Super Bowl loss. With eight minutes left in the game, the Chiefs went down 40-6 and Mahomes had a not-so-impressive stat line of 148 yards, one touchdown, two interceptions, and a lost fumble while completing a meager 12 of 22 passes.

Mahomes ended with a passer rating of 52.8, the third-worst in Super Bowl history behind Ben Roethlisberger and John Elway in 2006 and 1998 respectively. The difference? Roethlisberger and Elway won their games. This is nothing compared to his

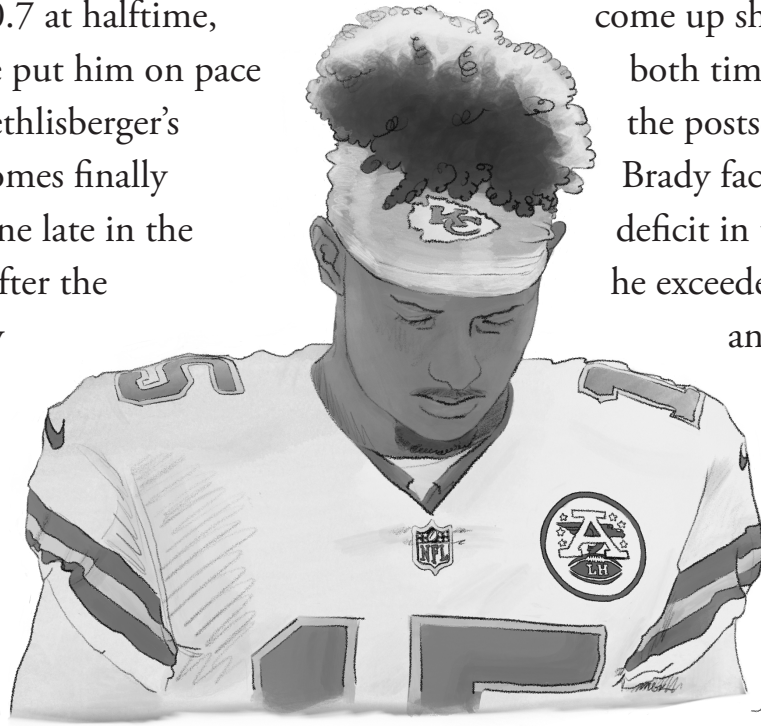
passer rating of 10.7 at halftime, which would have put him on pace to land below Roethlisberger's 22.6 rating. Mahomes finally salvaged his stat line late in the fourth quarter—after the Eagles had already let off the gas and dumped Gatorade on Nick Sirianni. The results of this game raise the question: is it still worth

debating Mahomes vs. Brady? This is not to say Patrick Mahomes could never surpass Tom Brady's legacy. However, Mahomes went from potentially becoming the first quarterback to three-peat to having one of the worst Super Bowl performances in history. It is time for the GOAT debate to be tabled. Mahomes has a long way to go before he can be compared to Brady.

It's worth asking whether the debates were ever justified, or if everyone was too swept up in Mahomesanity to ask if he has even passed Joe Montana yet. Many football fans would argue that you cannot completely blame Mahomes for the loss. Despite never blitzing, the Eagles' defensive line generated a staggering 38% pressure rate, making it impossible for Mahomes to make a play.

However, this is a situation that Mahomes normally takes in stride. Fans are used to seeing him scramble out of the pocket under pressure, make crafty plays, throw sidearm, diving, left-handed, behind the back, and do anything for the first down during the regular season. This creativity was nonexistent in the Super Bowl, giving way to poor pocket presence and sacks that worsened the Chiefs' struggles.

Importantly, Mahomes's second-worst Super Bowl performance was against 45-year-old Tom Brady. He has



come up short against Brady both times they clashed in the postseason. When Tom Brady faced a significant deficit in the Super Bowl, he exceeded expectations and led his team to victory. When he faced Mahomes in the postseason, the result was always the same—Brady won. We need

to question how much credit we give Mahomes for his wins and hold him accountable for his Super Bowl losses. Despite having a 3-2 in Super Bowl record, Mahomes still has a -23 point differential across all five games.

This is not meant to say that Mahomes is not a generation-defining quarterback. With his early career accomplishments and impact on the game, his performance is unlikely to be replicated anytime soon. If Mahomes plans to stay in the league as long as Tom Brady, he could have another 16 years of football left, enough time to close the distance in the GOAT debate. What matters most now is how Mahomes responds to this defeat—a blemish on his resume that Brady never had. This Super Bowl loss marks the beginning of the second era of Mahomes's career—one that will define his legacy. What he does in this next chapter will determine whether he becomes yet another shadow of Tom Brady's legacy or the subject of a similar debate in 20 years as the next generational talent emerges to challenge the throne.

DAVID DANIEL '28 (DAVID_DANIEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) JUST WANTS THE PACKERS TO FIND A KICKER.

GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27

NBA Logic Is Dead

These are the worst NBA trades from the past 15 years.

BY MARCEL RAMOS CASTANEDA '28

It was a quiet Saturday night, and I was getting ready to sleep when my phone suddenly blew up with messages. “Yo, did you see this?!” Half-asleep, I grabbed my phone only to be met with a breaking news alert: *Dallas Mavericks star Luka Dončić traded to the Los Angeles Lakers for Anthony Davis*. As a devoted Dončić and Dallas Mavericks fan, I was in complete shock. This was my first experience with the sports fan stages of grief. First came denial. Now, as I write this article, I still find myself struggling to come to terms with the atrocity. And so, this piece is my acceptance.

Some NBA trades age like the finest of wines, others like a gallon of milk in the Texas heat. Finally, we have the Mavericks-Lakers *Dončić* type, the kind that leaves you wondering how anyone could reach such unprecedented levels of stupidity. Before I get to why this was such a horrid trade (*I am very unbiased, as you can see*), the commotion around the NBA in the wake of this calls for a look at some of the worst trades of the past 15 years, and where this one ranks among them. So, without further ado, let us dive into some of the NBA’s moments of front-office brilliance.

Boston Celtics-Brooklyn Nets (2013)

In 2013, after a first-round exit in the playoffs, the Boston Celtics decided it was time to trade away their aging core—Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, and Jason Terry. Despite a finals appearance just three years prior, the team’s chemistry had declined, largely due to age (all three were 35 or older). The 2013 postseason marked their first first-round playoff exit in 13 years. The question became, what would Boston get in return for their old stars? Enter the Brooklyn Nets.

In what would become one of the best decisions in Celtics history—and one of the worst in Nets history—the Nets, desperate to win immediately, traded away multiple first-round picks and a 2017 pick swap, which turned into Jayson Tatum. Not only did all three former Celtics have the worst seasons of their careers in Brooklyn, but they were all traded again within two years. Celtics fans can thank the then-Nets owner, Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, for the 18th banner above TD Garden. But wait—we are not done with the spectacle of idiocy that is the Nets management. Next up: Ben Simmons.

Brooklyn Nets-Philadelphia 76ers (2022)

In the 2016 NBA Draft, Ben Simmons, hailed as the second coming of LeBron James, went

Philadelphia 76ers. At first, things went well—he won Rookie of the Year and had a solid first four seasons. Then came the 2021-2022 season: Simmons and the 76ers had a massive fallout, leading him to sit out the entire year in protest of an unsupportive team environment. In reality, his work ethic was criticized as he refused to attend team practices and actively undermined team chemistry.

How did he get bailed out? Who in their right mind would want a lazy, \$40-million-a-year “superstar”? Of course, the Brooklyn Nets entered trade talks. If you are a Nets fan, you deserve a free pass to bandwagon any team. After the catastrophe of the Nets’ so-called “Big Three” of Kevin Durant, James Harden, and Kyrie Irving, Brooklyn once again found itself in an all-too-familiar situation—desperately trying to salvage a collapsing team.

So, what did they do? They traded one unhappy, inactive superstar, James Harden, along with a couple of first-round picks in return for the lazy Simmons. When will you learn, Brooklyn? This is like sleeping through your midterm, convincing yourself that you will lock in for the final, and pulling an all-nighter only to sleep through the final. Not only did Simmons play significantly worse in his three seasons with Brooklyn, but he also averaged just 30 games per season.

Golden State Warriors-Washington Wizards (2023)

The Golden State Warriors went into this trade the same way a first-year goes to Annenberg—hoping not to see the same dry chicken and unseasoned rice but knowing it will always be there. Chris Paul is one of the most criticized players in the modern NBA because he is among the best players of the 21st century, but he could not win a ring if his life depended on it. After a string of disappointing playoff runs with the Phoenix Suns, including a Game 7 blowout against the Mavericks in the 2022 playoffs, Phoenix decided it was time to find a younger, more promising point guard to complement their star, Devin Booker. In 2023, they traded Paul to the Washington Wizards for Bradley Beal.

The Warriors had other plans: why settle for one Hall of Fame point guard in Stephen Curry when you can have two?

Oh, and did I mention that Paul was 38 when this trade occurred? Surely, the Warriors expected a generational championship run—why else would they do this? Their management’s dreams never came to fruition as the Warriors missed the playoffs the following year, and Paul was shipped off to the San Antonio Spurs the following season.

Washington Wizards-Los Angeles Lakers (2021)

When you have one of the greatest players of all time as your team leader, what kind of player do you want to pair him with? Someone who plays a role and lets him control the game? Or a ball-dominant guard who can’t shoot? We will never know what the Los Angeles Lakers’ management was thinking when they traded for Russell Westbrook and paired him with LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

After winning the 2020 NBA Finals, the Lakers were determined to bounce back from their first-round playoff exit in 2021 and prove that their championship was not just a “Mickey Mouse” ring. In the summer of 2021, they made a blockbuster trade for Westbrook, hoping to solidify themselves as championship favorites for the 2022 season. They ran into a massive problem: Westbrook’s nearly maxed-out \$44 million contract meant the Lakers had no salary cap space to sign crucial role players. His playstyle clashed with James’s, creating an inefficient offense with little depth. Naturally, the Lakers missed the playoffs in 2022 and shipped Westbrook out the following year.

Los Angeles Lakers-Dallas Mavericks (2025)

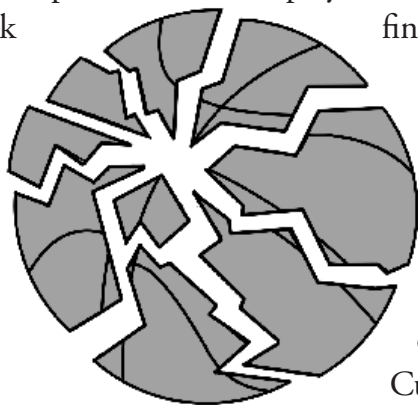
Why? I could not and still cannot comprehend why the Mavericks would trade Luka Dončić. While it is understandable to move on from a beloved superstar when he is past his prime, the same is not true for a 25-year-old phenom. Dončić has had five straight MVP-caliber seasons, a conference finals appearance, and led an NBA Finals run in 2024.

What’s even more confusing is that the Mavericks approached the Lakers. Even if management thinks defense wins championships, a franchise player of Dončić’s level should only be traded for gold, not a volatile cryptocurrency. Anthony Davis is not necessarily a bad player—but he is a 31-year-old All-Star who cannot stay consistently healthy. Meanwhile, Dončić was supposed to be the face of the franchise for the next 20 years in Dallas, leading them to multiple championships.

This trade makes as much sense as Harvard offering a prime Michael Sandel to Yale. Who would have taught “Justice” like Sandel? Nobody, because generational talent is rare, and when you find it, you do not give it away.

MARCEL RAMOS CASTANEDA '28 (MRAMOSCASTANEDA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS GRIEVING THE MAVERICKS' LOSS OF LUKA AND MIGHT (JUSTIFIABLY) BECOME A BANDWAGON LAKERS FAN.

GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27



Sports Spotlight: Women's Squash

Harvard women's squash team strives for another "good day at the office" as they prepare for nationals.

BY TILLY BUTTERWORTH '28

Not many teams at Harvard hold nine consecutive Ivy League Championships, yet the women's squash team makes it look effortless year after year. One of the most high-achieving and consistent teams on campus, this standout group should be on everyone's radar as they head into the final stages of the season and the College Squash Association Team National Championships.

Harvard women's squash has consistently proved they are the Ivy League standard. While many may argue that squash is an individual sport, the Harvard women's team has shown this is not true. "Everyone has individual ways of getting ready, but the team manages to come together," Captain Brecon Welch '25 said, confidently highlighting the united nature of the team throughout competitions.

The team's recent Ivy League title pays tribute to the strength of their roster, with the team demonstrating their squad depth throughout the season. They delivered a convincing performance, pushing ahead of Princeton 5-0 after the first five games. At this point, the team was on pace to be champions.

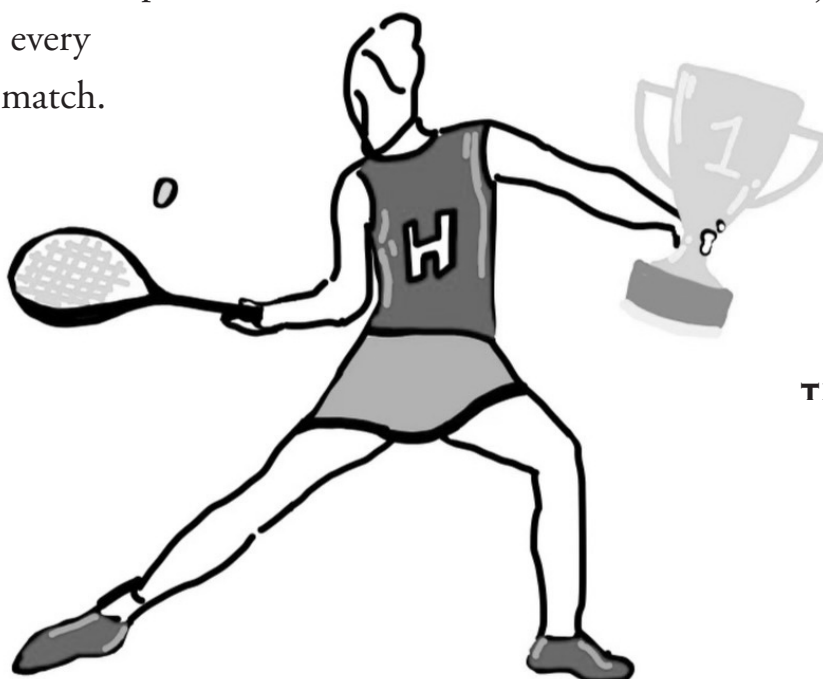
Saran Nghiem '26 pushed Harvard to victory with her Ivy League title-clinching game. After previously losing to her Princeton opponent in the College Squash Association Individual National Championships only a week before, where various Harvard athletes competed individually, Nghiem said, "I was really gunning for it, We have always had a big rivalry. I was super excited to be on the court." It was a moment of excitement and community as teammates, friends, and supporters began gathering during Nghiem's third game to celebrate the final seconds. A calm, professional performance topped off an impressive

undefeated Ivy League season.

Reflecting on the season so far, it is clear that the Crimson returners were using frustrating memories of Princeton's victory the previous year as fuel and momentum. "The freshman came in with new energy, And the team was wanting revenge. There was fire under us for the whole of preseason and training," Welch said. This energy from the three first years contributed to countless outstanding performances against strong opponents.

Other key highlights from the season include a hard-fought victory against Stanford, which, after cutting their program in 2021, has prioritized recruiting. This triumph over a rebuilding Stanford program was a necessary win and confidence boost for the start of the season. "It was great to win from that position," Welch said. The game was held in New York to coincide with the Pro Tournament, where professional and club athletes, including some Harvard alumni, were invited to compete in a separate major competition. As a result, alumni came to show their support for Harvard in their match-up with Stanford, paying tribute to the history and success of Harvard's squash program. This camaraderie has been a cornerstone of this Harvard team's success—past and present—as the ongoing support from previous athletes reminds current players of the importance of

every match.



The team's recent 9-0 victory over No. 10 Drexel concluded a thrilling regular season. The team celebrated its seniors and their career-long contributions to Harvard squash. The team heads into the postseason as the top-ranked team, with four All-Ivy Honors and the Coaching Staff of the Year Award.

The unity between the men's and women's squash teams has been integral to these successful years as both teams share coaches and their seasons overlap. "[We are] lucky to have guys and girls [teams] together," Nghiem said. The players have created a tightly knit culture that has contributed to both teams' consistency and success. Regular team meals and long training days spent together create a strong community for both teams while preparing for competitions. The consistency and culture of these teams have been a major factor in the women's squash team's success year after year.

Now, as the team gets ready for nationals at the top of the rankings, their initial motivation from preseason and confidence from the Ivy League Championship will lead to an exciting final dance. "A national championship is in the cards," said Nghiem. The team will head to Philadelphia at the beginning of March. Fine-tuning and focusing on minor adjustments is the focus whilst

preparing to become national champions, solidifying the Harvard women's squash dynasty.

TILLY BUTTERWORTH '28
(MBUTTERWORTH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28

CROSS-TROVERSY

BY FRED KLEIN '28

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27

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

ACROSS

3. Most Affected by Trump's Gulf of America
6. Very Strong
7. Like Indy's Layout

DOWN

1. End of Nixon's Scandal
2. Judge the ____, Not the Person
3. Your Body, According to Taylor's 32 y/o Lover
4. Spilled In Indy's Controversy Issue
5. People's Posses i.e. Presidential Cabinets

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