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CONTENTS

3. De Croo Addresses JFK Jr. Forum
by Jules Sanders ’28

4. Le’olam al tishkach, Le’olam lo
by Hannah Davis ’25 and Jordan Wasserberger ’27

5. POV: You Still Can’t Access TikTok
by Mia Tavares ’27

6. Trump’s Revised School of Thought
by Rania Jones ’27

7. Still the Hardest Summer You’ll Ever Love
by Owen Ebose ’25

8. Queue the Cameras: The Struggle for Gender Equality in Sports Media
by Sara Kumar ’27

9. Thoughts from New Quincy: The Apathy Industry
by Luke Wagner ’26

10. Winter Wonderland
by Riley Cullinan ’27

12. Chocolat Chaud, Pas Planète Chaude: Environmentalism the Parisian Way
by Frances Connors ’26

13. TikTok or TikToxic: Scrolling Ourselves Sick
by Heidi Heffelfinger ’26

14. News and Views: We Want Your Voice
by Rania Jones ’27, Sara Kumar ’27, and Gauri Sood ’26

15. Hamm Sandwich
by Kayla Reifel ’26 and Layla Chaaraoui ’26

16. “Foreigners Everywhere:” A Weekend at the Venice Biennale
by Sachi Laumas ’26

17. A Night of Enchantment with Cendrillon
by Adedoyin Adebayo ’26

18. Ten Things to Do Rather Than Watch the Eagles-Chiefs Game
by Tyler Dang ’28 and Kalvin Frank ’28

19. Indy Sportsbook: Cheaters n’ Chiefs
by Jordan Wasserberger ’27

20. Crossword: Icebreaker
by Han Nguyen ’27

About the *Independent*

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

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De Croo Addresses JFK Jr. Forum

The outgoing prime minister of Belgium gives his take on European-American relations during Trump's second term.

BY JULES SANDERS '28

On Jan. 31, outgoing Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo delivered a speech at the Harvard Institute of Politics on the future of the European economy and international security. The talk was one of two flagship events hosted as part of the student-organized European Conference at the Harvard Kennedy School.

De Croo, who has served as prime minister since 2020, is set to step down soon. His party, the Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats, suffered a major electoral defeat in June 2024. A new coalition government was announced to have formed on Jan. 31, just before he spoke to the crowd at the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum. Bart De Wever, who leads the New Flemish Alliance, allied with Francophone and Flemish nationalist parties to form a majority coalition in the Belgian Federal Parliament. Assuming the party congresses assent, De Wever, who has been described as a Flemish separatist, will take power at a date yet to be determined.

De Croo asserted that American allies in Europe need to strike a balance between cooperating with U.S. policy under President Donald Trump and pursuing their own national and continental interests.

"If we move into an era of interests and of being transactional—if the U.S. administration says trade deficit is a problem—okay, let's find a solution, but that's not a solution where our interests are aligned," he said. "As Europeans, we should be doing the same. As Europeans, if there are certain things which are important to us, we shouldn't be afraid to defend that."



He specified that Belgium plans to continue adhering to the Paris Agreement alongside other European Union member states. This assertion contrasts with the American withdrawal from the 2016 climate change treaty, which was prompted by an executive order signed by Trump after his Jan. 20 inauguration.

Like the rest of the EU, Belgium aims to be climate-neutral by 2050. "I know that 'drill, baby, drill' is a good time," he said. "I'm not convinced that this is bulletproof industrial policy for the next decades to come. So we believe that we need to push our industry to make the right investments, to invest, that our industrial processes can decarbonize." Belgium's greenhouse gas emissions have decreased by nearly one-tenth since 2020 and over one-quarter since 1990.

De Croo went on to reaffirm Belgium's commitment to NATO. "We Europeans will invest way more in NATO," he clarified. "There was no discussion on that. If NATO wants to function, it needs to stand on two strong legs, and the leg on the other side of the planet—it needs to be as strong as the leg on this side of the planet."

Since his reelection, Trump has called for all NATO member states to spend 5% of their annual gross domestic product on military spending, which has divided European leaders.

De Croo pushed back on the idea that the structure of NATO inherently places an undue burden on the United States, as Trump has historically suggested. He brought up Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty, which requires NATO member states to defend each other if one calls for assistance. "It's happened once in history. Who invoked Article Five is the United States… It's not European countries."

The United States invoked Article Five on Oct. 5, 2001, in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Thus, NATO member states participated in both Operation Eagle Assist, which called for aircraft deployment to patrol American airspace, and Operation Active Endeavor, which required member states to assist American efforts to curb terrorist activity in and around the Mediterranean Sea.

"I'm convinced that this relationship, this transatlantic relationship, is not only about economics; it's not only about interests, it's also about balance, and it's important that we work on the fact that it is about values and that I believe is our real strength," he said. "The United States and Europe—we have been a bacon—a beacon, not a bacon…we have been a beacon to the world."

He acknowledged that the future might bring challenges to relations between the U.S. and EU but urged Americans not to "throw away where we have been successful."

"Why do I believe in politics?" he questioned. "Well, that's because I believe that we have an ability to overcome obstacles, and that we have an ability to bring people together."

After De Croo spoke, Natalie Colbert, the executive director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, moderated a discussion with the prime minister. In response to a question she posed about the tension between rising nationalism, Euroskepticism, and health coordination, he argued that the European Union tends to come together rather than crumble during times of crisis.

"History has shown that the European Union moves forward when we have our back against the wall," he said. "It's in crisis that we move forward. That's what happened in COVID, that's what happened in the energy crisis. I think we have our back against it, and especially on industrial competitiveness will be a difficult situation. As I said, you can't soothe the alarm clock anymore. You really have to move forward."

De Croo condemned Russian hostility toward European nations. "Restoring the integrity of the state to Ukraine, paying for all the damages, stopping interference in Moldova, there's quite a list of things that you can demand from Russia before we could even normalize a relationship with Russia," he said.

The European Conference concluded on Feb. 1. Other flagship events included a talk with Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and a discussion with Benjamin Haddad, Minister Delegate of France for Europe.

Jules Sanders '28 (julessanders@college.harvard.edu) is the Associate News Editor of the *Independent*.

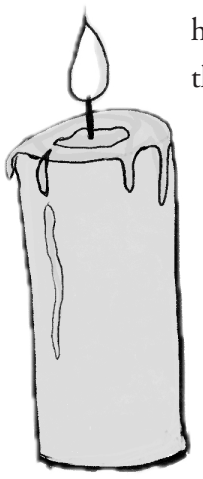
Photo courtesy of Jordan Wasserberger '27

Le'olam al tishkach, Le'olam lo

Reflections on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

BY HANNAH DAVIS '25 AND JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

Last Tuesday, Jan. 27, marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The United Nations proclaimed Jan. 27 as the International Holocaust Memorial Day in 2005 to mark Auschwitz's liberation in 1945, five years after its creation. From the camp's inception until its liberation by the Red Army, German Nazis murdered 1.1 million people. Although the majority of them were Jews, there were also Poles, the Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war. Seventy thousand prisoners remained even after Aushcwitz's liberation.



The Polish Parliament declared Auschwitz a memorial in 1947, transforming parts of the site into museum exhibitions so visitors could learn about and reflect on the horrors that occurred. The general exhibits include urns with human ash, camp toilets, sculptures depicting starving prisoners, and fragments of gas chambers. Showcases spread throughout the rooms displayed piles of artificial limbs of people sent to Auschwitz, human hair cut from prisoners, and uniforms people received after being brought to the camp.

Harvard and Yale took a group of students to Hungary and Poland in May 2024 for a Jewish history study trip. The Yale Slifka Center, Mignone Center for Career Success, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and Harvard Hillel sponsored the program. The students visited Budapest, Warsaw, and Krakow, with tours of Jewish sites in the towns and Holocaust remembrance sites, such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex.

Sydney Bloch '25 reflected on the significance of Holocaust Remembrance Day occurring on the day of the liberation of Auschwitz: "When we were at Auschwitz, the tour guide was talking about how they were thinking about a lot of different dates to make Holocaust Remembrance Day, and they wanted to have it be a day of liberation and freedom and hope and joy because you have this horrific event that has occurred. And how do you remember it in a way that does the people who survived it justice?"

Yad Vashem was charged with designing the final permanent exhibit and chose to focus on the *Shoah*—the Hebrew word for Holocaust. The space uses maps to illustrate the geographic extent of the Holocaust and commemorates the children persecuted during the Holocaust through childhood drawings.

One of the final exhibits in the "SHOAH" permanent installation is the "Book of Names," a list of people who died in the Holocaust in a book nearly as tall as a human.

"There's 10 pages of 'Blochs' that were killed in the Holocaust. And these are huge pages. Flipping through that was really impactful," shared Bloch. "There were other people on the trip with very traditional Jewish last names that had 30 or 40 pages worth of just people with their last name killed in the Holocaust. And some people could recognize their family members. And I think that was something that was really jarring to me."

Lauren Perl '25 is the granddaughter of two Holocaust survivors. In an online testimony, her grandmother, Lore Perl, shares how the memories of the Holocaust were still haunting her even years after her grandmother's liberation from Ravensbrück as a political prisoner.

"[My grandmother] couldn't drive to the Lincoln Tunnel because the actual white tile reminded my grandmother of the concentration camp showers," Perl said.

"I also don't think people understand that we are seeing a rise in Nazism around the globe," said Perl. "And specifically, I'm incredibly concerned—something that's been causing me so much anxiety—is the rise of the Alternative for Deutschland party within Germany and their overt ties to Nazism. And also, there's increasingly the data about people, young people, not knowing about the Holocaust or denying it or distorting it."

Global Holocaust education has dramatically worsened in the past few decades, further exacerbating rising anti-semitism and anti-Zionism. A 2025 Anti-Defamation League (ADL) survey found that 20% of respondents worldwide had not heard of the Holocaust, and only 48% acknowledged its historical accuracy. Among 18-34-year-olds, this lack of knowledge is even more pertinent, with 39% remaining skeptical of the Holocaust.

This decline in Holocaust awareness is troubling as Holocaust survivors age and pass away. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany published a demographic report on Holocaust survivors. 245,000 Jewish survivors are still alive, but these numbers dwindle as natural aging takes its toll. Few survivors may be alive in a decade. Daniel Hochberg '27, who went on a trip with Jewish student group Meor this past winter, reflected on the increasing number of people around the world who will never have any firsthand knowledge of the Holocaust. "We are the last generation that will actually get to know a Holocaust survivor."

On Feb. 3, the Institute of Politics JFK Jr. Forum hosted Holocaust survivor Magda Bader for an event titled "80 Years Since Liberation: The Legacy of the Holocaust." During the event, Bader recounted her harrowing experience surviving Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and her escape from a satellite camp in Tannenberg. She also reflected on life after the Holocaust and shared her thoughts on the troubling persistence of hate and division in the world today.

"When I talk to you, still I remember this all vividly, and it's very sad that today, I have to talk 80 years later about things that worry me, and that people can't get along with each other, and there is so much hate and so much distrust," she said to the packed audience. "I wish and I hope people could learn to live like human beings with each other side by side, and that's why I talk to students—high school kids and college kids—but I am sorry to see that eight years later, this is still an important subject."

Perl shared how the ability to preserve Holocaust stories and share them with future generations causes her "deep anxiety and fear."

"I know so many survivors who have had their tales memorialized in [recordings], and yet it's without it being readily accessible in terms of you looking that person in the eye or seeing the number on their arm, right?" She asked. "I don't think people that don't have this intergenerational trauma can truly comprehend."

Hochberg agreed, "Their stories are fading. It's a lot easier to read a book and not believe 100% and think 'oh that's hyperbole, oh that's craziness' rather than look someone in the eye who's been through all that, who's telling you their story."

Bloch said, "Realistically, we're one to two generations removed from it…But realistically, I think seeing Jewish hate on the rise makes me fear a lot more about what could happen again."

Hochberg also explained the connection he notes between the Holocaust and modern-day conversations around Israel are. "The Holocaust, I think, is what created the state of Israel as we know it today. I think the Holocaust is what made us as a Jewish people realize that we needed our own place to live, and that we couldn't rely on the kindness of whatever political machine happened to look favorably upon us for 100 years."

Hochberg continued, "Especially in light of the recent wave of call it what you will, anti-Zionism, anti-semitism, it's really the same thing—it's wanting to destroy the state of Israel, and by extension, what you're doing there is you want to destroy the Jewish people… No other country will ever protect us forever."

Hannah Davis '25 (hannahdavis@college.harvard.edu) and Jordan Wasserberger '27 (jwasserberger@college.harvard.edu) write News for the *Independent*.

Graphic by Christie Beckley '27

POV: You Still Can't Access TikTok

Harvard's Chief Technology Officer and most infamous hacker on data privacy in the wake of the looming TikTok ban.

BY MIA TAVARES '27

On Jan. 19, phones around the United States were thrown across rooms and hit against tables as TikTok users were completely denied access to the popular short-form video content app. Two days earlier, the United States Supreme Court unanimously upheld a ban on the app's use within our national borders due to data privacy concerns. Today, TikTok is seemingly accessible because of an executive order signed by President Donald Trump. The issued order instructs the Justice Department to delay the enforcement of the TikTok ban for at least 75 days. While still active throughout the country, TikTok is no longer downloadable from the Apple or Android App Stores.

Since the ban, the question of data privacy has become increasingly relevant to the lives of U.S. citizens. The concept of a federal TikTok ban was, for a time, promoted as a matter of national security by both the Biden and Trump administrations—politicians across the political spectrum argued that TikTok is nonconsensually accessing our data and potentially using it for nefarious purposes. The concern is not new—congressmen from both the Democratic and Republican parties questioned the CEO of TikTok for hours in March of 2023. Yet today, the response from both experts and ordinary citizens has been mixed, with many people arguing that this ban will do nothing for our security or privacy.

The *Harvard Independent* interviewed the Chief Technology Officer of Harvard University, Jim Waldo, and Harvard's "Datamatch hacker" Sungjoo Yoon '27, to learn how students at Harvard should be thinking about their own online privacy amid the TikTok ban.

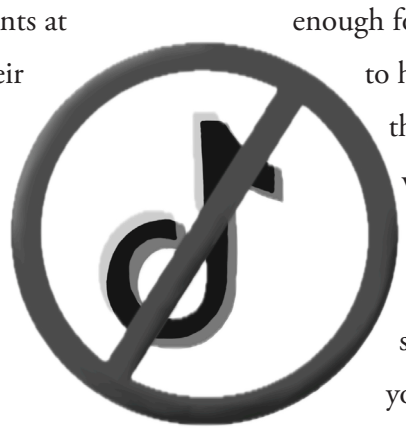
To Waldo, TikTok poses no unique privacy risk just because it's collecting data from its users. "It's all personal data that [TikTok] users are volunteering… Almost all of the information about demographic and location and those sorts of things could be obtained from standard online data aggregators in a much more convenient form." He proposes we ask different questions—the focus should be not on *what* data is being collected, but on *why* it is being collected. "It's really not data that is the invasion of privacy. It's how the data is used."

According to Yoon, when deciding whether to allow an app access to your information, you should pay close attention to the company's privacy policies—how your information will be stored and used. "Every time the app asks you to share more information, just say no," Yoon recommends. Even when using the internet, he says it's essential to "be conscientious of the tools that you're using…and [to] try to use the ones that are lauded for being more security-focused."

Still, as Waldo claims, there's not much you can do when it comes to the government accessing your data because "most privacy policies cannot stand up to a subpoena." Waldo advises, "If you're worried about the government using this information, then you just shouldn't share it with anybody."

Yet, even if you do not think the government will be subpoenaing your Finsta account from middle school, as Yoon explains, it could still be crucial for you to be hyper-conscious about the information you are putting online. "If you feel like you are going to be someone that is important, or you feel like you have the potential to be someone that's important, it's really, really important to have a handle on your data." The aspiration to be an "important" person, of course, applies to many Harvard students.

Yet outside of posting drunk selfies or other incriminating and easily accessible content, Waldo does not believe you necessarily have to be immensely concerned about using apps that are collecting demographic or personal information. "The largest misconception is that you're interesting enough for these companies to actually want to have a detailed dossier on you. What they have is a very broad notion of who you are, which may or may not be particularly accurate," Waldo explained. In fact, "thinking that somebody's going to figure out that you held subversive beliefs because of combing through all of your posts on Instagram at some point [is] probably not that big a deal."



At the end of the day, Waldo advises us to decide our own trade-offs around our data privacy and protection. The action items are very clear to him. "If you're worried about applications tracking all of your activity on the application, don't use the application. If you're worried about how they use your data, read the privacy policy." The enforcement of a national ban ensures that, regardless of users' personal choices, TikTok can no longer use or collect data from U.S. citizens. Yet with millions of apps and websites at the tip of your fingers, all asking to collect your information, Waldo argues that the primary role of protecting your data still falls to you.

To help us navigate this intimidating responsibility, Harvard offers plenty of resources. There are classes you can take to become more informed, like Waldo's course CS105: Privacy and Technology. Harvard pays for us to have access to a VPN and a specialized version of ChatGPT that ensures your queries won't be used to train OpenAI's models. But if you're worried that Harvard can use your queries to catch you breaking your class's GenAI policy, Waldo encourages you to *read the privacy policy* which says Harvard won't look at your use of the model. "If you think that the Harvard version of ChatGPT is more dangerous than just using the regular version of ChatGPT, you're not paying attention," says Waldo.

Choosing what version of the model to use or really any app comes down to how much you trust each company with your information. That's a personal decision that should be an *informed* decision. If people are using OpenAI's model instead of Harvard's, the implication is that "people trust OpenAI more than they trust Harvard." Waldo's response? "They should re-examine their life choices."

When it comes to trusting TikTok, students and government officials alike are still debating whether the company is "responsible" with our data or not. Some Harvard students have responded to the national ban by choosing to accept the privacy policies of even less U.S.-regulated social media companies, like RedNote. Others have taken the chance to permanently delete TikTok from their phones and examine their privacy choices more closely. This national ban serves as an opportunity to examine your online presence and become more informed about the privacy trade-offs you're making every day. In the end, online privacy is not just a policy debate—it's a personal responsibility.

Mia Tavares '27 (miatavares@college.harvard.edu) has never downloaded TikTok or made an account (despite being the *Independent's* Video Director for a year).

Graphic by Allyson Xu '28

FORUM

Trump's Revised School of Thought

Using statutory and executive authority, Trump's war on diversity, equity, and inclusion takes its opening blow on the academic left.

BY RANIA JONES '27

Two Januaries ago, on the top floor of a Chicago skyscraper, I fiddled with the gold, engraved buttons of my cardigan as my Harvard interviewer and I swapped stories about Harvard's craziest classes and Chicago's hidden gems. In a pause in conversation, she jumped at the opportunity to ask what I was most excited to experience in college. I didn't hesitate: the chance to learn, grow, and be propelled by the force of thought, of experience, and most importantly, of diversity—which I believed defined the Harvard experience.

It's important that educational spaces are places where perspectives collide and where assumptions or prior understandings unravel. Harvard, as a global institution, prides itself on this commitment to fostering an environment that "draws on the widest possible pool of talent to unify excellence and diversity." This pursuit of excellence isn't one-size-fits-all. It's found in the thespian *and* the mathematician, the activist and the athlete. It's found in the spaces between every kind of student—in both the friction and the fusion.

Harvard isn't alone in this commitment to viewing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a vehicle to achieve excellence. Many colleges and universities around the country have long-standing commitments to cultivating inclusive environments. Yet, as I'm in the midst of my second year of college, I can't help but recognize all the ways in which this vision is being challenged. In his very first days in office, President Donald Trump weaponized civil rights laws that address discrimination in education to undermine these very efforts.

Since Trump has taken office, he has published a series of executive orders, one of which targets DEI in higher education institutions, aiming to end what he calls "illegal" policies. Designating any institution that receives federal financial aid as a subcontractor, the order dictates that such colleges' employment, procurement, and contracting practices "shall not consider race, color, sex, sexual preference, religion, or national origin in ways that violate the Nation's civil rights laws."

Trump directed each federal agency in his executive order to "identify up to nine potential civil rights compliance investigations" of various organizations, including higher-education institutions with endowments over $1 billion, a category that undoubtedly includes all the Ivy League Schools.

The order directs agencies to "enforce our longstanding civil-rights laws and to combat illegal private-sector DEI preferences, mandates, policies, programs, and activities." It does not, at any point, define DEI. Further, the order also calls on the Secretary of Education to create instructions for colleges and universities on how to comply with the 2023 Supreme Court ruling in the case *Students for Fair Admissions, INC. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, which banned the use of race-conscious admissions policies.

DEI programs are not discriminatory; rather, they encompass a wide range of lawful initiatives to create fairer schools, fully in line with constitutional principles of equal protection. While these initiatives are designed to uplift a wide range of communities, like women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, veterans, and people with disabilities, Trump's executive orders seek to conflate these lawful efforts with discrimination. However, DEI programs operate within the bounds of the Constitution, working to ensure that all students have equitable access to opportunities. Through attacking the work of DEI offices at educational institutions, Trump's order attempts to dismantle integral systems that uplift and support historically underrepresented student populations.



The executive order deeply mischaracterizes DEI and aims at the core mission of higher education. Trump's administration has fundamentally always been afraid of DEI practices, mischaracterizing equity programs as discriminatory. Trump and conservative politicians alike perpetuate the false notion that the remedies of discrimination are seen as its roots.

In trying to assert political control over American higher education, Trump is doing exactly what he said he would do—advancing an America that prioritizes color-blind, merit-based admissions practices. His official inaugural address was a clear indicator when he said he'd "end the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life." Trump's immediate actions in office represent a deliberate attempt to reverse more than 50 years of civil rights work committed to promoting equal access to the American education system. He is undoing decades of bi-partisan federal anti-discrimination policy.

In college campuses, DEI initiatives are essential to fostering environments where everyone has an equal chance to succeed. Actively abandoning and dismantling DEI programs risks perpetuating inequality by alienating diverse merit and talent, as it removes the support structures that help students from underrepresented backgrounds thrive. Trump's administration, in their crusade against DEI, depicts these programs as divisive while, in reality, these initiatives aim to drive inclusivity.

Trump's administration is taking intentional steps to undergo reverse civil rights progress and is shielding it all as a color-blind meritocracy.

Responses from university leaders will likely vary by whether the university is private and what state it's located in, but now more than ever, schools and institutions must resist the intimidation, fear, and confusion that these executive orders instill. It is time to double down on their commitment to equal opportunity, ensuring that everyone maintains the right to thrive.

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE FORUM EDITOR OF THE *HARVARD INDEPENDENT*.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27

Still the Hardest Summer You'll Ever Love

Service isn't easy. That's what makes it great.

BY OWEN EBOSE '25

Three summers spent in the Cambridge sun, chasing kids on the playground, teaching chemistry, running through sprinklers, peering into museum cases, dancing with parents, serving food, sitting quietly, directing loudly. Three summers spent working at the Phillips Brooks House Association Summer Urban Program. The best three summers of my life.

It's a classic PBHA proverb: *SUP is the hardest summer you'll ever love.* Let me tell you about the hard part. As a director, your day might start relatively late (let's say 7 a.m.). You'll catch the bus down Cambridge Street at 7:40, rolling up to the site by eight. Your first task is to prepare attendance sheets as counselors set up their classrooms. At 8:30, they begin to arrive. Children. Energetic, curious, and insatiable. They'll be your responsibility for eight hours, their parents entrusting you with the heavy privilege of guarding their lives. Moms and grandfathers and sisters, after waving goodbye to their loved ones, give you a nod that is both reassuring and intimidating; a nod that says, "You got this. Now don't mess it up."

You and your team of college and high school students are in charge. You know all the systems and procedures, from the order of lunch breaks to the approval of the curriculum, because you designed them. If the systems fail (and they probably will, because this is your first time managing a full-time staff), you will answer for the consequences. When others run away, your job is to run toward the emergency. When your team is tired, your job is to be energized—to provide steady encouragement and a tone of professionalism and enthusiasm, even when you yourself are tired and discouraged.

The job of a counselor is no easier. You will be chief counsel to ten or more developing and maturing humans. They will turn to you for guidance as they process deep and complex emotions. They will expect you to have the answers to all their questions, mediate their conflicts with the precision of Justice herself, and act "cool," even though your essential task is to keep them safe (it goes without saying that coolness and safety don't always align, especially in the eyes of elementary schoolers in summer mode). You will negotiate for their attention every step of the way, battling against the temptations of phones and swing sets just visible through the classroom window.



A few of your campers will lack respect for themselves and others. You will insist on kindness, responding to meanness with compassion and the gentle hand of a teacher. Some might run when they should walk, talk when they should listen, and play when they should focus—you will respond with relentless patience and a belief in their capacity to succeed. You will try your best and come out short. Sometimes you'll feel like giving up. Some do give up.

So why do you love it? Why do you return for two more summers and write an op-ed encouraging your peers to go for it? Maybe for practical reasons: you realize that your service as a guardian made a tangible difference. That each hour of camp is an hour for parents to work or rest or plan for the future. In my first summer, a parent of two campers used the time to navigate the Cambridge affordable housing process. I was a reference on her housing application. She has now successfully moved to Cambridge.

Perhaps you realize that camp is the site of crucial emotional and intellectual stimulation for young people vulnerable to summer learning loss, the decline in academic and social preparedness that comes with sitting at home instead of gaining new experiences. Learning loss becomes learning inequity when only high-income households can access programs. SUP is incredibly affordable, often one-tenth the cost of neighboring initiatives, and readily waives camp fees for anyone unable to pay. That affordability is made possible by the student staffing model. It is made possible by your commitment and sacrifice.

Maybe you love it because you forged profoundly deep relationships with your campers and colleagues. With every conversation about respect, early morning van ride to the site, bandaged knee scrape, lunchtime game-winning three-pointer, and venting session in the dining hall, you grew closer to the special people around you. People committed to the wellbeing of their community and kids excited by the simple things in life: tag, water balloons, friendship bracelets, Takis. You love it because you had fun; you enjoyed letting your inner child leap around the playset and devour bubblegum ice cream.

Maybe you love it for the same reason I did: because you're up for the challenge. You're ready for a level of responsibility that you likely won't be granted again until you're 30. President John F. Kennedy '40 said that we went to the moon not because it was easy, but because it was hard. SUP is hard. Really hard. And that's what makes it an incredible experience. You will grow immensely as a human being. The people you meet will be the best of the best. Your community will thank you. So, dear reader, take the leap into service. Join us on the moon.

The Phillips Brooks House Association, located in Harvard Yard, is the hub for public service at Harvard. A student-led organization, PBHA offers over 60 programs to the residents of Cambridge and Boston.

Owen Ebose '25 (owenebose@college.harvard.edu) is on his way to enjoy some bubblegum flavored ice cream.

Photo courtesy of Owen Ebose '25

Queue the Cameras: The Struggle for Gender Equality in Sports Media

A look at how a lack of coverage and stereotypical portrayals of female athletes perpetuates a cycle of sexism in sports.

BY SARA KUMAR '27

On Jan. 14 and 21, four Boston-area collegiate women's ice hockey teams competed in their biggest tournament of the season: the Beanpot. Bringing together students from Boston University, Boston College, Harvard, and Northeastern, this renowned athletic event has been occurring annually since 1952. However, while the Men's Beanpot around two weeks later is accompanied by roaring crowds and a sold-out rink, the female hockey players are less lucky.



The 2025 Women's Beanpot attracted 13,279 viewers, the largest audience in New England history. While these numbers seem cause for celebration, the Men's Beanpot consistently draws over 15,000 people. Furthermore, since the Women's Beanpot is scheduled before most Harvard students return from Winter Recess, such a discrepancy in audience is only exacerbated on this campus. Even beyond the Beanpot, college female athletes are waiting for comparable recognition and treatment both on and beyond campuses.

Since the average professional salary for American female athletes is only 83% of their male counterparts, collegiate female athletes often have to dedicate more time to being well-rounded—it is not as easy to rely on a sport without the prospect of a lucrative career ahead. Ultimately, such numbers expose the recurring discussions surrounding the ever-present divide between men's and women's sports. Moreover, the sexist portrayals of female athletes in the media perpetuate gender-based discrimination, leading us to question whether news broadcasts and sports journals are the problem—or if the larger societal culture is.

In March 2021, researchers at Purdue University demonstrated that, from 1989–2019, the percentage of women's sports coverage compared to men's had barely changed. In 2019, female athletics only accounted for approximately 5.4% of airtime on live television, only slightly higher than the 5% calculated in 1989. According to a campaign launched by Buick in 2022, "over 40% of all athletes are female." Thus, offering them such little media coverage does not make sense, at least based on participation.

Additionally, the Purdue researchers explained that the quality of coverage in women's versus men's sports is drastically different: "In 2019, with rare exceptions…women's sports stories were still normally presented in bland and boring ways. In contrast, viewers of stories about men's sports were constantly immersed in a sea of colorful and dominant verbal descriptors, delivered in excited and widely-modulated voice intonations."

Beyond inadequate televised exposure, depictions of female athletes in popular publications uphold discriminatory rhetoric in sports. A 2019 study published in *Body Image*, which traced the objectification of female Olympic athletes over the past sixty years in *Sports Illustrated*, explained that while men are often depicted as hypermuscular and talented, female athletes are often highlighted for their appearance, family life, and fulfillment of other stereotypically female gender roles.

On the one hand, it is not solely ESPN, *Sports Illustrated*, or other popular sports media's fault for this discrepancy. It's understandable that media outlets focus on what the public desires to consume, as increased viewership translates to higher revenue. This dilemma presents an interesting chicken-and-egg scenario: should increased media coverage and altered depictions of female athletes come first to drive interest in women's sports, or must attraction come before viewership?

It is almost impossible for women to expand their audience if they do not have the opportunity. The lack of talent-centric, compelling, and consistent exposure of female athletes in the media inadvertently teaches the American populace that men's athletes are more important and more captivating, as their sports remain one of the primary programs the public can consistently watch. Favorite players inevitably become LeBron James, not Nneka Ogwumike, and the Los Angeles Sparks are left in the shadow of the Lakers.

Redefining the portrayal of female athletes by emphasizing skills and team achievements over their appearance and status would transform the cultural narrative around women's sports. Viewers would learn to respect and celebrate these professionals rather than compare and scrutinize superficial traits.

Additionally, an analysis conducted by audience research company GWI explains that there has been an increase in public engagement in women's sports from 2021 to 2024. 28% of sports fans say they now follow or are interested in the FIFA Women's World Cup, which is an 11% change since 2021. The WNBA saw a 7% change in public interest since 2021, with 19% of individuals now watching the league. The UEFA Women's Champions League, the Women's Tennis Association, and the International Cricket Council Women's T20 all similarly are noticing climbing viewership, observing percentage changes of 13%, 9%, and 3%, respectively. To sustain this progress, we need to first intentionally alter national media.

As Makenzie Glassford of *The Campanile* comments, "Sports media is not waiting for us to get interested in women's sports, it is creating our apathy." Unless news broadcasts extend their air time when showing women's sports and journals remedy their stereotypical gendered depictions of female athletes, American discriminatory perception of these individuals will not change.

On campus, male athletes should actively promote their female counterparts, both online and on the field. Instead of simply seeing one another at weekend mixers or athlete dinners, they should bring vibrant posters and their friends to every game. As the stands begin to fill, more students will realize the importance of supporting all Harvard athletes equally.

Sara Kumar '27 (sjkumar@college.harvard.edu) is looking forward to attending Harvard women's sports games this spring.

Graphic by El Richards '26

Thoughts from New Quincy: The Apathy Industry

Examining the rise of desensitization in modern culture.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

As I sat on my flight back to school last weekend, I found myself immersed in a spectacle of violence and eroticism radiating from the screens around me. A man two rows ahead of me was engrossed in a brutal shootout, while another nearby watched two men fight to the death with their bare knuckles. As I looked around from screen to screen, almost every person visible to me on my flight was either watching people being killed or having sex. The two most primal extremes of human existence—the destruction and creation of life—are reduced to mere entertainment. This pervasive exposure to such content, seamlessly integrated into daily life, epitomizes a troubling reality: we are becoming increasingly desensitized to the visceral weight of violence and human intimacy.

German philosophers and sociologists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry provides a crucial lens to understand this phenomenon. In their essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception," they argue that culture has become a commodity to be bought and sold in society. These commodified goods become homogenized products that are constantly sold to the masses to maximize profit. Rather than challenging the status quo and creating new forms of content, artists often produce virtually identical works that Adorno and Horkheimer note are "ready-made cliches to be used here and there." These forms of content are so similar that they could be inserted at any moment into any show with the same effect—take Taylor Swift's songs, for example. Her songs may sound different on the surface, but they are just one product being sold repeatedly with slightly different "packaging."

Today, the media we consume is saturated with violence and hypersexualization. The NIH noted that around 60% of television shows have some sort of violence, and 40% of those shows have "heavy violence." Videos of people getting executed have infiltrated not only television but also the mainstream media. While surface-level traits may vary from character to character, the subliminal messaging remains the same. By making violent and erotic images so recurring, the media normalizes brutality and eroticism in the psyches of their audience by presenting homogenous worldviews.

This phenomenon is evident in how streaming platforms and social media algorithms prioritize engagement over substance. Sensationalized violence and hypersexualization are not incidental but rather integral to social media's function to captivate the audience to continue scrolling on their app. Instagram and TikTok fuel compulsiveness and ensure that audiences remain passive participants ingesting these ready-made cliches of violence and eroticism at every corner. In this way, the entertainment industry perpetuates a cycle where desensitization leads to greater consumption, and greater consumption, in turn, leads to further desensitization.

In an era characterized by an incessant inundation of media, our cognitive and emotional landscapes are seeing death and violence at almost every turn. Technology has advanced to a point where anyone can open their phones and be flooded with hundreds of messages in seconds. Within these messages, graphic violence and hypersexualized imagery have precipitated a psychological shift in the American consciousness. After constantly watching people get killed on television or OnlyFans creators dancing with almost no clothes on, we become desensitized to the violence and eroticism of the culture industry. You could watch someone get beat to death with bare knuckles, but it does not have the same weight that it should because millions of Americans are watching it happen daily, five inches from their face.

"Squid Game," the global Netflix sensation, exemplifies the shift in modern entertainment. Season 1 of the series amassed 1.65 billion hours streamed—the most in the first 28 days in Netflix's history. "Squid Game," ostensibly a critique of economic disparity and capitalism, paradoxically transforms mass killings and homicide into a spectacle of entertainment for American elites. It's important to realize that one of the most popular and viewed shows on Netflix chooses to put gory, bloody violence at the forefront of the narrative, forcing the audience to watch people kill each other with their bare hands.

Repeated exposure to portrayals of murder, warfare, and brutality in films, television, video games, and news media engenders a cognitive numbing effect. Psychological research suggests that prolonged immersion in violent imagery diminishes physiological arousal and blunts emotional responses, fostering a diminished sense of empathy toward real-world atrocities. In 2006, psychologists from Iowa State University produced a piece of work on the impact of violence and desensitization; it concludes: "In short, the modern entertainment media landscape could accurately be described as an effective systematic violence desensitization tool." Similarly, the American Psychological Association states, "Early research on the effects of viewing violence on television—especially among children—found a desensitizing effect and the potential for aggression."

Moreover, social media exacerbates this desensitization by obliterating the distinction between reality and spectacle. Distressing videos of real-life violence are disseminated widely, often met with passive scrolling rather than genuine moral engagement. The boundary separating fictional carnage reminiscent of "Squid Game" from authentic human suffering disintegrates, rendering tragedy a consumable commodity.

Parallel to the normalization of violence is the widespread desensitization to sexual content. Once regarded as an intimate and private domain, sexuality has been progressively commodified and broadcast on an unprecedented scale. Films, TV shows, and social media platforms have obliterated traditional boundaries, ushering in an era where hypersexualization pervades every digital space. Platforms like OnlyFans epitomize this paradigm shift, transforming intimacy into an economic transaction. In Jan. 2024 alone, the platform saw 455 million visits in the United States.

Furthermore, an article in "Bustle" highlights findings from the "Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry," which found: "Porn can desensitize you... Participants who regularly watched significant amounts of porn had more trouble getting aroused during actual, human-to-human sex than participants who watched little to no porn." This reflects how the increasing commodification of sex in digital spaces can interfere with personal intimacy and connection.

Social media further compounds this phenomenon. Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms perpetuate a visual economy in which curated, hypersexualized imagery dictates standards of desirability. Platforms like OnlyFans are becoming so popular that creators like Sophie Rain are making more money annually ($44.3 million) than elite NBA athletes like Luka Doncic ($43.0 million) and Jayson Tatum ($34.8 million).

TikTok is increasingly dominated by content creators who openly discuss their jobs as sex workers and advertise their OnlyFans accounts. TikTok Content houses are being made for OnlyFans workers, such as the "Bop House," which has already garnered over 2.6 million followers and 26.5 million likes. This relentless consumption of idealized aesthetics engenders a detachment from organic human connection, replacing authentic intimacy with a pursuit of unattainable standards. On many social media platforms, sexuality is no longer an expression of emotional or relational depth but rather a commodified spectacle subject to algorithmic amplification and profit.

Desensitization, at its core, functions as a psychological defense mechanism. The human mind cannot process an unrelenting barrage of suffering, brutality, and hyperstimulation. To mitigate emotional overload, individuals instinctively detach, cultivating an internal buffer against distress. Yet, this response has far-reaching consequences: apathy supplants empathy, engagement gives way to indifference, and the depth of human experience is diminished.

Modern media is not merely a reflection of cultural shifts—it is an active agent that shapes our understanding of society and emotions. The numbing effect of incessant exposure to violence and sex is not a peripheral concern but rather a profound cultural shift. Recognizing the depth of our desensitization to violence and sex is imperative, for only through this awareness can we begin to grapple with its far-reaching consequences and reclaim our capacity for empathy and critical engagement.

Luke Wagner '26 (lukewagner@college.harvard.edu) finds it crazy how often American consumers witness people getting killed on television.

Graphic by Emily Pallan '27



Chocolat Chaud, Pas Planète Chaude: Environmentalism the Parisian Way

A winter in Paris has shown me how the French embrace sustainability unlike America's convenience culture.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

From December through February, the first thing I did when I got home from middle school was whip up a big pot of hot chocolate to thaw myself after braving the cold of Midwestern winters. Save for an uncharacteristic cold spell the first week I was here, Paris has thankfully proven milder than Cleveland, Ohio, but the appeal of warming up with a *chocolat chaud* persists across the Atlantic. Famous for its luxuriously rich hot chocolate, Paris's offerings for this classic winter beverage have not disappointed me. Yet, every time my frigid fingers cup around a *chocolat chaud*, I can't help but wonder how many frozen-over winters our planet has left before our world becomes a *planète chaude* due to climate change.

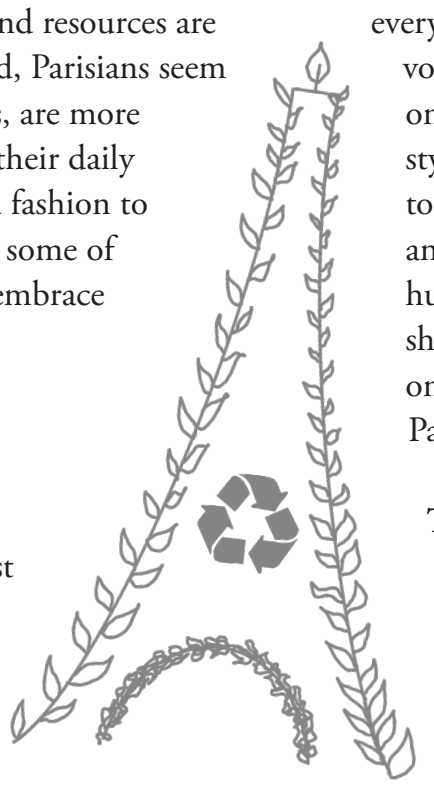
One of the first cultural differences I noticed between Paris and back home is the difference in attitude towards the climate crisis. Between implemented policy and individual habits, France is far more concerned with the environment than the United States.

Paris has become practically synonymous with international climate policy. The Paris Agreement was a landmark treaty that legally bound its 196 signatories to take action on climate change and limit "the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels." It was signed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) on Dec.12, 2015, and has been critical to prompting international climate action ever since.

Domestically, France has made sustainability a cornerstone of its policies. More than 70% of its energy comes from nuclear power, a result of a long-standing policy aiming to maintain the country's energy security. The country also invests heavily in public transit: in 2020, France spent €6.7 billion on transit infrastructure. I've seen firsthand how this investment has translated to a clean and efficient metro that can get me anywhere in the city. These types of policies set the stage for a more sustainability-oriented attitude across the population.

Beyond France's climate policies, I have noticed that Parisians forgo many conveniences Americans take for granted in the name of sustainability. For example, a Parisian may walk to their local butcher, produce vendor, and boulangerie for the week's groceries while an American would drive to the supermarket or order them via Instacart.

Although an individual's actions are not the sole cause or solution for climate change, a shift away from the world's current consumerist mindset will be necessary as we face the reality that energy and resources are not infinite. Across the board, Parisians seem more aware of this and, thus, are more mindful of sustainability in their daily practices. From cooking and fashion to energy and beyond, here are some of the ways I've seen Parisians embrace sustainability.



The French Kitchen

The first difference I noticed was in the kitchen. With one of the world's most celebrated cuisines, French food leaves little room for complaint. Part of what makes French cooking so divine is the fresh ingredients they use. Many of the meals I've shared with my host family are simple, yet delicious because they let the ingredients shine through. Fresh ingredients are all about timing.

Like every fruit stand in Paris, my host family's kitchen is overflowing with citrus because it is in season. Berries will have to wait until summer (unless they're frozen). Not only does this culinary timing ensure better produce, but it also minimizes the environmental impact by prioritizing local foods. Even French pantry staples are more sustainable than their American counterparts, often packaged in paper instead of plastic. The extra time spent decanting paper bags of nuts into glass jars is worth it to me to not use plastic. France also passed a law banning grocery stores from discarding edible food, further preventing food waste.

Another subtle sustainability habit in the kitchen is the prevalence of compost bins in Paris. Almost every one of my classmates has one in their host family's home. In the United States, I have always perceived compost as a rarity done only by the highly environmentally conscious, but in Paris, it is standard practice.

Not-So-Fast Fashion

One of my favorite ways that sustainability manifests itself in Paris is the plethora of vintage stores and flea markets across the city. As the fashion capital of the world, Paris is filled with stylish people. Luckily for me, I can scour through their previously loved pieces in second-hand shops across the city. From kilo shops that sell clothes by the kilogram to high-end vintage designer boutiques, there are stores for everyone to score great finds. The sheer volume of vendors is unmatched, and once you step inside, the quality and style of the clothing make it feel easy to build a fashionable wardrobe in an earth-friendly way. I was happy to hunt for days for the perfect vintage shoulder bag instead of just ordering one on Amazon. Turns out that in Paris, sustainable fashion is *très chic!*

Très Mindful, Très Demure

Perhaps the most shocking cultural difference between France and the United States is the French aversion to wasting energy. Compared to Harvard dorms where I wear short sleeves and shorts to bed and still wake up sweating, French buildings tend to run a bit colder, necessitating more layering on my end. Likewise, lights are often on timers so they don't get left on for too long. In Paris, most of my friends and I line-dry our clothes. In so many areas where Americans choose comfort, Parisians choose to employ a little more manual labor to save energy.

I never realized how careless Americans can be with energy use until I moved here. In France, higher taxes on energy have led to more efficient consumption. It's easy to turn up the thermostat a few degrees without thinking about the environmental impact, but it's just as simple to throw on a sweater instead to make sure winters stay cold.

Sustainability in France can at times feel inconvenient, especially since living in America we're accustomed to getting things exactly the way we want them in the fastest way possible. But does this convenience always make us happier or better off? Is this convenience worth its price? Perhaps we could learn from the French—cook meals with family instead of DoorDashing dinner, or maybe bike somewhere instead of driving. A collective shift away from convenience and towards sustainability will ensure we can all enjoy many more frozen winters warmed up by hot chocolates.

Frances Connors '26 (maryfrancesconnors@college.harvard.edu) was once an Environmental Science and Public Policy Concentrator.

Graphic by Sophia Rascoff '27

TikTok or TikToxic: Scrolling Ourselves Sick

Why TikTok's temporary departure should become permanent.

BY HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26

It's 11:30 p.m. on a Tuesday night. I have a 10:30 a.m. class on Wednesday, and I have just finished most of my readings for tomorrow's classes. Satisfied with this work, I decide it's time to hit the hay. I brush my teeth, put my retainer in, and crawl into bed. I put my blue light glasses on, open my phone, and click on TikTok. I tell myself: *Just a couple of videos and then I'll go to bed.* This all-too-familiar story has an all-too-familiar ending: closing TikTok at 2 a.m. with heavy eyes and a mind buzzing with noise and regret.

Don't get me wrong—I love TikTok. The ability to bounce from a new recipe to a helpful life hack to an undiscovered artist in a matter of minutes is phenomenal; it's exactly why I would always redownload the app after deleting it.

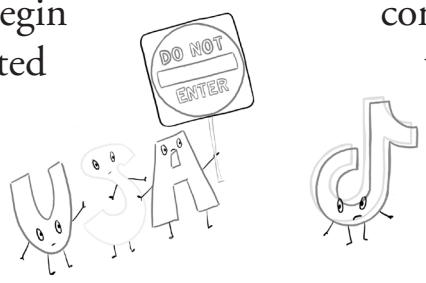
Every couple of months, I do a deep dive into my phone's screen time, and I am inevitably disappointed with my social media usage. After years of hearing about my parents' extraordinary college experiences, I can't help but question why I continue to waste so much of mine on this mindless app. As a result, I find myself going through the routine of deleting TikTok for a couple of months, then, at some point in my cleanse, inevitably finding myself bored enough to redownload it.

This is exactly why I was horrified to discover on Jan. 17 that I would no longer be able to redownload the app after my latest TikTok cleanse. Sure, I deleted the app every couple of months. But I also counted on it always being there when I was ready to return.

TikTok is a source of joy, connection, and inspiration. A place where anyone, regardless of fame or fortune, can go viral. It's funny. It's entertaining. It's addictive. And that's exactly the problem.

TikTok isn't just another social media app—it's a perfectly engineered attention trap. Compared to other platforms, TikTok's algorithm keeps users scrolling for hours by inducing a "flow state." A flow state, often experienced by competitive athletes and performers, is essentially a state of intense concentration and a loss of sense of time.

Due to its connection with the brain's reward pathway, being in a flow state is a highly enjoyable experience. With regard to TikTok, users get quick dopamine hits when scrolling which helps enter them into a flow state. Once in this flow state, users begin to feel the associated time distortion, explaining how three hours pass during what feels like 20 minutes of mindless swiping.



It may seem that these three hours on TikTok have no harmful consequences—besides the unintentional passing of time. Unfortunately, this is not the case. One study found that time distortion increased problematic TikTok usage, while another study showed that TikTok's algorithm makes the addiction more severe than other social media platforms. Although the flow state itself is associated with reward, the addictive nature of scrolling on TikTok renders its flow state more harmful than helpful.

Another unfortunate outcome of TikTok's endless stream of short videos is a reduced attention span. We've all sat on our phones waiting in line for a coffee, while we were supposed to be listening to a lecture, or even going to the bathroom. Be honest: When was the last time you sat in silence and did nothing for 10 minutes? Our generation is chronically online, and TikTok only exacerbates this.

Our perpetual attachment to the internet provides a limitless source of information, and TikTok provides an environment for this information to be consumed faster than ever. While this flood of content is a fantastic way to stay connected and in the loop, it's also a double-edged sword. TikTok's vast expanse of helpful knowledge is also rife with misinformation that spreads just as quickly as the truth. One investigation even discovered that 20% of search results for prominent news topics contained misinformation.

Despite these flaws, TikTok retains many benefits. It fosters creativity by providing users with a platform on which they can express themselves through a variety of mediums. It builds inclusive communities by bringing people together through shared niche interests and creating spaces to feel seen and understood. Above all, the app captivates and constantly entertains.

Since deleting TikTok for the final time, I've noticed some slight but impactful improvements in my life. I wake up every morning and get right out of bed and every night, fall asleep shortly after getting back into bed. The instinct to open my phone upon any unoccupied moment has faded, and the free hour I have between classes has now become a productive one. Most importantly, I feel in control of my time instead of being dictated by an app that tick-tocks away my days.

I'm not saying I wouldn't give into the temptation to redownload TikTok if I could. I'm certainly not saying TikTok has no appeal. But at what cost do we keep scrolling? For every new life hack or viral trend, there is an algorithm designed to keep us scrolling into oblivion, hours of our lives slipping away along with our attention span, and a feed filled with misinformation. TikTok has turned TikToxic, and it's time to stop scrolling and start living in the real world.

Heidi Heffelfinger '26 (heidiheffelfinger@college.harvard.edu) has been spending just as much time on Instagram Reels as she did on TikTok.

Graphic by Clara Lake '27

News and Views: We Want Your Voice

This budding column brings your voice to topical news.

BY RANIA JONES '27, SARA KUMAR '27, AND GAURI SOOD '26

Joan Didion begins her 1979 book *The White Album* with a striking assertion: "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." In journalism, op-eds—short for "opposite the editorial page"—are where these stories take shape. Such narratives aren't neutral reports on events but a fusion of arguments, perspectives, and deeply felt convictions. The most salient narratives do not come merely from headlines or official reports but from the voices that dare to step beyond them—voices that argue, persuade, and reveal something more remarkable.

It's hard to conceive that the modern op-ed didn't always exist. The modern op-ed was formally developed in 1970 in *The New York Times* under the direction of editor John B. Oakes. Though newspapers had long featured opinion pieces, they were almost exclusively written by staff editors or columnists. From academics to everyday citizens, the *Times* revolutionized this format by dedicating an entire page to outside contributors, thereby offering diverse perspectives beyond the paper's official stance.

Since its establishment, the op-ed has become an influential vehicle for shaping public discourse, dismantling dominant narratives, and elevating unheard voices. In our modern fragmented media landscape, op-eds remain a counterbalance to traditional reports, indicating that journalism isn't exclusively about telling people what happened but rather about making sense of why it matters.

This past week, one of our writers at the *Independent* attended a conference on "Organizing and Lawyering for Systemic Justice" at Harvard Law School. At the conference, experts on a panel on legal journalism discussed what kinds of reporting on court decisions most powerfully represent the impact these rulings and decisions have on individuals.

Several of the featured journalists mentioned that the most riveting law review articles, or other forms of legal journalism, remove nearly all of the legal details, leaving behind the stories that speak to the larger impact that a ruling may have. After all, the law does not exist in a vacuum, nor do politics or power.

Here at the *Independent*, we reflected on our current initiatives, which focus on publishing outside contributors' voices that share not just what is happening but what should happen next. We imagined this column, *News and Views,* as an effort to fill this lack of national journalism and Harvard's on-campus publications spaces. We want this initiative to exist with editorial writers in coordination with our classmates and peers outside the *Independent*.

News and Views aims to create a space where personal narratives and strong arguments shape the conversation. We recognize that all individuals on Harvard's campus have unique stories. The news has arguably never felt closer to home, clearly affecting our friends, loved ones, and even ourselves at a highly intimate level.

The strongest opinion writing does not only react to current events and the world; it drives it forward. We're asking for your opinions on breaking or contentious news, informed by your unique experiences and perspectives. We welcome all Harvard undergraduates to submit 650-800-word opinion editorials here. Writers of accepted submissions will be paired with members of our editorial team to ensure your piece is ready for both online and print publication. If you have something to say—an idea, a story, an argument—this is your place to share it! Submit your op-ed. Join the conversation. Make your voice heard.

Rania Jones '27 (rjones@college.harvard.edu), Sara Kumar '27 (sjkumar@college.harvard.edu), and Gauri Sood '26 (gaurisood@college.harvard.edu) really want you to submit an op-ed to News and Views.

Graphic by Annelise Fisher '26



Hamm Sandwich

Hasty Pudding Theatricals honors actor Jon Hamm with their 2025 Man of the Year award.

BY KAYLA REIFEL '26 AND LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

You might be surprised by the abundant similarities between Jon Hamm and a pound of deli ham, but according to Bernardo Sequeira '26, they do not share one thing: an Oscar win.

On Friday, Jan. 31, the Hasty Pudding Theatricals (HPT) honored actor Jon Hamm with their prestigious Man of the Year award. During the event, Hamm participated in a lively roast, held a press conference, and got a sneak peek at this year's production, "101 Damnations."

Jon Hamm is best known for his iconic role as executive Don Draper in the AMC series "Mad Men," set in the high-stakes world of Sterling Cooper advertising. Beyond "Mad Men," Hamm has showcased his versatility in a range of films, including "Keeping Up with the Joneses," "Beirut," "Baby Driver," and "Top Gun: Maverick." He has also made memorable television appearances, with notable roles in "30 Rock," "The Morning Show," and "Parks and Recreation."

Hamm's range across drama and comedy has made him a standout talent in Hollywood, and his sharp wit and charm were on full display during the Man of the Year event, captivating the audience with his humor.

Roast presenters Sequeira and Cathy Stanton '25 put Jon Hamm through a series of playful "tests" to prove to Hollywood that "he's still got it." The first test involved confirming Hamm's claimed 6-foot-2 height, but the Pudding team pulled out a giant ruler that appeared to measure him at a comically shorter 5-foot-8.

Next, Hamm was put to the test to showcase his salesman skills. He had to pitch car insurance to a "Baby Driver," sell a pen to a woman who had just lost her job (in which he traded her the pen for a dollar—much to the presenters' amusement), and try to convince a superfan to buy a Daniel Radcliffe bathtub poster. "The Real Paul Rudd"—an exaggerated, muscle-bound version of the actor—made a surprise appearance and joined Hamm onstage for a flexing competition.

The final test was a game called "Hamm or Ham," where the presenters asked a series of questions to see if the answers could apply to either Jon Hamm, the actor, or ham, the deli meat. Hamm won by default, since the slab of meat couldn't speak, and as a quirky follow-up, he was challenged to slice the ham using a pair of hook hands—a nod to his "30 Rock" character, Dr. Drew Baird, who loses his hands in a freak accident after waving to someone while exiting a helicopter. Twice.

After successfully passing all the tests, the presenters declared that Hamm had earned his place as the recipient of the coveted Pudding Pot. He was then presented with this prestigious honor by HPT members Ava Pallotta '25 and Jessica Zisk '25 while sporting a decorative Hasty Pudding Theatricals bra. "He'll have lovely friends on my shelf," Hamm joked with reporters at the press conference as he explained that he would place the Pot alongside his other prestigious awards, including an Emmy and two Golden Globes.



Stanton, HPT's president, said that she "had the time of [her] life honoring Jon Hamm as Man of the Year! He's extremely personable and good-humored with so much knowledge and experience that he shared with students interested in the arts and entertainment." Furthermore, Stanton mentioned that "during the day, it became clear that [Hamm] really keeps himself busy, booking multiple movies [and] TV shows per year and filming in months-long increments. That gave us plenty of material to work with during the roast, which he took like a champ!"

Hamm was accompanied at the press conference by costumed Hasty Pudding members Harrison Epstein '25 and Liv Ernst '26 and Press and Publicity Manager Chaelon Simpson '26. "Jon Hamm is definitely one of the most down-to-earth and nice people that I think I've ever interacted with. He used to be a teacher and I talked a little bit with him about what the job was like, especially because my mother is a teacher as well," Simpson said. "I feel like that human element of teaching other people really informed his politeness and fun energy that he brought—not only the roast and the press conference, but the entirety of the festivities as well."

At the press conference, Hamm talked about what it was like going into the roast, and if he had prepared himself for what could be in store. "I thought it would be more fun if I just entered it, like most things, with eyes wide open and knowing that it's all in good fun," he said. "I did notice that the four or five Men of the Year before me are all people that are in my phone, so I could have certainly hit them up, but I'm glad I didn't and let it be a wonderfully pleasant surprise."

The evening concluded with a preview of the first half hour of HPT's 176th production, "101 Damnations." The theater's curtain flew up to reveal a relatively barebones set, primarily defined by a detailed, beautiful projection on the back of the theater that depicted a sprawling hellish metropolis. The opening number, led by Gabrielle Greene's '27 character Claire Ickle-Error, reveals that the characters are dead and now in Hell. Claire, a Dorothy-esque goody-two-shoes, has seemingly found herself there by mistake, or rather, due to a clerical error.

Claire's ballad about how she does not belong in Hell trips off some sort of metaphorical sensor in God's omniscience and he sends William Murray's '26 character Anne Gelic, a well-dressed drag queen angel, to go rescue her and bring her to Heaven. Claire navigates Hell alongside a wacky cast of characters, from Emma Rogers's '25 fur-clad viking Jürgen Alovemeoneday to Will Jevon's '27 fratty, backward-cap-wearing rower Rowan D'Boat. It is clear that writers Rodmehr Basidj '26 and Jackson Coombs '26 alongside principal lyricist Zachary Halberstam '25 have put together a fun, eclectic show that is sure to keep audiences interested.

The underworld portrayed in "101 Damnations" certainly lives up to its description as "nondenominational," with references to the River Styx and three-headed dog Cerberus of Greek mythology, mentions of the classic Christian figures of Lucifer and God, and other nods to the fabled afterlives of various religions and cultures. The preview cemented the show as a must-see comedic romp and impressive visual spectacle rife with talent and more heaven and hell puns than you ever thought possible.

The official premiere of "101 Damnations" will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 5, with Woman of the Year honoree Cynthia Erivo also being celebrated that night. The production will run at Farkas Hall from Feb. 7 to March 9, with special performances in New York City on March 14 and 15.

KAYLA REIFEL '26 (KAYLAREIFEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CANNOT WAIT TO SEE THE FULL "101 DAMNATIONS" PRODUCTION.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KAYLA REIFEL '26

"Foreigners Everywhere:" A Weekend at the Venice Biennale

Rotting fruit, chalkboard walls, and a heavily beaded punching bag.

BY SACHI LAUMAS '26

Walls of glass beads, each colored strand hugging the next as they hang from the ceiling. A pile of rotting fruit on a wooden desk, connected by long wires to speakers emanating a low and melodic hum. In a room that's all chalkboard, names link in a never-ending tree stretching from floor to ceiling. A fountain with a Greek-looking bust in the middle, red lasers and water spurting from her eyes.

These are just four examples of the incredible displays of art from the 2024 iteration of the biannual Biennale di Venezia (or in English, the Venice Biennale). Visiting the Biennale was a highlight of my semester abroad, a faint dream turned reality during the two-hour ride from Florence into The Floating City's central train station.

The Venice Biennale is one of the most prestigious contemporary art exhibitions in the world. The Biennale oscillates between art and architecture, switching between them each year. Typically running from April through mid-November, the Biennale features artists from all over the world in pavilions that are spread throughout the grounds like amusement park rides. Each pavilion is its own freestanding building and exhibition space, most consisting of one or two rooms with flexible layouts. Most countries who participate each year retain their own pavilion or share with a neighboring country, making the exhibition akin to the Olympics of the contemporary art world. The pavilions culminate in the Central Pavilion, which—in 2024 at least—resembled a more traditional art exhibition.

Each year the Venice Biennale is something to write home about, and the 60th iteration, entitled "Foreigners Everywhere" or "Stranieri Ovunque" and curated by Adriano Pedrosa, the Biennale's first openly queer curator, was no exception. The 2024 exhibition aimed to send the message that, in Pedrosa's words, "wherever you go and wherever you are you will always encounter foreigners— they/we are everywhere. Secondly, that no matter where you find yourself, you are always truly, and deep down inside, a foreigner."

Each artist and each pavilion interpreted this theme in their own way: below I have highlighted three of my personal favorites from the 2024 Venice Biennale: Foreigners Everywhere.

Australia

Winner of the Golden Lion Award for Best National Participation, Archie Moore's work "kith and kin" spoke volumes. My favorite of the pavilions I experienced, Moore's work demonstrates the common ground between his personal experience and Australia's political climate. Upon entrance, the work encased the visitor in a large, somber, square room. Chalkboard walls lined the room with over 2,400 generations of Moore's family lineage, organized into a large-scale family tree. The work was meant to represent the deep-seated and strong history of the First Nations people of Australia, while also exposing how these peoples have been colonized, murdered, and repressed by the British and eventually the Australian government.



The center of the room was filled with a pool of dark ink. Floating in the pool was a 'city' of stacks of paper, the top of each stack including copies of coroner reports from the deaths of Aboriginal Australian people. The island of floating paper represents the island of Australia itself and the delicacy of Aboriginal history. One wrong step, one wrong sweep of a hand, and the documents would cascade into the black ink, their information lost forever. The installation spoke volumes and seemed to demand whispers and lowered voices to let the work's voice fill the room instead.

Japan

Artist Yuko Mohri exhibited two works in the marble-floored and airy Japanese pavilion, entitled "Moré Moré (Leaky)" and "Decomposition." The former, inspired by Tokyo subway workers who resourcefully used whatever objects they had on hand to patch up subway leaks, was a series of kinetic sculptures with water flowing through them. Using only local materials and objects from Venice itself, Mohri sought to explore the intersection of movement, water, and the everyday object in a different context.

The second work, my favorite from this pavilion, explored the organic roots of sound and noise. "Decomposition" was a series of live sculptures, consisting of groups of fruit allowed to decompose and rot. These pieces of fruit were connected via cables to hanging lights or speakers, resulting in either a flickering light display or a melodic hum that changes in pitch alongside the changing levels of moisture in the fruits. The fruits were replaced every few weeks and therefore the lights and sounds changed completely depending on how long the fruit had sat out. Mohri is interested in how the world will continue to respond to global crises such as natural disasters and climate change, and so her works embody these responses in a smaller-scale form.

The United States

The first Indigenous artist to represent the United States in the Biennale solo, Jeffery Gibson's pavilion "the space in which to place me" was a colorful and involved exploration of how culture survives and thrives under "impossible conditions." A highlight of the show was the large looming figures with intricate beadwork. Each torso held a different caption, including "WE WANT TO BE FREE," the title of the work.

Another work in the show used two found punching bags covered in heavy and rainbow beadwork, reading the phrase "WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT." Admirers of Gibson may remember his work "RED POWER" in the Harvard Art Museums' collection, which was displayed last spring as part of the show "Future Minded: New Works in the Collection." His pavilion at the Biennale was simultaneously a representation of his oeuvre and a sign of where the artist plans to move next with his work. Gibson continues to inspire and inform contemporary studies of how Indigenous material and non-material culture has and continues to persist and evolve.

The 2024 Venice Biennale was a show of coming together. A show of recognizing that though we all may be foreigners, there exists unity despite our differences. Although this iteration of the Biennale has been uninstalled, there is always next year to see a new curator's vision for the Biennale. And for the architecture-minded, the 19th International Architecture Exhibition opens on May 10, 2025.

Sachi Laumas '26 (slaumas@college.harvard.edu) can't stop reminiscing about her semester abroad and is also the Associate Arts Editor of the *Independent*.

Photo courtesy of Sachi Laumas '26

A Night of Enchantment with Cendrillon

Harvard College Opera brings a Cinderella story to the Agassiz Theater stage.

BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26

As the first week of classes concluded, many Harvard students made their way to the Agassiz Theater to experience the magic of a night at the opera. The original "Cendrillon," a Cinderella story and French opera, was composed by Jules Massenet from 1894-1896 before its premiere in the National Opera-Comique in Paris in 1899, with a libretto by French dramatist Henri Caïn and director Albert Carré. Inspired by this powerful narrative, director Eliza Zangerl '26 and composer Danilo Thurber '25 helped bring the Harvard College Opera's adaptation of "Cendrillon" to life on Jan. 29.

Eliza Zangerl '26 described Massenet and Caïn's work as "transgressing expectations" by presenting a tale of mature sadness—specifically for the missed opportunity at love—in a story for children. Many of us learned the story of "Cinderella" through the 1950 Disney animated film. Fans of this classic will appreciate familiar elements of the fairy tale while finding the differences between the adaptations both intriguing and refreshing.

The opera opens with a spirited "presto" chorus that reflects the energy of the royal court's preparations for the upcoming grand ball. The musical notes are joined by a layering of voices, ultimately showcasing the movement and emotions of the production's characters for the audience. However, the tone slowly shifts as woodwinds accompany the strings in later scores, bringing viewers along as the plot evolves from optimistic to somber when Cendrillon (Cinderella) enters in an aria to represent the original fairy tale's plight.

Unlike many versions of the narrative, Cendrillon's father is alive and part of the story. Pandolfe, played by Jonas Iskander '25, is a newly married widower and father who laments not having more control over his household in comparison to his new wife, Madame de la Haltière. He also regretfully watches his daughter suffer at the hands of his wife. Madame de la Haltière, played by Evelyn Carr '25, aspires to elevate the status of her daughters, Noémie and Dorothée (Lara Tan '27 and Alicia Chu '28, respectively), at Cendrillion's expense by marrying one of them off to Prince Charming.

On the night of the king's ball, Cendrillon is awoken by La Fée, her fairy godmother, and an ensemble of spirits and elves. Tara Guetzloe's '26 towering high notes and powerful voice make her role as La Fée a quintessential part of the show. Cendrillon's identity is hidden from her family and the prince at the king's ball. In tradition with Parisian opera, Prince Charmant (Prince Charming) has a soprano voice part and is portrayed by a female actress. Leyna Blume's '27 delivery of a brooding prince yearning for his true love embodies the spirit of the story while keeping the audience engaged with the complex character.

The production's stage manager, Selina Lin '26, used the physical components of the stage and lighting for the Harvard adaptation of "Cendrillon" to enchant the audience. An exhausted Cendrillon finally goes to sleep after a long night of house chores while her family attends the king's ball. The passage of time is conveyed by the lights transitioning from a warm yellow glow to a magical purple hue. This sets the scene for a daydream-like sequence of dances by the spirit companions of La Fée before Cendrillon experiences a magical makeover suitable for the king's ball.

At the end of the production, Cendrillon and the Prince get their happy ending. The music score echoes with a gleaming aria interspersed with staccato woodwind notes and adagio string patterns to commemorate the culmination of this beautiful storyline.

Apart from the interaction of the music and plot, the opera's hand-painted backdrops immersed audience members in the story by depicting comfortable and familiar scenes of domestic life and the natural beauty of the forest. One of the most striking and memorable moments came when the stage curtains dramatically parted to reveal a grand staircase, allowing the ball attendants to descend center stage in a procession before the dance began.

Whether or not you've experienced opera before, this production powerfully demonstrates that opera is a genre for everyone, regardless of background or familiarity. Harvard College Opera shatters the stereotype of opera as an exclusive, elitist art form by making the performance accessible and engaging for all students. The thoughtful inclusion of two large screens with French lyrics and English translations ensures that no one feels left behind.

Every Harvard student should seize the opportunity to experience a Harvard College Opera performance before they graduate—it's an unforgettable experience.

Adedoyin Adebayo '26 (aadebayo@college.harvard.edu) loved Cinderella so much as a child that she owned all three movies on DVD.

Graphic by Annelise Fisher '26



Ten Things to Do Rather Than Watch the Eagles-Chiefs Game

A compilation of better ways to spend your Super Bowl Sunday.

BY TYLER DANG '28 AND KALVIN FRANK '28

Despite the Chiefs defeating the Bills and the Eagles storming past the Commanders, our eyes are anywhere but Sunday. Super Bowl LIX will be a quarterback rematch between the back-to-back Super Bowl winner Patrick Mahomes and the newly reinforced Jalen Hurts. Football fans face a tough choice: sing along to the "illustrious" lyricism of "Fly, Eagles, Fly" or hope to see the refs call the defense for "phantom" roughing the passers whenever Mahomes gets touched.

Despite everyone bursting with enthusiasm to see the Chiefs once again reach the Super Bowl, your time is precious, and the *Harvard Independent* understands that. We could tell you to do your homework, but be honest: you are going to pretend to start it at 11 p.m. Therefore, we have compiled a list of the best ways to spend your day while waiting for Kendrick Lamar to open his mouth and win another Grammy. This list contains all the premier pastimes that even your campus tour won't mention.

Link up on Sidechat

Perusing the Harvard channel on Sidechat reveals the romantic side of the student body. It's clear: chivalry still exists and modesty is abundant. As one anonymous post offered, "Any girl wanna release some pressure tn? I'll make you go seven times I promise. Hmu." Why resort to Hinge or Tinder when your perfect mate is waiting for a public response? Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift? Pfftt. Try you and the guy (or gal) that wants to rail you. Exhausted the Harvard pool of bachelors and bachelorettes? Try the Ivy League channel—someone at Cornell is bound to be desperate for validation.

Go to an MIT frat. Solo.

Last semester, we covered the MIT frat experience. Cancel your weekend plans: MIT's throwing for Superbowl Sunday. Enjoy the staggering atmosphere of sweat, heat, and the lack of alcohol (it is a vice after all). They say it is about the journey, not the destination, and what better trek than a solo adventure? Take in the skylines while crossing the Charles—alone. Eagerly wait in line for your favorite frat—alone. If you're of the male variety, get denied by said frat because you are—alone. And if you do happen to get in, expect the police to arrive soon. But do not worry: the curb makes for great seating—especially when you're alone.

Try out some Math 55 p-sets.

Want to experience the physical and mental toll of professional football without actually stepping on the field? Attempt a few Math 55 p-sets. Just like NFL playbooks, they make absolutely no sense, take way too much time, and will most likely drive you to drink. Instead of a linebacker taking you out, it'll be abstract algebra. On the bright side, the only concussion you will receive is from banging your head on the table trying to figure out what "homotopy equivalence" is.

Comp the Crimson.

The Harvard Crimson is the oldest newspaper on campus. Writing for the many boards allows students to tailor their articles to their interests… just as long as their ideas can successfully get approved by historically "lenient" editors. Want to cover the surprising success of the Eagles rookie duo of Dejean and Blankenship? Too bad—not Harvard-related. Realize that News is not your thing and want to try Arts? Too bad—should have thought of that before you comped. All your work is well worth the effort for their raging parties… right?

Try to get a table at Tatte on a Sunday.

Walk into Tatte, and you will find a clientele that looks like they just stepped out of a J. Crew catalog. When it comes to their $42 iced matcha lattes, the Hist-Lit majors can't seem to get enough of them. With the "grueling" amount of readings they have assigned, they will be sure to fill up every corner of the beloved coffee shop as they attempt to finish a 400-page analysis of "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." If you go at kick-off, you may even be able to grab a seat by half-time, but we would not bet on it.

Rewatch the Biden v. Trump Debate.

Who needs to watch Jalen Hurts run the ball for the 50th play in a row when you have real cinema? You can experience highlights like Biden's inspirational immigration message: "I'm going to continue to move until we get to total ban—on the total initiative relative to what we're going to do with more border patrol and more asylum officers." He really has a way with words, doesn't he? Or watch as President Trump dodges answering for his hush money to a porn star like he dodged jail time for his felony convictions. Just like this Super Bowl, everyone loses.

Get cut by a pre-professional club.

Congratulations on getting into Harvard! Get ready to join an even more exclusive club dedicated to making you do work that others are getting paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to do! Jump through hoops and hurdles as you hope that just one person on the board will maybe notice you. Compete with that one triple-legacy New York kid who already has his summer internship secured through Daddy's company. Do not be surprised when you get ghosted—these clubs are even more competitive than Sunday's game will be.

Refresh your inbox for internship rejections.

Who knew landing an unpaid internship would be more problematic than getting into Harvard? Skip the Super Bowl, and refresh that inbox for those "thank you for applying" emails. Bonus points if it says, "We'll keep your résumé on file" which is just corporate-speak for "we'll delete it immediately." On the bright side, you could always study abroad for the second summer in a row!

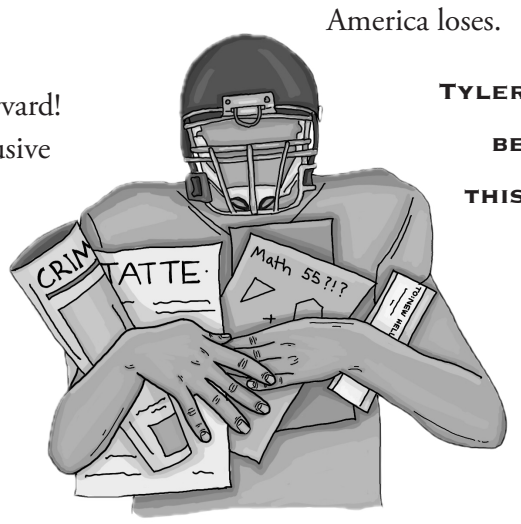
Scour the cart for last-minute gems.

With the add/drop deadline rapidly approaching, you may be realizing that Medieval Studies 119: Constitutional and Legal History of Medieval Continental Europe is not as easy as you thought. Thankfully, you can ease your burden by taking a "gem," the undergrad code word for easy A's. With Sleep losing its shiny surface, you may have to sift through the 1,600 other courses. For some suggestions, we heard only good things about STAT 111. Alternatively, CS 161 is apparently a walk in the park. ECON 1011B is another must-take. A final option, follow our guide from last semester.

Go to Hell on Earth: New Haven.

Are you looking for something a little more murderous than repeatedly bashing your head into a wall of 300-pound linemen? Take a pleasant stroll through one of America's most dangerous cities. Feel the rush of playing the sport Yalies are best at: dodging crime. Enjoy a delicious charred cracker that New Haveners, for some reason, call pizza. And once you have run out of a few things to do, take the train out (there isn't a major airport in sight).

This list represents only a fraction of the hundreds of things we would rather do than watch this year's Super Bowl. We won't judge if you are a die-hard Eagles fan or simply adore Taylor Swift—it is your right to be wrong. However, remember that with only these two teams, no matter the outcome, America loses.



TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) BELIEVES THE TITANS WILL REACH THE SUPER BOWL THIS DECADE. KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS STILL MOURNING THE DETROIT LIONS' LOSS TO THE COMMANDERS.

GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28

Indy Sportsbook: Cheaters n' Chiefs

The *Independent's* predictions for Super Bowl LIX.

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

All right, this better be the last one. Because surely the Kansas City Chiefs will not be in the Super Bowl four years in a row. Right? This Sunday, the Kansas City Chiefs and Philadelphia Eagles compete for Super Bowl LIX. The Chiefs are the defending champions and have won the past two years. They beat the Eagles in the 2023 Super Bowl to begin their dynasty.

If the Chiefs win, they become the first team in NFL history to win three consecutive Super Bowls, solidifying them as one of the greatest football teams ever assembled. If the Eagles win, many of our friends from Philly get bragging rights. So, pretty high stakes! Here are the fictional Sportsbook picks that could make your Super Bowl weekend even better.

Coin Toss Winner

The refs love the Chiefs. The Chiefs are winning the coin toss. How is this even a question? They won the coin toss in both Super Bowls LVII and LVIII. It doesn't matter if they're practicing magic, if it's a weighted coin, or if they're just absurdly lucky. They won it two years in a row, and we think they are winning it again. Of course, if we're wrong, it's your fault for listening. But come on, they won the coin toss for LVII and LVIII! The league isn't even trying to hide their favoritism for the Chiefs. Ridiculous.

Chiefs: -500
Eagles: +500

Most Penalties

Looking at penalty calls across the Chiefs' three Super Bowl runs, it is clear that they must have the world's most extensive blackmail folder on the NFL and its officials. Since 2021, the Chiefs' opponents have committed 57 accepted penalties, while Kansas City has had just 27 accepted penalties (and eight declined).

Chiefs: -200
Eagles: +1000

The Chiefs have been flagged less than 10 times in their last 11 playoff games, while 10 of their opponents have been flagged at least 10 times per game. This season alone, the Chiefs have had enough officiating controversies to fill a small novel, ranging from defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo calling an illegal timeout in Week 1 to a phantom pass interference call against the Texans during Week 16. It's unclear whether the NFL is trying to help the Chiefs win or if they are just that good. Either way, the Eagles will be awarded more penalties during Super Bowl LIX.

Anytime Touchdown Scorer

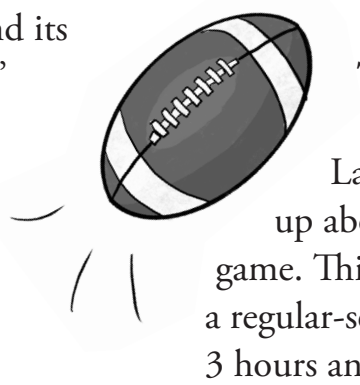
Who do we think will definitely score a touchdown in Super Bowl LIX? Probably the guy who scored 15 touchdowns during the regular season, is one of the finalists for the league's Offensive Player of the Year Award and MVP, and is now playing in his first Super Bowl with a chance to topple one of the NFL's greatest dynasties. Saquon Barkley, don't let us down.

Saquon Barkley -650

Most Passing Touchdowns

Jalen Hurts is a two-time All-Star and has received one All-Pro Honor. He is an outstanding QB. Unfortunately for Hurts, he's playing against Patrick Mahomes. Hurts is more of a running QB overall, and on top of being a generational talent, Mahomes has thrown eight more TDs than him this season, while playing with a phenomenal Kansas City defense. We expect those trends to continue into the Super Bowl. At the end of the day, Mahomes is just one of those generational players where, seemingly, nothing else matters, so we're picking him all the way.

Patrick Mahomes -400
Jalen Hurts +400



Taylor Swift Screen Time (O/U)

Last season, Taylor Swift took up about 0.46% of screen time each game. This season, the average length of a regular-season football game is about 3 hours and twelve minutes, with 25% of that being commercials. Given Swift's purported on-screen percentage and accounting for 48 minutes of commercials, we can estimate that she's shown for 40 seconds during an average regular season football game.

The average length of a Super Bowl (halftime included) is three hours and thirty minutes, so assuming a similar 0.46% figure, Swift would be in the spotlight for 43 seconds. Here's where things get exciting: during the Chiefs/Texans NFL Divisional Round game on Jan. 18, 2025, Swift's numbers dropped to 0.32% for 35 seconds across six appearances.

Despite the drop compared to her regular season numbers, that is a 40% increase over last year, when Swift was shown for 25 seconds during the Chiefs/Bills NFL Divisional Round game. During the 2024 Super Bowl, Swift's numbers increased compared to the rest of the playoffs by 116%—she was on screen for 54 seconds and shown 12 different times. Our best prediction comes from taking her 2024-2025 playoff stats and increasing them by about 116%, bringing us to a total of 75.6 (76) seconds shown.

During the 2025 NFL Divisional Round game against the Texans, Swift was shown six times, for an average of 5.8 seconds per appearance. Between the 2024 NFL Divisional Round game and the Super Bowl LVIII, her appearances increased threefold, and her seconds-per-showing decreased by about 30%. If we apply that to 2025, we estimate that Taylor Swift will be shown 18 times, 4.2 seconds per showing, for 76 seconds on screen.

Full Line (18 times, 4.2 seconds per, 76 seconds total), -250
Anything else, +150

Super Bowl Winner

The only thing we have given the Eagles is that Saquon Barkley will probably score a touchdown during the game. The Chiefs are likely to win this Sunday, becoming the first team in history to three-peat and making a serious case to be the greatest football team ever. The Eagles have the talent to pull off an upset, but we think it's unlikely the Chiefs will choke here.

Kansas City Chiefs, -250
Philadelphia Eagles, +400

Jordan Wasserberger '27 (jwasserberger@college.harvard.edu) will jump into the Charles immediately if he gets all these right.

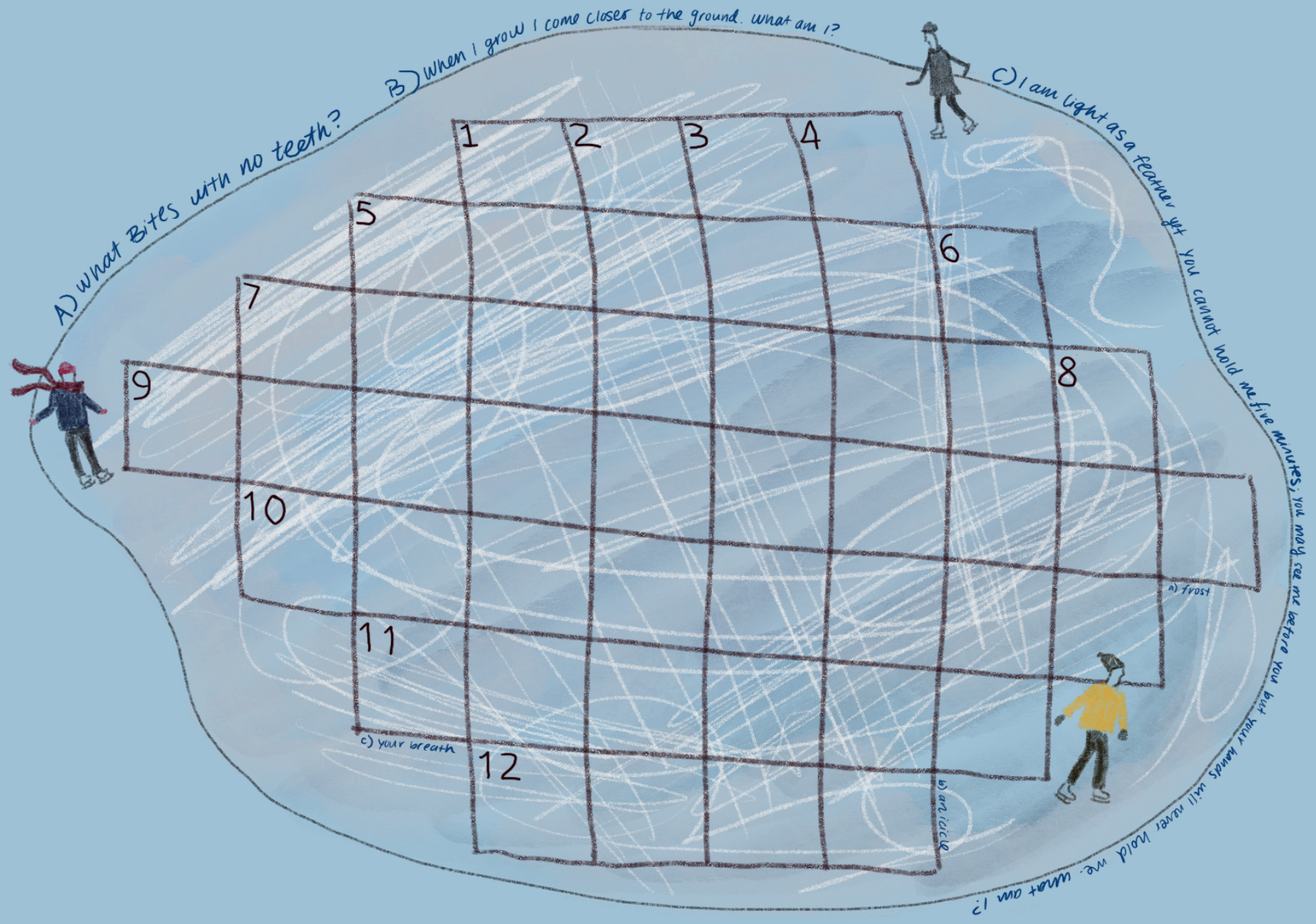
Graphic by Christie Beckley '27

COVER ART BY RILEY CULLINAN ’27
LAYOUT BY RILEY CULLINAN ’27 AND CHRISTIE BECKLEY ’27

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

Icebreaker

BY HAN NGUYEN ’27
GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE ’27



ACROSS

1. Legs, slangily
5. Skiing style
7. Procrastinators
9. Overpass warning
10. Catholic university near Tampa
11. Laces again
12. Actor Gosling

DOWN

1. Montana’s ___ National Park
2. In abundance
3. Revolutionary Army
4. Standard vision test
5. In battle
6. Great Lakes natives
7. Call for help
8. ___-Cone

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Katie Merriam Layla Chaouaoui