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HARVARD

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# INDEPENDENT

The student weekly since 1969

# EARTH DAY





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# About the *Independent*

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

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# Amped for Action: HUCEG's Push for Clean Energy

A profile on the Harvard Undergraduate Clean Energy Group.

BY SOPHIE DAUER '27

As one of Harvard's leading student organizations in climate and clean energy, the Harvard Undergraduate Clean Energy Group serves as a space for students interested in sustainable development. With more than 350 active members, HUCEG offers a vast network of projects and partnerships in clean energy. In the face of what many classify as a global climate crisis, student organizations like HUCEG have a unique role in tackling environmental concerns and laying the foundation for future leadership for the green transition.

HUCEG offers a range of student-led programs, providing various hands-on avenues to engage with climate activism. The Consulting Program pairs teams of students with sustainable energy companies, hoping to offer undergraduates experience in business development while providing exposure to established and emerging organizations in the field. HUCEG has worked with large corporations such as Climeworks and SYSO Technologies, as well as smaller start-ups like Sol Clarity, Better Earth, and SunGreenH2.

HUCEG's Policy Team provides members with the opportunity to work directly with public officials as they work on innovative, sustainable energy policy projects. One upcoming project is the Energy Affordability Initiative, established in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute. Members of this team are looking to decrease the cost of energy for American ratepayers, which currently averages 19 cents per kilowatt-hour nationally.

Another ongoing initiative—the Democratic Energy & Electrification Project—has HUCEG members conducting research alongside various private companies and government programs to discover how Texas can scale its virtual power plant capacity to a higher level. The team is specifically looking to power 16,000 homes.

In the past, the policy team has worked with Massachusetts State Representative Christina Minicucci, who allowed HUCEG to strengthen its relationship with the state legislature.

The Energy Education Team is

HUCEG's newest public service initiative—HUCEG Co-President Lilly Xu '27 dedicated her freshman spring and sophomore fall to building this program. "At first, we partnered with the [Phillips Brooks House] Cambridge Afterschool program and Environmental Action Committee... to teach kids in elementary school from underserved

communities in Cambridge about clean energy," Xu said in an interview with the *Independent*.

The initiative was initially part of HUCEG's Energy Equity Group but has now become its own program. Aimed at empowering future leadership in sustainability, the program will educate Massachusetts high school students about clean energy through a six-week virtual program.

Reflecting on the wide range of opportunities offered, Xu commented on what she finds to be the most unifying aspects of such a large organization. "I'd say that we're all interested in either working in clean energy or just learning more about it," she said. "We just want to make an impact within the clean energy and sustainable development space."

In addition to members of specific groups, HUCEG also has several "social members" who are not part of specific teams, but still attend conferences, speaker presentations, workshops, and other events. "I think everyone here is friends," Xu said. "We all really enjoy being a part of this... That's why we have a lot of people who are just social members and not even involved in a program."

On April 19, HUCEG held its 2025 Clean Energy Summit, "Amped & Wired," with panels, workshops, and fireside chats concerning innovation in the world of clean energy. The event took place at the Harvard University Center for the Environment, co-hosted by the Columbia Clean Energy Group and in collaboration with the Princeton University Energy Association. Some of the event's speakers included former U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh and Senior Advisor to former President Joe Biden Mike Donilon.

"The summit was a huge success," HUCEG Co-President Elson Bankoff '27 said. "This is our first time hosting one. HUCEG is around five years old, and we've hosted a joint-policy related summit with the IOP... but this felt more exciting and modern, and we also used it to launch Columbia's undergraduate energy group." Bankoff

highlighted the wide range of panelists selected, including members of the Biden administration, a McKinsey & Company Partner, and founders of various startups. "We wanted to saturate the room with really interesting people," she continued. "We just got all of these cool people who do super different things on panels."

According to Bankoff, "HUCEG is a group about solutions. Every slide deck you're making is actually meaningful and is actually helping someone...and is actually helping us get to this end goal that requires so much intersectional work."

One of the aspects of the summit that Bankoff most appreciated was its spirit of youth and excitement. "You have all of these intense people with intense careers that showed up and were just instantly relaxed and instantly optimistic, and I think that's something that we really try to do with HUCEG," she said. "We're all committed to this—that's not a question... Now it's just [a question of] how we can have fun while we do it."

Bankoff is confident about HUCEG's expanding horizons, following the success of this weekend's event. "It was definitely a pilot episode for what the future will hold for the rest of this stuff," she said.

**SOPHIE DAUER '27**  
([SOPHIEDAUER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:SOPHIEDAUER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)) WRITES NEWS FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.

**GRAPHIC BY**  
**MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28**



# Harvard Responds to Trump

University affiliates react to President Trump's recent funding freeze.

BY PIPPA LEE '28

Three days after the Trump Administration sent a list of demands to Harvard, detailing a series of operational changes the University needed to make to maintain its federal funding, Harvard University President Alan Garber released his response.

"The University will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights," President Garber wrote on April 14 in a campus-wide email. "No government—regardless of which party is in power—should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue."

Some of the mandated changes from the Trump Administration included the elimination of all diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and programs within the College, a reformed hiring and admissions processes that "cease[s] all preferences based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," and an updated admissions process that prevents admitting international students who are "hostile to the American values."

Garber noted that these demands followed a previous letter from the Federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, which threatened a review of \$9 billion in federal funds amid accusations that Harvard was not adequately addressing the issue.

Hours after Garber's refusal to comply with federal requests, the presidential administration froze \$2.2 billion in research grant funding—a move that is part of a broader initiative by the Trump administration to reform higher education in the U.S.

Since then, reports have emerged indicating internal confusion within the White House—some federal officials believed the April 11 letter had been sent prematurely, while others thought it was intended solely for internal circulation among task force members, not for Harvard.

May Mailman, senior policy strategist at the White House, dismissed Harvard's public rejection as an overreaction and blamed Harvard for not continuing discussions.

"It was malpractice on the side of Harvard's lawyers not to pick up the phone and call the members of the antisemitism task force [whom] they had been talking to for weeks," Mailman said.

However, administrative officials at Harvard disagreed.

"Recipients of such correspondence from the U.S. government—even when it contains sweeping demands that are astonishing in their overreach—do not question its authenticity or seriousness," said a Harvard spokesperson.

While Harvard administrators and government officials sparred over responsibility and intent, the institution's refusal to comply with federal demands and the subsequent withdrawal of funding affected Harvard's campus and peer universities across the nation, spurring responses from students, faculty, and alumni.

On-campus student organizations were among some of the first to speak out on recent executive orders. Harvard College Democrats released a statement in support of Garber's rejection of the Trump administration's demands.

"As Trump takes aim at this university, threatens our funding, targets our students, and attempts to make an example out of us, we are pleased by Harvard's decision to stand firm in the face of threats to academic freedom, free speech, and student safety," the group wrote on a post on Instagram. "Though the stakes are high for our university, they are even higher for our democracy—if Harvard complied, the precedent it would set would be dangerous."

The Harvard Republican Club took a different stance. "It is not the constitutional right for any private university to receive funding in perpetuity," the Board of the Harvard Republican Club wrote. "While some of the funding has been allocated to reasonable programs, Harvard has shown itself to be a partisan consumer of the American taxpayer dollar."

Beyond responses from partisan political clubs, the *Independent* also spoke to multiple University affiliates. A first-year student involved with Jewish life on campus, who requested anonymity, offered a layered reaction to the funding withdrawal and the Trump administration's justification.

"I was most curious [about] what aspects of the funding were frozen, because if this is about antisemitism...then you would hope to see that the aspects of the funding that were frozen were the aspects of the University that were causing problems," he explained. "So what's getting frozen? It's actually not so clear."

"Those [recent] demands seem to me like they have absolutely nothing to do with antisemitism in the most part," he said. "There's a bunch of stuff [in the list of demands] that I think are just other talking points that he's frustrated by, like merit-based admissions—in my opinion, that doesn't have to do with antisemitism. It's just he doesn't like the way that the University is run, and so he wants to influence that, and he's probably using antisemitism as the impetus to do that."

In principle, this student said he understood why a president might want some influence over federally funded institutions. "If he's purely using antisemitism as an excuse to go after it, I would have more of a problem with it," he said. "I just don't like using antisemitism as an excuse... Honestly, it might lead to more antisemitism."

However, he added that he believes the University should do more to enforce its own rules consistently. "To me, it's a little bit sad that it required the threat of funding for them to actually uphold their policy," he said. "If the University had policies that they implemented, I don't think that there would ever be a real problem. You should encourage people to do [a] proper protest and not violate University policy."

Other students emphasized the personal and legal precarity they may now face. For some international undergraduates, the potential repercussions of President Donald Trump's mandates extend beyond funding or free speech.

"All of us, we are so, so stressed. Anytime we're doing something, we're like, 'Oh, is this legal?'" Sila Yormulaz '28, a first-year student from Turkey, explained. "Even if we're crossing the street, we're afraid of jaywalking right now. And people are saying, 'Yeah, if there's any sort of protests or something going on, just change your way. Don't go even near the protests and stuff.'"

In late March, as anti-government protests erupted in Turkey following the detention of the most prominent opposition figure and Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, Yormulaz said many Turkish students at Harvard felt conflicted about showing support from abroad. "When the Turkish protests were going on, we were afraid to go there and support our own people because of this."



Yormulaz offered a mixed reaction to Harvard’s rejection of the requests by the Trump administration.

“I felt really good after that,” she said. “I was like, ‘Oh...Harvard supports us’... Finally, because we were waiting for something like that from Harvard,” she said. “But then again, I started thinking, ‘Oh, right now [Harvard is] basically in opposition to Trump,’ which is kind of bad, because we know that Trump’s gonna ask for more and more and become more strict,” she added.

Harvard’s graduate students, too, are beginning to reflect on what the federal response might mean for the University’s future.

“I was annoyed at the notion that our loyalty to the administration could be bought, or even scared into submission,” said Alice Volfson, a graduate student at the Harvard Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. “If you are being targeted by this administration for your ideals or actions, you probably have been doing something right.”

Volfson also emphasized the effects the funding freeze could have on Harvard’s research output.

“From medical research to the humanities, the production of knowledge is integral to the progression of society, and I think this loss will have drastic implications for us in the future,” she explained.

In response to the administration’s list of demands—including the elimination of DEI initiatives and new restrictions on admitting international students—Volfson was unequivocal.

“I found them to be ridiculous and immoral,” she said. “To target international students, who are among the most vulnerable on this campus, for their constitutionally protected right to free speech is abhorrent and ignorant of the wealth of knowledge that they bring to this community.”

For Volfson, the policies that the Trump administration is seeking to eliminate are integral to a strong education.

“It has been exactly the diversity of students, both in ideology, race, socio-economic background, [and] religion, which has made American education so strong,” she said. “International students, in particular, have enriched dialogues on this campus, forced us to reckon with uncomfortable truths, and look outside of the ‘American bubble.’”

Volfson argued that Harvard must reject all of the demands without compromise.

“To accept even one demand on this list is tantamount to ‘bending the knee’ to American authoritarianism, and what Tim

Snyder would term ‘obeying in advance,’” she said, referring to one of Yale’s most distinguished professors of history.

“I think this idea, which has sprung up lately to separate ‘politics from education’ completely misses the point of what education should be. Education has always been political, and it would be ignorant to ignore this,” she continued. “Universities have always been the site of protest, of difficult dialogues, and this has been integral to the production of information in this country.”

While students voiced personal fears and political concerns, their calls did not go unheard. In the weeks following the funding freeze, Harvard has released additional statements and signaled continued engagement with community concerns. Alumni groups, too, have begun mobilizing in support of the University’s response.

“We are, of course, outraged at the Trump administration’s escalating efforts to undermine Harvard and higher ed and, especially appallingly, to target students,” co-founder and board member of Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, Jeannie Park ’83 said in a statement to the *Independent*.

“Back in February, we wrote to President Garber urging him to resist. We are grateful to all in the Harvard community who have protested, petitioned, and raised their voices.”

Park also offered a way for alumni to get involved with the ongoing conflict and political pressures facing Harvard.

“An easy way for alumni to send a message to Harvard to continue to resist and to safeguard diversity is to vote for our endorsed candidates in the current elections for Harvard Overseer and HAA Elected Director. It is critical that we stand firm together, and we hope other universities will join Harvard in a united front,” Park stated.

In addition to promoting a strong reaction from students and alumni, the recent events regarding funding have also prompted a reaction among faculty at Harvard.

Over a month ago, more than 800 Harvard faculty members signed a letter urging the University to take a stronger stand against what they called “anti-democratic attacks.”

Following that, on April 11, the

Harvard faculty chapter of the American Association of University Professors, alongside the national AAUP, filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration over its demanded policy changes. In their lawsuit, they alleged the administration’s policies were a means of restricting free speech in universities.

“Harvard faculty have the constitutional right to speak, teach and conduct research without fearing that the government will retaliate against their viewpoints by canceling grants,” general counsel of the AAUP-Harvard Faculty Chapter and law professor Andrew Manuel Crespo ’05 said in a statement to “The New York Times.”

This past Monday, President Garber announced in an email addressed to the Harvard community that the University had filed a lawsuit to halt the funding freeze, describing it as “unlawful and beyond the government’s authority.”

“Today, we stand for the values that have made American higher education a beacon for the world,” Garber said.

“We stand for the truth that colleges and universities across the country can embrace and honor their legal obligations and best fulfill their essential role in society without improper government intrusion.”

This lawsuit marks a significant escalation in

the conflict between Harvard and the Trump administration. As the dispute continues, its implications remain far-reaching. Faculty, alumni, and students—both at the College and at graduate schools—are navigating not only the material consequences of the funding freeze, but also broader questions about students’ safety on campus, academic freedom, and the role of the government in higher education.

What comes next remains unclear. As legal challenges proceed and federal agencies determine how to implement the funding freeze, the implications for Harvard—and for other universities watching closely—are still unfolding.

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

**GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER ’26**  
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# The Push for Clean Energy: Will the U.S. Invest?

HUCEG and climate policy makers on the future of clean energy.

BY MIA WILCOX '28

During President Donald Trump's first week in office, he signed 37 executive orders—"Unleashing Clean Energy" among them. Clauses include the elimination of the "electric vehicle (EV) mandate," as well as the freezing of \$14 billion in funds designated to the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which was "the single largest investment in climate and energy in American history," according to the Department of Energy. Many feel that this order will undo much of the Biden administration's efforts to develop the clean energy sector.

On April 19, the Harvard University Clean Energy Group hosted its "Amped and Wired" Summit, bringing together students, policymakers, investors, and clean energy professionals into conversation about the future of clean energy, especially in the wake of these policy changes.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Elson Bankoff '27, co-president of HUCEG, explained her journey in climate and sustainability. "I came to college very concerned about the solution of [climate change and sustainability]. How do you actually, pragmatically go about doing things?... How do you do it? How do you make it financially lucrative? How do you make it interesting?" Bankoff asked.

Bankoff has dedicated the past few years to answering these questions, traveling around the country to conservative rural areas to research climate policy and demonstrate the importance and efficiency of clean energy for all Americans. "I actually went around the country this summer. I want to prove that clean energy is patriotic," she said.

"I was in eastern Oregon, where there are all these power outages," she continued. "And they're designing microgrids, and also are huge conservatives. It doesn't really matter past a certain point, because [clean energy] is just the right thing. It's just the future, and it's correct. Doing that was interesting because it decoupled [climate and environment] from a political outcome."

She attributed America's resistance to clean energy solutions to the partisan split: "I don't think [Americans] like to be told what to do, especially when it's a paradigm of something that's told to be political," she said. "Buying a car is not political until you attach a value system to it and tell someone that they're a bad person because they won't buy an electric vehicle."

In response to these partisan concerns, she offered an alternative perspective on clean energy: "Every time you're building infrastructure to decarbonize, you're also building resilience for communities who are getting ravaged in hurricanes and tornadoes and such."

Bankoff's perspective, personal research, and work illustrate the real-world stakes of clean energy endeavors, especially as federal priorities shift under Trump's recent executive orders. These discussions and changing policies framed

much of the conversation at HUCEG's summit.

At the summit, HUCEG hosted former Biden administration policymakers, including former Chief Economist Dr. Heather Boushey; Deputy for Clean Energy Innovation Kristina Costa; former Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh; as well as former Senior Advisor to the President, Mike Donilon. The panelists emphasized the inextricable links between clean energy, job creation, and national security.

Efficient energy "is not endowed by destiny," Singh said, pointing towards the importance of the U.S.'s investment in the future of clean energy. Dr. Boushey agreed on the importance of clean and affordable energy from a global competitive economic standpoint. The panelists explained the inevitability of clean energy as a growing sector of the global economy.

For centuries, one of the U.S.'s major strengths has been in oil and gas production. Rather than remaining stuck in the ways of the past and allowing other global powers to capture products and technologies from the private sector, the panelists encouraged a view of clean energy as a possibility for building a new basis for our economy. They emphasized the importance of focusing on long-term economic growth and sustainability. They all echoed the sentiment put forward by Donilon, that investing in new clean energy infrastructure, such as semiconductors, is investing in the country.

Despite this collective vision, the path forward for clean energy has become increasingly uncertain due to Trump's executive orders, which risk undermining the infrastructure and innovation crucial to maintaining the nation's position in the clean energy sector.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Costa expanded on the importance of IRA provisions and the implications of Trump's executive orders targeting state policy on climate change. "I think that it is essentially an anti-constitutional measure on the part of the administration," she said. "A bunch of states are going to have to waste a lot of time and resources in litigation with the federal government if they actually attempt to take action on the basis of the order against state policy."

Additionally, Costa explained that individual states simply can't maintain energy efficiency without the help of federal funding. She highlighted the stark disparity in state energy staffing, noting that California employs hundreds, while Alabama has just two. "The lack of state capacity to execute programs that are devolved by law from the federal government is a big constraint on health care, on education, as well as on energy and climate policy," Costa said.

Costa's concerns about the ramifications of the order's disruption of state policy and climate initiatives, particularly those funded by the IRA, have begun to materialize in court. The Trump administration is already facing backlash: on April 15, federal judge

Mary McElroy ordered the release of billions of dollars in funding for climate infrastructure that had been unlawfully frozen by the administration.

Republican congressmen, led by Rep. Andrew Garbarino (R-N.Y.), have begun backing the preservation of the IRA. Almost 80% of clean energy infrastructure and funding has gone toward Republican congressional districts, funding projects such as the Randolph, N.C. EV battery factory and Nevada Solar for All.

NSFA was awarded \$156 million through the IRA to expand solar infrastructure in the state, "[enabling] low-income and disadvantaged communities in Nevada to deploy and benefit from solar energy by providing financial and technical assistance, transforming the Nevada solar market into a vibrant and self-sustaining industry," according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Before the funding freeze, the latter was projected to lower energy costs by at least 20% for thousands of low-income households in Nevada.

The "Unleashing Clean Energy" executive order will not only reverse the efforts to lower energy costs, but will also cause the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs associated with these clean energy infrastructure projects. "If [the Trump administration] is determined to move forward with this, I expect states will litigate, and they're gonna have a very strong case," Costa said.

The panelists mentioned that the ramifications of the "Unleashing Clean Energy Order" stand in contrast with the Trump administration's stated goal to "solidify the United States as a global energy leader long into the future." Experts agree that clean energy is an inevitable part of the future of America and the world. If the U.S. hopes to keep this position, investment in clean energy will become increasingly unavoidable; to repeat the words of Singh, it is not "endowed by destiny."

The panelists expressed optimism about the future of clean energy despite any current setbacks of Trump's executive orders. Donilon explained that built-in protections and Republican self-interest will encourage the safeguarding of the billions of dollars of investment in the IRA, further backed by the macroeconomic and national security incentives explained by Singh.

Bankoff echoed this optimism: "I think all of this stuff is inevitable. I think we're just being a little silly right now and shooting ourselves in the foot in a lot of ways."

"I'm optimistic about the fact that energy, for the first time, is a technology. So the learning curve is just always getting better. The prices are always dropping. That's just gonna keep happening," she said.

**MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS STAYING INFORMED ON THE CHANGES IN CLIMATE POLICY UNDER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION.**

**GRAPHIC BY EMILY PALLAN '27**



# No Harm, No Fowl

Conservationists weigh in on proposed changes to the Endangered Species Act by the Trump administration.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT '28

**C**On April 16, the Trump administration, in conjunction with the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, proceeded with a proposal to redefine critical terminology in the Endangered Species Act—a motion that experts believe could have catastrophic implications on conservation efforts nationwide.

The proposal aims to modify the current functioning legal definition of harm within the Endangered Species Act. In dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia argued that a more literal interpretation of take and harm would better serve the intended interpretation and practice of the Endangered Species Act. In response, conservation experts warn against the extensive repercussions that narrowing these definitions will have on national conservation efforts.

“The Endangered Species Act prohibits ‘take’ of all endangered species, and ‘take’ is broadly defined in the statute to include hunting, pursuing, injuring, and also harm...harm was defined to include habitat destruction,” said Endangered Species Director for the Center for Biological Diversity Noah Greenwald in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*.

Passed in 1973, the Endangered Species Act was a substantial milestone for national climate activism that came subsequent to the establishment of prior environmental legislation. Congress passed this legislation in part due to increasing concerns regarding the environmental crisis and species extinction that prompted climate activism and an increased public support for conservation measures at the turn of the 20th century.

Greenwald emphasized the importance of the current legal definition and interpretation of harm within the scope of this act. “It’s really the one place in the statute that really prohibits destruction of habitat for listed species, and this definition was further refined under the Reagan administration to include significant habitat modification or degradation that results in actual injury or death,” he said.

The current definition of harm provides essential protections for endangered plant and wildlife species and has been substantial in preventing further habitat loss. Changes to the interpretation of the terminology will drastically alter the ways the act can be implemented. “It’s a substantial narrowing of the prohibition on take under the Endangered Species Act that would open up old growth forests used by the

spotted owl to be logged. It would open up areas in South Florida that are needed by the Florida panther to be developed. So it really is the worst attack on the Endangered Species Act in its history,” Greenwald said.

Following standard procedure, a 30-day comment period on the proposed rule is currently in effect, in which public opinions will be accepted before the action is decided. “People should definitely comment in opposition to this,” Greenwald said.

However, he has strong reservations about the efficacy of public comment. “I’m sure they will finalize this. They won’t listen to the—

I’m sure—tens and tens of thousands of people are going to comment in opposition to this, and I’m sure they won’t listen to that.”

The Center for Biological Diversity, a leading nonprofit organization in the protection of endangered species, plans to take legal action against the Trump administration upon the approval of the action to redefine harm in the Endangered Species Act. “Just to be real about it, we will certainly challenge this in court,”

Greenwald said.

Current environmental concerns are not limited to the scope of this recent order. In his inaugural address, Trump said “drill baby drill,” reflecting his efforts to expand America’s natural gas industry. Since then, Trump has issued an immediate expansion of the timber industry and has opened a protected marine zone that is populated by endangered species for commercial fishing off the coast of Hawaii.

“The Trump administration is systematically and rapidly working to undo all of the safeguards for our water, for our air, for our land, for wildlife, for our climate, and really it’s just a stunning example of short-term greed,” Greenwald said. “We’re currently facing two existential crises—climate change and the extinction crisis—and both of these things need immediate attention. And we’re basically seeing the Trump administration go exactly the wrong direction, and it’s really going to have severe consequences for future generations.”

In addition to their environmental implications, these legislative actions pose substantial concern to those entering conservation and related fields.

“My passion for wildlife conservation has shaped my research and fieldwork, as I currently

focus on carnivore ecology in African systems,” said Summer Smentek ’25, an integrative biology concentrator.

During her time at Harvard, Smentek has traveled to Africa numerous times and has studied abroad in Tanzania. She has participated in a conservation-focused National Geographic scholarship as well as volunteer work in Namibia, where she contributed to research on human-lion conflict and coexistence in Kenya through her affiliation with the Davies Lab, where she is completing her senior thesis.

“When the legal framework for conservation is weakened, it becomes much harder to secure funding for research and advocate for endangered species,” Smentek said. “Jobs in this field are already under threat; we’re currently seeing dramatic cuts to government funding for conservation research, and important agencies like U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service have recently had mass layoffs. I personally know people who have lost their jobs because of these cuts, and as I graduate this year, I also fear what my immediate career prospects will look like in the near future.”

Smentek added that the scarcity of job opportunities within the field could have a substantial impact on conservation efforts globally. “As these job opportunities disappear, I believe we may also see a mass exodus of highly trained professionals to places where these skills and expertise are still valued, or many may choose to leave the field altogether,” she said.

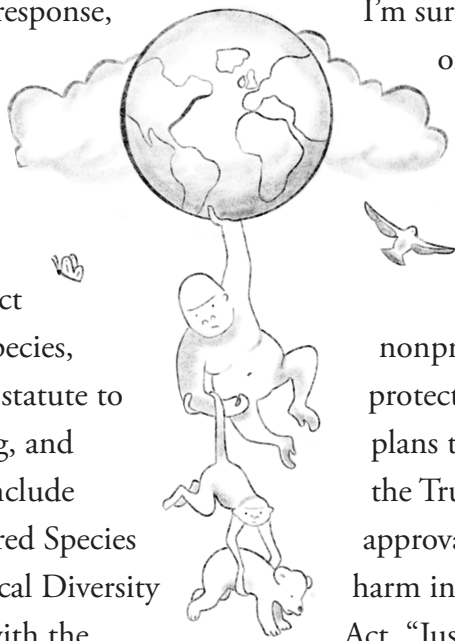
“This would just further undermine our ability to protect ecosystems here in the U.S., and at a time where it is needed more than ever.”

Smentek underlined the importance of advocacy and taking an active role in climate conservation. “If you can’t donate money, donate time: by volunteering, raising awareness, and especially contacting your elected officials.”

As the proposed change to the definition of harm in the Endangered Species Act hangs in the balance, those in the field of conservation urge the public to submit feedback on the rule, continue to advocate for climate justice, and implicate sustainable living practices regardless of the outcome.

**MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD LIKE TO UTILIZE HER BYLINE TO PROVIDE THE LINK FOR PUBLIC COMMENT ON THIS PROPOSED RULE: [HTTPS://WWW.REGULATIONS.GOV/COMMENTON/FWS-HQ-ES-2025-0034-0001](https://www.regulations.gov/commenton/FWS-HQ-ES-2025-0034-0001).**

GRAPHIC BY EMILY PALLAN '27





# Congressman James Clyburn on Party Identity, Public Trust, and Lessons From the Past

A conversation on shifting values and moral leadership, the Democratic Party's identity, and the future of American democracy.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

In an era marked by political polarization and institutional distrust, many Americans are questioning the role of morals in public leadership. This reality took center stage during an April 14 discussion at the Harvard Institute of Politics JFK Forum, where Congressman James Enos Clyburn joined moderator Anthony Foxx to explore the importance of moral leadership in today's tumultuous political landscape. Drawing on his personal background and legislative experience, Clyburn discussed the guiding principles behind his public service, how those principles have shifted over time, and the Democratic Party's role in that evolution.

Clyburn, now serving his 16th term as the representative for South Carolina's Sixth Congressional District, is among the most senior members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Since his election to the chamber in 1992, Clyburn has held various leadership roles, including multiple terms as House Majority Whip and as Assistant Democratic Leader, from which positions he helped advance major legislation such as the Affordable Care Act (2010), the American Rescue Plan (2021), and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021).

Foxx is the director of the Center for Public Leadership and the Emma Bloomberg Professor of the Practice of Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School. Previously, he has served as Secretary of Transportation under President Obama and as mayor of Charlotte, N.C.

For Clyburn, moral leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept. "I know what I think is required of me," he said, reflecting on how expectations of right and wrong vary across time,

communities, and personal experience. "We struggle with that which is moral." He emphasized that moral frameworks are not fixed; they shift based on historical moments and cultural context.

Reflecting on his background, Clyburn shared how his upbringing and his father shaped his moral compass.

"My father was a fundamentalist minister," he said. "I shall never forget my sophomore year at South Carolina State...[when] I went home to tell my dad that I was not going to go to the seminary as we had planned."

"He said to me on that day, 'Well, son, I suspect the world would much better see a sermon than to hear one.'" For Clyburn, this moment underscored the belief that moral leadership is not about preaching ideals but embodying them through action.

From here, Clyburn linked his familial roots to his fundamentalist Christian church upbringing—both continue to influence his conception of morality.

"My favorite Bible verse is Micah 6:8," he said. "For He has shown you, oh man, that which is required. Do justly, love mercy, and be humble. To me, that is my moral compass. To do that which is just. To be merciful and to be humble."

While he expressed uncertainty about the direction morality may take in the political and social sphere, Clyburn offered a glimpse into his current framework for leadership and the forces likely to influence it.

"I look upon morality like the Supreme Court justice who once said of our constitution, that it is a living document that makes adjustments, and makes changes, based upon the times within which we live," Clyburn said. "I have no idea what the moral

underpinnings of this country will be next year this time...I do believe very strongly that what happens in this country over the next year will pretty much tell us what the morality will be going forward."

After former President Joe Biden withdrew from the presidential race on July 21, 2024, President Donald Trump proceeded to win the November election, prompting ongoing debates about whether the Democratic Party's loss could be attributed to the late timing of the candidate switch.

However, regardless of the reasons for the 2024 American presidential election outcome, Clyburn reflected on Biden's leadership, emphasizing the often-overlooked distinction between style and substance in modern politics.

"We are in an era when substance takes a backseat to style," he said, arguing that Biden's accomplishments have been overshadowed by public expectations for a more charismatic presence.

"Mr. President, the big problem that you have is that the style people are looking for—you're never going to be able to give it to them," Clyburn recalled telling Biden directly.

Clyburn defended Biden's record, placing him among the most substantive presidents in recent history. He cited the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the PACT Act as landmark achievements that reflect Biden's commitment to meaningful change while in office.

"On substance, nobody since Lyndon Johnson has been more substantive than Joe Biden," Clyburn said. "You can look at any metric that you may want to use, and you won't surpass it."



Against the backdrop of historical insight came a sobering examination of today's political climate—one marked by federal threats to defund long-standing institutions, deepening polarization, and a growing sense of disillusionment. As these pressures mount, questions about the strength of democratic institutions have taken center stage. In response to these concerns, Foxx asked Clyburn whether he remains optimistic about the future.

"I'm hopeful and I'm a pretty optimistic person," Clyburn said. "But I'm fearful—I just have to admit that. Hopeful, but fearful."

For him, history is not merely a record of the past but also a guide for the present and a warning for the future. In his view, the country is ignoring history's most vital lessons.

"We are, relatively speaking, a young nation," he said. "There have been strong nations before us... and I think that history ought to be instructive. You have to learn from history—you can't just deny it, you can't misrepresent it, because the facts are the facts."

His concern lies in the possibility that the U.S. is repeating familiar mistakes. "If we fail to learn the lessons of history, we're bound to repeat them," he said.

The warning comes amid growing concerns from leading scholars about the democratic threats posed by recent government actions. This past week, a "Los Angeles Times" article featured Harvard political scientist and "How Democracies Die" co-author Steven Levitsky, who has warned that "we are currently witnessing the collapse of our democracy." Levitsky, who has spent decades studying authoritarian regimes, helped organize a letter—signed by over 800 faculty members—urging Harvard

to defend academic freedom and resist what he and others view as a coordinated attack on higher education by the Trump administration.

Clyburn's attention shifted to the Democratic Party and its standing with the American public. Since the 2020 election, many voters—especially younger and working-class Americans—have voiced frustration with the party, convinced it has fallen short in delivering on its promises. Foxx raised the issue, asking whether the Democratic Party is facing a messaging crisis.

For Clyburn, however, the problem is not messaging.

"Just because you failed to win an election doesn't mean that you were wrong for the country," he said. "If you just go legislatively, the CARES Act, you go right through it, the country is with the Party on all those things.

So then what's the problem? Everybody says, 'Well, the problem is the

message.' No, it's not the message."

Instead, Clyburn said, the Democratic Party is facing a branding crisis—one largely imposed from the outside. "I'll admit the Party is suffering from branding," he said. "And the question is: did we brand it ourselves, or have we been branded? The Party has been branded."

While some blame internal leadership roles or strategic failures, Clyburn pointed to the role of the media and the political maneuvering of the Republican Party. "The media brands us according to the articulations of the Republicans...which is an insult to the Democratic Party."

He went further, contrasting the tone and tactics of the two major parties. For him, the Republican Party's messaging has been more effective not because it's

clearer but because it plays on hostile emotions.

"The Democratic Party does not sell well," he said. "Hate sells. People are going with what sells."

In reflecting on the current political and media climate, Clyburn returned to a subject he has long emphasized: history. When Foxx asked about recent efforts to defund or reconfigure institutions like the Smithsonian, the Kennedy Center, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Clyburn was direct.

"It's about whitewashing history," he said. "That's all that is."

He argued that these actions represent a broader effort to erase historical truths, particularly those tied to race and Reconstruction. He spoke of the significance of acknowledging the contributions of African Americans, including the 17 Black congressmen who served during Reconstruction and the critical role of the Black church in political life.

"What we're seeing now isn't new," he said. "It's part of a long pattern in American history."

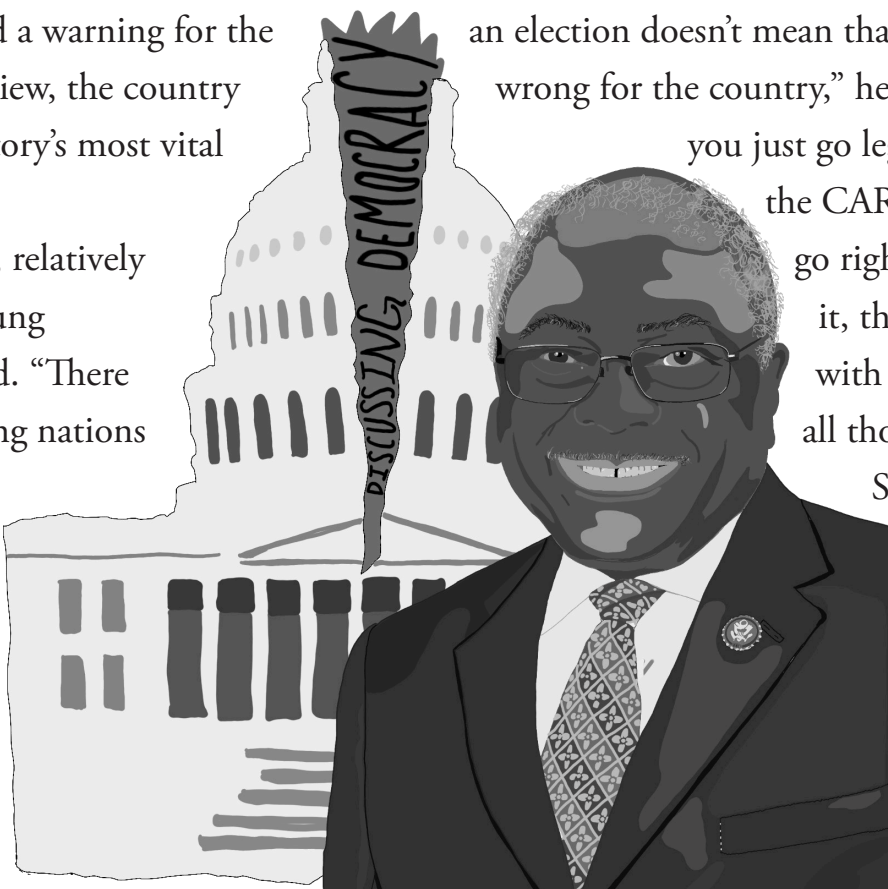
"You cannot become a good Democratic nominee by being Republican-lite," he added. "You've got to go all in and be who you are."

Clyburn cited Biden's 2020 campaign as an example. "Biden won the presidency by being Joe Biden," he said. "That infrastructure bill? It was part of his campaign. People flocked to him, and they won. And of course, the branding took place, and they spent all their time making him a pariah."

Still, he argued, moral leadership is not about public approval. It's about standing firm in the face of it. For Clyburn, this ultimately means defending uncomfortable truths, uplifting underserved communities, and preserving the lessons of the past.

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**GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26**

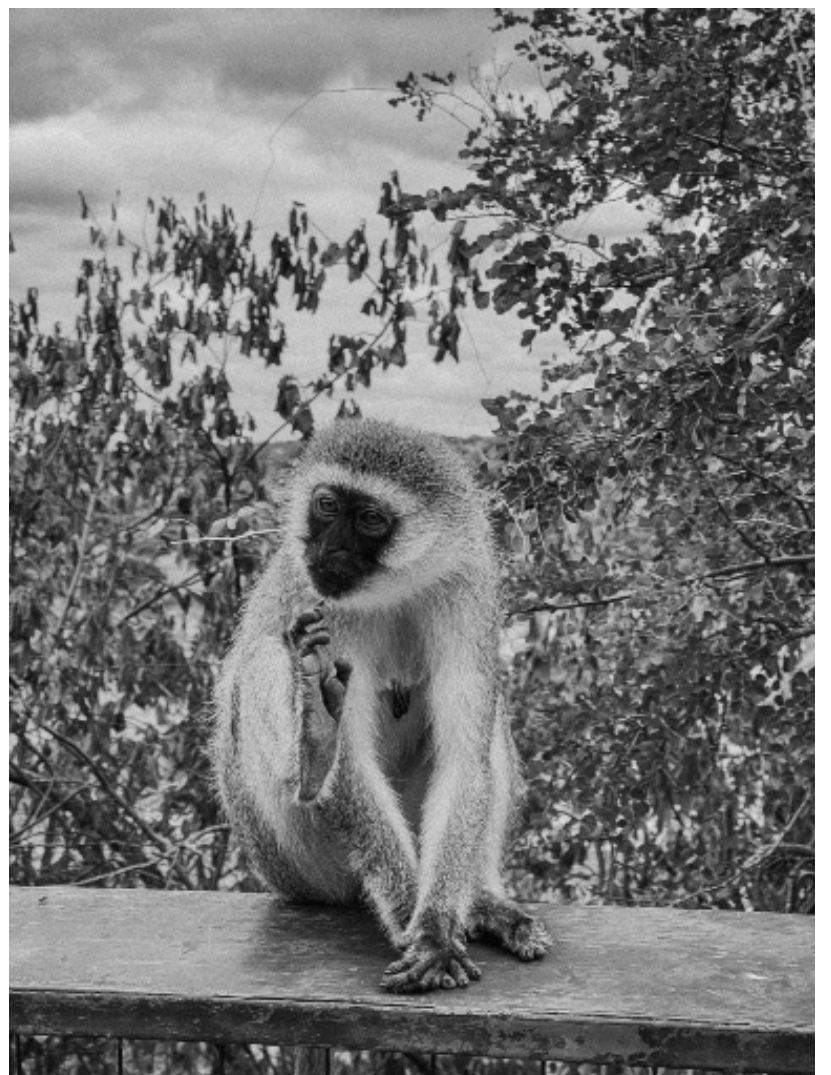
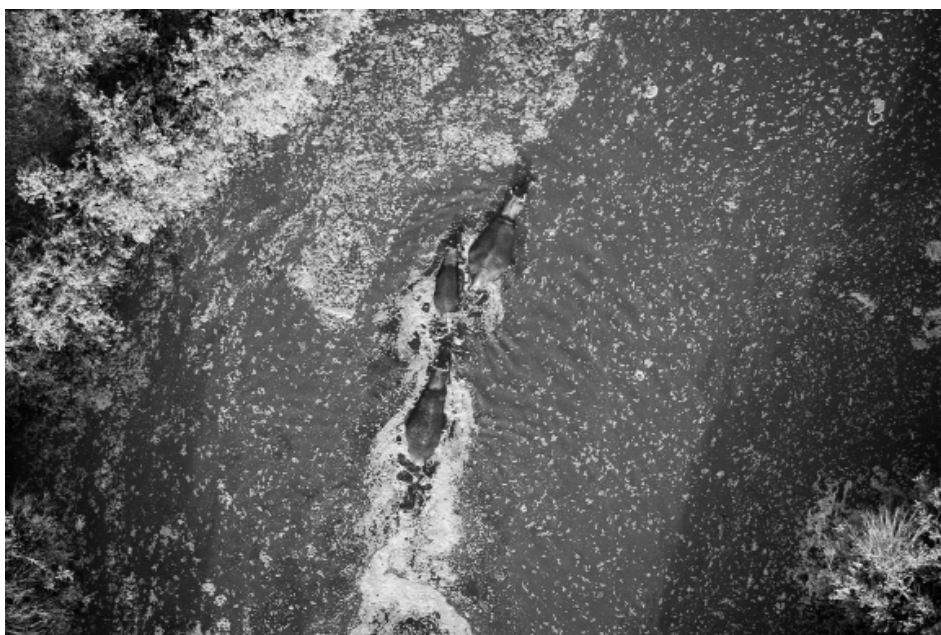




# Scenes from a Shared Planet

A glimpse at Mother Earth from our camera lenses.

BY SARA KUMAR '27, KATIE MERRIAM '26, AND JORDAN  
WASSERBERGER '27









# FORUM

## Wyoming

An ode to the world slowing down—if we let it.

BY MEENA BEHRINGER '27

I often fall in love with the essences of certain places, as if they somehow embody the person I want to become—an indescribable concept of the atmosphere and identity each place nurtures. When I was younger, it was the glamour and elegance of Paris. In high school, I unfittingly labeled myself an “LA girl,” obsessed with the beaches and the naive promise of reinvention and wild dreams in Los Angeles. But last summer, I fell for somewhere more enduring.

In August, I visited Wyoming with my family. My brothers had been asking to go for years—they wanted to go out west and ride horses and wear cowboy hats. Naturally, our days were filled with hikes, rodeo outings, and river explorations.

In the middle of the American West, Jackson rests in a valley between the mountains of the Teton Range and the Gros Ventre Range on Wyoming’s western edge, along the Snake River. The land was originally home to several indigenous tribes before John Colter became the first Anglo-American to explore the region as part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition from 1804 to 1806; the town would be officially named in 1894 and incorporated in 1914. Today, it’s surrounded by abundant wildlife and breathtaking natural landscapes, neighboring the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks.

The town square itself embodies the Old West. The low-story shops are made of simple, run-down wood, seemingly sunken compared to the mountains. Horses, ridden by police officers or pulling carriages, walk in the streets that stretch only a few blocks in each direction. They circle the town square park, each corner adorned with elk antler arches.

Wyoming feels suspended in time, absent of the development and commercialization that has captured much of even the West. A single-lane road—the Teton Pass highway—winds through, connecting the sparse town to endless fields ahead and, ultimately, the parks. The highway, if you could even call it that, is enclosed on either side with pastures of roaming animals, held back only by wooden gates. I would drive down, the only car in my periphery with no trace of a red light, wanting to soar as fast as I could on the open road while simultaneously slowing down to take in the peaks lining the skies. The ragged mountains themselves impose quiet humility, anchoring you in your place.

I often went for walks. I would walk out of the village, past the wandering horses, and onto the road, the Teton range to my left. With no destination in mind, I would wait for the moose to emerge from behind the trees. They would pick at the

lavender and fauna that cover the ground—the contrast of the fierce antlers and the delicate petals.

From the road, I could see glimpses of the Grand Teton National Park ahead of me. Much farther up the winding path was Yellowstone. The national parks themselves were transcendental, capturing the magnificent wonders of our earth and wildlife. The kind of beauty you can’t quite comprehend how it exists.

In the Grand Teton Park, we wandered in an everlasting field with pockets of yellow flowers as the sun rose in the morning. Abandoned wooden cabins, the intrusion of humankind, are scattered amid the rocky mountains that are followed by rivers. The trails in between burst with sprawling wildflowers of all colors, present for a few fleeting months among the stretching forests of pine trees. We hiked through the bushes, and we dipped our toes in the pristine lakes littered only with rocks. In Yellowstone, we were immersed in wildlife that paid no attention to us. Absorbed in the sounds of cascading waterfalls and gorges, we watched herds of bison roam and steam erupt from geysers.

It’s an empowering sense of freedom and awe that the landscapes emulate. I found myself entranced in simply just being, of the human condition of living. Wyoming embodies the freedom of presence, stillness, and vastness. For better or for worse, I do not think I will ever fully embody the spirit of Wyoming. Perhaps I’ll forever aspire to.

Yet both in my hometown and at Harvard, the world has often felt small. People relentlessly rush onto the next, walking through streets that span blocks. Trapped in the chaos of achievement, there seems to be only a few narrow paths forward—a perpetual chase to prestige and lucrateness, a confinement to the same buildings and aspirations and roads. It feels as if there is nothing else to explore.

In the expansiveness of those mountains and fields, empty of people and full of silence, I was reminded that the world is, in fact, anything but. In the peace, so quiet you could hear the elk softly grazing, I was reminded of what it felt like for the world to slow down.

The wildlife served as my own escape, the transcendentalist notion of the divinity and enlightening force of nature. President Theodore Roosevelt ’1880 echoes in my ears—*“there are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness,*

*that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm.”* Beyond its monumental impact, our wildlife and parks have become shared cultural and environmental treasures that define our country.

It was Roosevelt’s visit to Wyoming and Yellowstone Park on a presidential tour in 1903 that helped inspire his pioneering conservationist efforts. Throughout his presidency from 1901 to 1909, Roosevelt federally protected over 230 million acres of public lands, including five national parks and 150 national forests, and created the modern-day U.S. Forest Service. During a time of massive industrialization and rapid technological advancement that threatened to exploit the nation’s natural resources, Roosevelt set a precedent of protection.

Now, the Trump administration is demolishing these conservation efforts.

His first day in office, Trump declared a National Energy Emergency in an executive order, encouraging mass oil and gas production. In February, the administration silently fired over a thousand national park employees, yet required parks to operate normally despite understaffing and record-breaking visitor counts. The administration additionally dismantled protections on over half of U.S. Forest Service-managed land in April, shortly after issuing another order on March 1 to expand timber production. Most recently, Trump is attacking the 1973 bipartisan Endangered Species Act, rolling back protections on what it means to “harm” species to expand industrial access into wildlife habitats. Trump claims he wants to put America first, but the destruction of our

country’s nature does just the opposite.

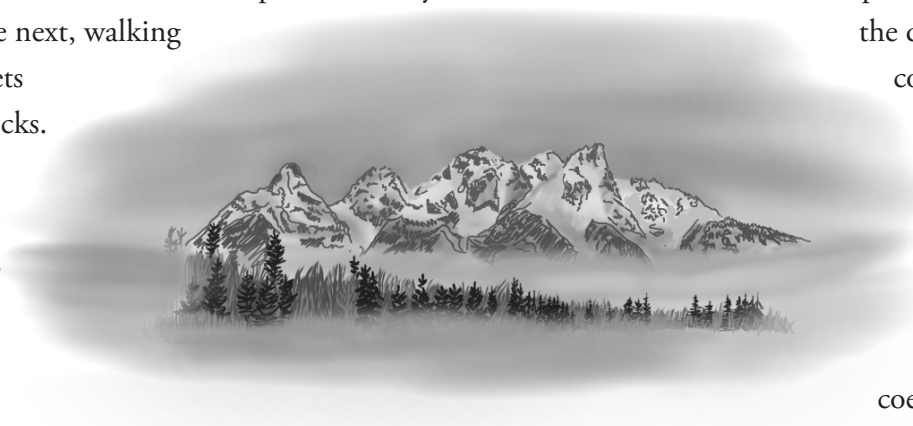
The advancement of man can, and should, coexist with the

wonders of nature. Roosevelt’s message from the early 20th century holds: *“Leave it as it is. You can not improve on it, and many can only mar it. What you can do is to keep it for your children.”*

We owe it to America—in all its natural beauty—to resist.

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FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.**

**GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO ’28**





# Turning Food Waste Into Climate Action

Massachusetts is deploying waste consultants to reduce food waste and drive sustainability.

BY SOPHIA GHAFOURI '27

In a country where nearly 60 million tons of food are thrown away each year—close to 40% of the national supply—wasted meals have become more than just a moral or economic dilemma. They are a climate liability. As policymakers, businesses, and communities search for solutions, Massachusetts stands out for its innovative approach to keeping food out of landfills and turning waste into a resource.

In 2014, Massachusetts became one of the first states to introduce a ban on food waste disposal. Under this regulation, businesses and institutions that generate more than half a ton of food waste per week are required to divert that waste from landfills and incinerators to instead compost or donate edible leftovers. Since then, VT, CA, NY, RI, and CT have followed suit. Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, for example, led to a 40-percent increase in food donations statewide.

Yet, Massachusetts's efforts go beyond mere legislation. While the law has been in place since 2014, enforcement has been light—just 141 businesses have been cited for noncompliance in the past decade. Recognizing that regulation alone is not enough, the state has invested in building a culture of waste reduction by supporting waste consultants who help businesses put the law into practice.

Heather Billings is one such consultant. After growing up watching her father-in-law collect newspapers for recycling, she launched a neighborhood recycling center 35 years ago and later joined the waste-hauling industry. Today, she serves as a senior waste reduction consultant for the Center for EcoTechnology, a state-contracted nonprofit. Her role involves visiting restaurants, grocery stores, and food service businesses to identify sources of food waste. She then offers these establishments tailored and realistic solutions, such as providing smaller bins for food scraps or connecting kitchens with composting services and food recovery nonprofits.

This kind of action is urgently needed. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that in 2019, nearly 60% of wasted food ended up in landfills. When food rots in these oxygen-starved environments, it generates methane,

contributing to approximately 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. These food waste emissions are equivalent to those produced by dozens of coal-fired power plants.

The consequences extend far beyond the climate. Every uneaten meal represents wasted land, water, labor, and energy. The economic toll of food waste in the United States in 2023 was estimated to exceed \$338 billion. Meanwhile, millions of Americans live with food insecurity. Recovering surplus food and redirecting it to those in need would work to both fight hunger and cut emissions.

Composting, in particular, offers one of the most promising ways forward. Unlike landfilling, composting allows food and organic material to decompose in the presence of oxygen, which prevents methane production. The resulting compost enriches soil, reduces dependence on chemical fertilizers, and helps farmland retain water. If the U.S. could redirect just half of its food waste to composting, it could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 64 million tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent annually. By employing waste consultants like Billings, Massachusetts is already taking steps toward that target. A study published in "Science" found the state has made more progress than any other in reducing total waste per capita.

Beyond Massachusetts's waste consultants, other states with food waste laws have seen the value of pairing legislation with education and infrastructure. In California, for example, the Food Cycle Community Compost Program helped participating households cut their food waste by nearly 50%, diverting over 210,000 pounds of scraps from landfills and preventing 144,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions over six years. Programs like this demonstrate how communities can make meaningful

progress when given the right tools and support, yet they remain limited in scale and are often disconnected from broader policy enforcement.

That is where Massachusetts offers a hopeful model for what is possible. While other states are beginning to embrace the idea that policy alone is not enough, Massachusetts has shown how to take that commitment further and be effective at scale. While valuable, food waste programs alone often rely on voluntary participation and tend to reach a limited audience. In contrast, Massachusetts's implementation of government-contracted waste consultants has reduced food waste across industries. It embeds support directly into the system by ensuring that waste reduction does not depend on individual initiative but becomes a standard part of businesses' operations. This kind of support system ensures that food waste laws are not just symbolic, but actually work.

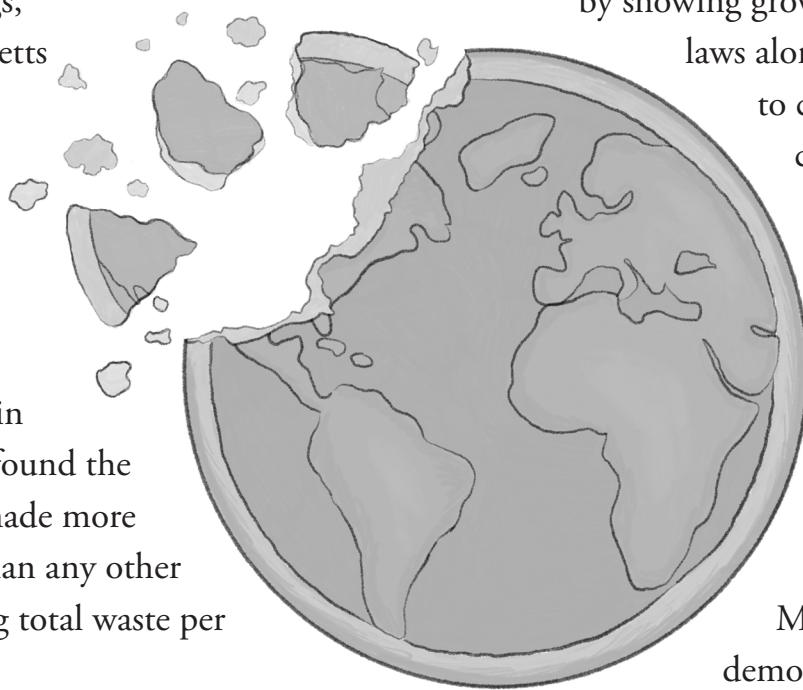
For states that have already passed food waste laws, Massachusetts offers a blueprint for their next steps. Community-based programs, like those in California, are a promising step in the right direction by showing growing recognition that

laws alone are insufficient. Yet, to create large-scale, lasting change, states need the kind of infrastructure Massachusetts has built. By investing in education, offering hands-on support, and treating food waste as a solvable problem, Massachusetts has demonstrated how to turn

policy into progress and waste into climate action. As more states follow suit, the path toward a more sustainable, less wasteful future is not only possible, but is already beginning.

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**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA  
RYMAN '28**













# La Vie en Rose: My Love for French Flowers and Parks

Why it's so important to appreciate Earth's beauty.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

Every day, I walk seven minutes down Rue Orfila to the Gambetta Metro Station to take Line 3 toward Levallois. The transit part of my commute stays the same, but my short walk often changes. I vary which side of the street I take and when I cross, picking without rhyme or reason. Lately, however, a blooming wisteria plant along the fence of the park I pass has added a bit of consistency to my morning stroll. Now, I cross the street at the intersection just before the park, deliberately choosing the side where I can walk under its blossoms. In those moments, as the purple canopy and sweet fragrance envelop me, the world disappears, and I'm in a fantasy garden far away. Not a bad start to the day! And a far cry from my Cambridge commute, where the closest thing to the wisteria is the smell of lavender tea in the Smith Center.

As Paris bursts into color, with different blossoms spilling from parks, terraces, and windowsills, I've learned something about myself: I like flowers. I mean, I really like flowers. On a good day, a beautiful flower bed lifts me into that euphoric, floating, I'm-so-happy-I'm-abroad state. On a bad day, they remind me that there's always something good in the world. Along with my newfound appreciation for flowers, spring has deepened my love for parks, patios, and all types of outdoor spaces. I've been perpetually in a good mood since the weather started warming up last month. As Earth Day arrives, I've realized how essential it is to regularly connect with nature and beauty for a good life. Fortunately, Paris is the perfect place to enjoy the outdoors.

Back to flowers. Last week, they nearly brought me to tears. On Monday morning, I took a 45-minute train to Giverny to visit Monet's house and gardens. When I walked through the entrance and rounded the corner into the garden, my jaw dropped. An ocean of tulips, peonies, and other blooms in every imaginable color stretched out before me. As I walked up and down the perfectly straight, color-coded rows, I felt tears welling in my eyes. It was just so beautiful—a true aesthetic experience. I had never seen anything like it. I only spent two hours exploring the garden, the water lily pond, and the house, but it was enough to keep a smile on my face for the rest of the day.

Even without a trip to Monet's garden, Parisian parks still put me in a good mood. My friends and I do everything outside—from writing history

papers to enjoying un apéro in the grass. On some days, I spend over 75% of my waking hours outside. In addition to working through my croissant bucket list, I've slowly been checking off a park bucket list in the city, and I've found the perfect spots for every occasion.

Located only five minutes away from my classes, Jardin du Luxembourg is the park I visit most often in Paris. I'm clearly not alone—there are always crowds lounging in front of the French senate, no matter the day of the week. Half of its charm lies in its versatility: it's big enough to go for a run without looping endlessly, play petanque (French bocce), sunbathe, read a book, or even write an Indy article. Unfortunately, you can't picnic on the grass, but the benches and tables are perfect for a quick lunch with friends. Thanks to its prominence, the park is meticulously maintained. With every step, you're greeted by beautiful Greek statues, fountains, and—of course—flowers.

Luxembourg might be a great spot to check your emails, but I would never dream of pulling out my computer in Parc Buttes-Chaumont. This dreamy park in the 19th Arrondissement is a hidden gem. Its main attraction is a small temple perched on a cliff overlooking a crescent-shaped pond. The park slopes face the water with some nice flat areas at the bottom. I only recently discovered this spot, but I already love meeting friends there for a picnic and lounging on the grassy hills. In certain areas of the park, you can't see a single building in sight, leaving you to feel like you're miles away in the countryside, not in the heart of a bustling city. It's a welcome and relaxing escape.

Place de Vosges, in the Marais, is surrounded by art galleries and French Romantic writer Victor Hugo's former home, so it's no surprise it's my go-to park when I'm seeking artistic inspiration. The statue of Louis XIV at its center makes a perfect

subject, as do the beautiful arcade buildings around the small park. Its petite size reminds you that you're still in the city, but the proximity to such beautiful architecture is a feature, not a fault, for me. And unlike Luxembourg, here you can sit on the grass. It's a perfect little breath of fresh air.

Admittedly, one of my favorite parks in the Paris area—Parc Sceaux—isn't inside the city limits. But since it's reachable by the RER (Paris's commuter rail), for all intents and purposes, I'd classify it as a Paris park. I visited once with friends to picnic under the

blooming cherry blossoms, and I felt that same magical feeling as I do under my wisteria plant. That feeling only deepened as we explored the grounds, taking in beautiful views of the château and gardens that seemed to go on forever. Covering nearly 450 acres, Parc Sceaux is about nine times bigger than Luxembourg Gardens. Walking around, I felt in awe that such immense beauty was so close to where I lived.

While each of these parks differs in its means, they all offer me the same end: time outside with nature. Being surrounded by sunshine and greenery is the best way I've found to relax and reset, and these spaces allow me to do just that. My recent visit to Giverny reminded me just how necessary this is.

Monet, one of the greatest artists in the world, chose to plant a stunning garden outside his home so that he could be greeted and inspired by beauty every morning. Although I don't have two acres of my own to cultivate flowers, I definitely have taken this sentiment with me back to Paris. I continue to find inspiration in every flower and park in the city. This semester has been an opportunity to seek out ways to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, and as a result, it's been one of the happiest times of my life. Each breath of fresh air is a call to slow down and appreciate the beautiful world around us.



**FRANCES CONNORS '26  
(MARYFRANCESCONNORS@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS  
A REGULAR AT PETALI FLOWER  
SHOP BEFORE GOING ABROAD.**

**GRAPHIC BY FRANCES  
CONNORS '26**



# Thoughts From New Quincy: Planetina, Plastic, and Performance

“On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous.”

BY LUKE WAGNER ’26

Earth Day feels like a funeral now. Not one with black veils or organ music—but a well-staged, well-catered wake. A jazz trio hums near the Science Center. Someone hands out succulent cuttings. There are cookies shaped like the Earth, iced in HUDS-friendly greens and blues—flavorless, but photogenic.

A booth gives away bamboo forks in rice-paper sleeves stamped with the slogan: OUR POWER, OUR PLANET. Ten steps away, the Science Center exhales warm, gas-fired air into a spring breeze still tinged with methane.

No one cries. No one shouts. We smile for the group photo, backpacks slung like credentials.

This is what Earth Day has become: not a reckoning, but a ritual. A polished performance of concern, where optics replace outrage and aesthetic choices stand in for action. We don’t gather to confront what’s been lost—we gather to feel better about it. What once demanded transformation now asks only for symbolism.

My phone buzzes with a clip from “Rick and Morty.” It’s Planetina—a parody of Captain Planet—summoned by four teenage “Planeteers,” each with a magic ring tied to an element: fire, water, earth, and air. In theory, she’s a symbol of environmental hope, justice, and unity. In practice, she’s hollowed out. Planetina isn’t free—she’s franchised. Her powers are controlled by a team of handlers who package her image, sell her merch, and approve her every move. She’s a superhero run through a PR machine.

Eventually, she fights back. She stops asking for permission and starts acting. When she incinerates a coal mine, it’s not a metaphor—it’s vengeance. Morty, once infatuated, dumps her. She’s “too intense.” Too angry. Too real.

It’s played for dark comedy, but the subtext hits hard. Planetina is what happens when conviction crashes into a culture that prefers aesthetics over stakes. She exposes what we won’t admit: that conviction without packaging gets ignored. That passion, unfiltered, gets sidelined.

As she floats above the coal mine, rings blazing, smoke curling around her. Her voice cuts through the flames, setting ablaze dozens of workers: “There’s only one solution to Earth’s pollution!”

It’s a joke—but it stings. We’ve been trained to treat climate change as a personal moral failure. Forgot your tote bag? You’re the problem. Still use a gas stove? Shame. The burden shifts from ExxonMobil to your recycling bin. From Chevron to your LED light bulbs.

Planetina parodies the world we live in—where outrage and virtue are marketable. Her cartoon violence seems absurd only because we’ve already absorbed the message she mocks. We’ve accepted that solving climate change starts with the right shopping habits.

Remember when Trump’s campaign sold half a million dollars’ worth of bright-red plastic straws because “liberal paper straws don’t work?” Pollution morphed into partisan memorabilia—proof that salvation could ship in two-day Amazon Prime. The stunt was absurd, yes, but also refreshingly honest. If you’re going to pollute, at least stop pretending it’s biodegradable.

Fast forward to 2025: Trump signs an executive order halting the federal procurement of paper straws. They’re “nonfunctional,” he says, citing chemicals and plastic wrap as proof of liberal hypocrisy.

But it’s not just conservatives who play the optics game. And it’s not just environmentalism.

This same logic drives so much elite liberal performance: protest when it’s fashionable, post when it flatters, opt in when it feels good.

Recently, in Bryant Park, New York, a protest poster went viral: “If Kamala Harris were president right now, we’d all be at brunch.”

It’s a joke, but also a confession. A subtle acknowledgment that, for many, outrage isn’t sparked by injustice—but by inconvenience. It reveals the truth behind so much surface-level politics: people aren’t angry about the world. They’re angry about how it looks under someone they don’t like.

When the optics improve, the urgency fades. The mimosas come out—plastic straws and all. We don’t protest because we care. We protest because the image demands it. Swap the president, and the appetite for action disappears.

The brunch returns. The urgency fades.

So we soothe ourselves with small victories because they can be completed. Paper straws replace plastic. LED bulbs replace incandescents. We tweet the solar-panel selfie.

Meanwhile, global plastic production is set to triple by 2060. That statistic has no feel-good analog, so we cancel it like a show that never made it past the pilot.

What would it look like to celebrate Earth Day without the merchandised mercy?

Picture Widener’s limestone façade transformed into a live carbon ticker, broadcasting Harvard’s emissions like a stock quote. Every desktop left running. Every conference flight booked. Even the midnight tater-tots in the oven scroll

the number upward in metric tons. Departments that overshoot their budget write checks—no tax-deduction alchemy—to build rooftop solar in Dorchester or electrify school buses in Lawrence.

Yes, the vibe would sour. No jazz trio. No “I <3 Mother Earth” cookies. No branded compost bins humming in the sun.

But maybe the sourness is overdue.

The comfortable lie of Earth Day is that the problem is spiritual—an attitude issue fixable with flair, not infrastructure. Planetina preaches personal purity. The Trump straw shouts personal defiance. Both shrink the crisis to consumer choices. Both flatter the individual and spare the system.

If we insisted on structural stakes, the celebration would grow dull—and effective.

No iPhone cases are made of “ocean-bound” plastic. A procurement memo banning single-use lab consumables unless medically necessary.

No tote bags. A binding, public divestment schedule—updated quarterly, names attached.

No slogans. A rollback of fossil fuel subsidies. A federal mandate on energy efficiency codes for new buildings. A climate risk disclosure requirement for all endowment assets. Just the admission that power, properly defined, is a ledger, not a feeling.

Planetina says the planet has no time. But what we’re truly short on is attention.

A planetary drama can’t compete with a meme cycle or a flash sale. We scroll. We sigh. We buy a bamboo fork and feel fractionally better. Then we repeat.

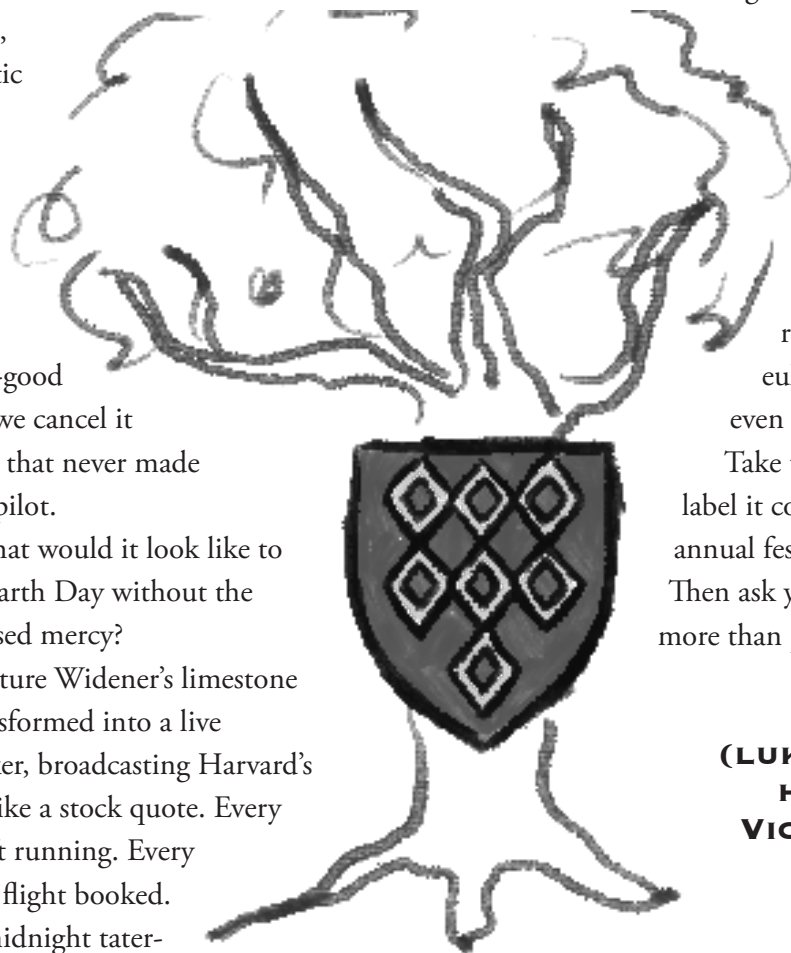
One last glance at the Yard before lecture: the jazz hits a major-seventh chord as someone poses beneath the banner, straw hat tilted just so. The photo will look impeccable. The atmosphere, slightly less so.

I used to love Earth Day. Maybe I still do, in the way you can still love a song even after it’s been overplayed. But this version—the photogenic grief, the compostable redemption—it feels like a eulogy written before the body’s even cold.

Take the picture if you must. Just label it correctly: souvenir from the annual festival of not-quite-enough. Then ask yourself if next year, you’ll do more than pose.

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INDEPENDENT.

**GRAPHIC BY RILEY  
CULLINAN ’27**





# The Rise of *Homo sapiens* and Downfall of Our Planet

How modern *Homo sapiens* have made the planet more inhabitable for all other forms of life, including ourselves.

BY KATIE MERRIAM '26

Due to the rapid industrial development over the past 300 years, the Earth's biodiversity has taken an extreme hit—increased pollution, resource depletion, habitat destruction, and climate change—yet many protective measures are being aggressively targeted by the current presidential administration. Over the past few weeks, President Donald Trump has attempted to modify the Endangered Species Act based on individual interpretation rather than the existing written word.

Although I do not believe in textualism, it is inconsistent to utilize the method with certain legislation and not others. Republicans tend to utilize century-old statutes to accommodate rapidly changing modern weaponry, yet they don't want to hold environmental legislation to the same standards.

President Donald Trump's administration has made it clear that the environment is of little importance; they frame ecological protection as a hindrance to our country's economic development. From dismantling national parks and increasing logging to loosening protections on endangered species and halting renewable energy production, Trump has enabled destruction on all fronts.

Our current presidential administration's move to repeal policy conservation efforts is an attack on ecosystems across the country. From the Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon to Yellowstone Park or Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, citizens and foreign travelers alike flock to American landscapes. These currently protected parks could be stripped of resources due to capitalistic greed. We must preserve the shape of this nation, and conservation efforts must persist.

American conservation efforts can be very effective in reviving species in danger of extinction. One species long associated with the U.S. was removed from the endangered

species list in 2007 due to successful conservation efforts. The bald eagle has been a prominent symbol of American freedom and independence since 1782, when it was designated as the national bird. This is just one of the many success stories from the U.S. endangered species list. These success stories are truly a testament to the necessity of maintaining a broad list of species in the interest of their conservation. With such a deep-rooted legacy, one would expect traditional nationalists to champion the protection of animals such as the eagle rather than enable their extinction, turning them into mythical creatures like the dodo bird.

Like the shifts in policy toward conservation efforts, the timber shortage is yet another issue that is being mismanaged. Increasing logging on protected lands is not the solution. There are countless reasons why it's unfeasible—from a lack of expertise in sustainable forestry, to legal barriers, worker shortages, sawmill closures, and infrastructure inefficiencies, and the lack of investments into sawmills from private investors. Despite Trump thinking that his executive order, "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production," may be a good idea, it is neither practical nor sustainable. This proposal claims that logging would decrease wildfires, when in reality, it only increases the severity.

If logging on federal lands were to occur, it would have drastic repercussions: removal of critical habitats for endangered species, loss of biodiversity, increased risks of wildfires, disruption of carbon sequestration, increased soil erosion, reduced water quality, and changes to local microclimates.

Not only are habitats being attacked by logging, but they are also being threatened by Trump's proposal to redefine "harm" in environmental legislation. Currently, habitat destruction is covered under the umbrella of "harm." The proposed edit aims to rescind this current definition by claiming "the existing regulatory definition of 'harm,' which includes habitat modification, runs contrary to the best meaning of the statutory term 'take'" in the ESA. Under Trump's redefinition, habitat loss—the largest contributor to species extinction and endangerment—would not count as harm.

Rather than reducing the ESA to the definition of "take," as the actual 'taking' of species is less common than it used to be due to industrialization, instead, I propose we expand the ESA to increase land usage and destruction regulations. Although the current ESA definition of "harm" includes habitat conservation and aims to prevent habitat devastation, thrifty individuals often find ways around this extension of "harm," making minor

adjustments to their plans, thereby minimizing the impact on endangered species rather than halting the project altogether.

As difficult as it may be, what might be best for the planet is a return to our roots. As hominins evolved eventually leading to the rise of *Homo sapiens*, we were living in social groups of around 30 people where everyone knew one another as hunter-gatherers. Some groups, like the Hadza in Tanzania, still live like this today. Although the lifestyle is not as comfortable and the rate of mortality is higher, there are many benefits, including less metabolic disease and minimal destruction to the environment.

Although this might seem impossible, this would provide us with the checks and balances of fairer treatment towards one another, preventing repercussions, including being exiled from one's group. As we evolved and moved across environments, our resources and food

opportunities changed, along with the advancement of fire, which resulted in increased meat consumption. To optimize hunting, individuals had to work together, increasing both our socialization and cooperation abilities. As a result, it was evolutionarily beneficial to work together and have good social relationships with each other and the environment. Now, there is a shift, at least in the industrialized world, from group to individual efforts. This difference, I believe, is due to the ego we have either acquired or built. Put simply, the industrial world rejects the idea of cohesion between humans and nature.

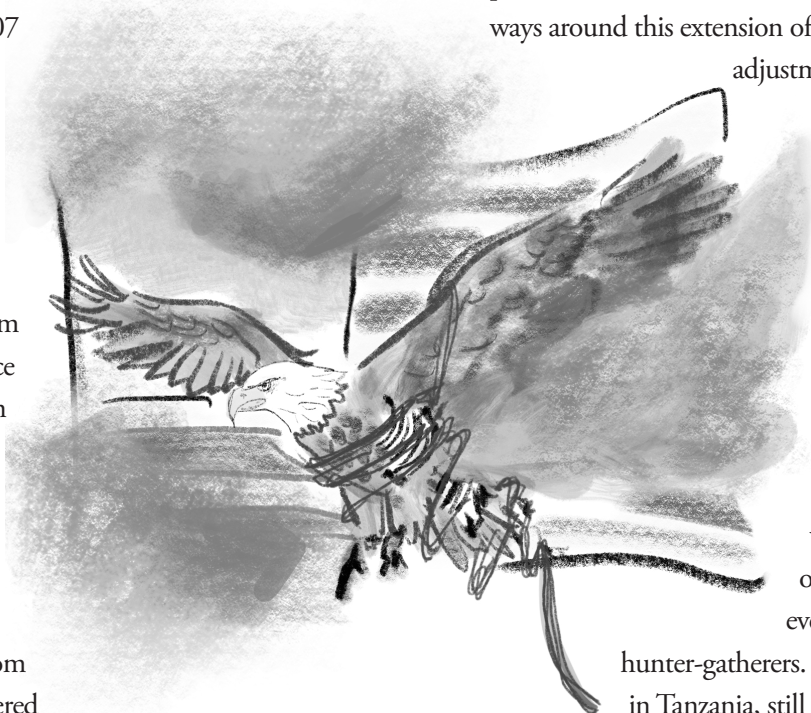
All this being said, scientists and researchers would not be as successful without our technological advancements. Vehicles allowing archeologists the ability to travel to and excavate sites at locations have led to optimal preservational conditions, safer archaeological digging, and isotopic analysis technology. This has furthered our knowledge of our evolutionary history and given us a better understanding of ourselves and ancestors. Despite all the technological benefits and necessary advancements to advance our understanding of our natural world and past, I believe there is more we could be doing to be more sustainable and lessen our impacts on the environment and species that inhabit it.

Our intelligence has given us both the capacity for destruction and the potential for empathy, creativity, and cooperation. It is precisely because of this that it is our responsibility to do better. With conservation efforts and legislation like the ESA, species, like our beloved Bald Eagle, have been brought back from the brink of extinction, and successful climate policies have shown that positive change is possible when we do our due diligence and take responsibility for our actions. The duality of human impact on the environment—our capacity to destroy and to preserve—should drive us to make choices that better the livelihood of all species and not just our own.

After all, much like the freedom and lack of limitations the Bald Eagle represents, Earth has the freedom to sustain itself without us, but we cannot sustain ourselves without the Earth. As we observed with the COVID-19 pandemic, with minimal human activity, the environment can heal itself. During this time, we saw a resurgence in biodiversity and clearer waters, seen through the return of dolphins and swans to the Venice canals. However, if we push too many species to extinction, the biological food chain and its systems will be severely disrupted, inadvertently causing a chain reaction of extinction. Despite being a product of Mother Nature ourselves, the human race is her biggest threat. No matter how small a change you think you can make, any positive change is better than doing nothing at all to help the future generations of both our species and others.

**KATIE MERRIAM '26 (KMERRIAM@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WISHES PEOPLE CARED ABOUT ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT AS MUCH AS THEY DO ABOUT MONEY AND STATUS.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28**





# Abreast on Abroad: Letter Four

Sadie Kargman’s travel diary dump.

BY SADIE KARGMAN '26

**A**i my little tariffs,  
Apologies for the two-week hiatus. Shockingly, I have school and midterms—eye roll. Just kidding! It was 72 degrees and sunny in Paris. No work was done. But I wasn’t kidding about the midterms. Anywhoseldorf, welcome to the fourth edition of Abreast on Abroad: “Travel Diary Dump: Part Un.”

As I’ve mentioned in previous columns, traveling around Europe is not only doable time-wise, but also financially accessible. This means I’ve been kissing my sweet Paris goodbye most weekends and hopping aboard EasyJet chariots to explore more of this godforsaken world.

Below, I’m going city by city, breaking down the highlights and the hell-nos. My rating system is completely vibes-based: 10 means I’m marrying the city, below a 5 means not worth my time, nor your own.

**Lion (Lyon): 6.95/10**

Lyon is a charming little town just 1.5 hours from Paris. Some people choose to study abroad there, and while I’d never be one of them, it’s walkable and lovely and makes for a solid day trip. The thing about Lyon is that it’s neither overrated nor underrated, it’s just “rated.” However, I would still highly recommend going if you’re spending an extended time in Paris, if only for the Basilica de Notre-Dame and the Ferris Wheel. There is nothing more titillating than a Ferris wheel, and I stand by that.

**Edin-“bruv”: 9.32/10**

I know what you’re thinking: Scotland is basically England with a twist. Wrong! In fact, if you even mention the Brits, any Scot rambles about the “eegits,” or “idiots.” Charmed. However, if you thought Scotland was just like Disney’s 2012 film, “Brave,” you are absolutely correct. In the city, the kilts (#FeastYurEyes) are traded for skinny jeans (a staple of Europe, with or without Brexit), but everyone sounds like they’re friends with Merida. Overall, I loved the trip as there is nothing this girl loves more than a wry Scot.

**St Andrew’s Scotland: 10/10**

Shawarma House. That’s the review. (To my tiny colony of St. Andrews readers: ily.)

**Moutardia (Dijon, France): 5.87/10**

If you know me, you know I’m a whore for a good condiment. Dijon’s gorgeous, grainy, hand-churned mustard, or moutarde? No exception. Did I hop on a train for over an hour just to sample an assortment of moutards? Obviously. Other than that…not much to do. Unless you interface with the local Amorino, which follows me everywhere I go.

**Amster-damn: 8.41/10**

I LOVE AMSTA. Red lights? Give ‘em to me. Canals? Let me fall in. Bikes? Eh, I could do without. I went to Amsterdam for the first time with my family and did a variety of “touristy” activities, so I made sure this trip was more of a locals tour. I went to some incredible restaurants, one of which had not one, but two vinyl DJs. After a good meal, I loved stumbling into beautiful exhibitions and stores. On the last day, I obviously hit

the Rijksmuseum (yes, pronounced like Rikers Island), and waved to my fav “Rembies” (Rembrandt paintings). However, this trip couldn’t reach a high-nine rating solely because of my lodging situation, which I discussed in my recent “ScareBnb” article.

**Chan-tea (Chantilly, France): 9.09/10**

Surprisingly, this ranks as one of my favorite day trips. Of course, the Chateaux de Chantilly was closed the day I went (everything everywhere is closed on Tuesdays, FYI), but I still had so much fun strolling the small city, walking through the forest, and seeing the race track. Most importantly, however, was a Chantilly crème (whipped cream) “cooking class,” although we didn’t technically cook anything. I always see Chantilly cream advertised, and while I thought it was a justification for price inflation, boy was I wrong—it was worth every €5 bite.

**Copenis (Copenhagen, Denmark)**

**8.85/10**

I loveeeee Scandinavia. The people, clothes, food, and atmosphere are all gorgeous. But if there is one SINGLE thing to complain about, it’s the weather. While it’s possibly on me and my boyfriend for poor planning, considering the conditions we had to endure in brisk February, I would not recommend a trip during the late-fall or winter. You’ll spend the whole trip racing from shop to shop to avoid the cold, and I once heard running was only for children and thieves. Oh—special shoutout to any local saunas and cold plunges—MUST do.

**Os-loh my god (Oslo, Norway): 3.21/10**

Ozzy, baby…you don’t deserve this review. I know that, you know that, the people know that. Disclaiming my bias: I found out my apartment in Paris was robbed while in Oslo. Another treat was that it was torrential downpouring and frigid while I was there. I can’t say a nice thing about the city, except that Babbo Collective has the most insane scrambled eggs I’ve EVER had. Overall, this one’s on me, and I need a do-over.

**Mah-rihd (Madrid): 7.37/10**

Just like in Oslo, the weather gods were NOT on my side. God was weeping when I landed in “Ethpana,” as they say. All in all, I loved Madrid for the culture, food, and, dare I say, the 11 p.m. meal times. I always complain about not eating dinner early, stating “We’re not in Barthelona,” but this time, we kinda were. I must return, and hopefully soon.

**Londontown: 9.61/10**

Classic. Sophisticated. Innit. You cannot go wrong with a London trip, especially when the Tube is so glamorous.

Under three hours from Paris, the trip was easy, and I was with my best friends who visited during Harvard’s spring break. We ate Indian food (my fav cuisine), walked through Kensington Gardens, and yapped our asses off. Even though I technically speak English everywhere but Italy and France (generous of me, but #selflove), there’s something so freeing about not trying to communicate. That is, of course, until I am doing my heinously inappropriate British accent. London is a food paradise, and there’s nothing like eating my way through a city. I will go back to London time and TIME again.

Side note: I am convinced I had a full Alfie-Solomons from Peaky-Blinders cockney accent in a past life (deep cut reference—if you know, you know #JewishMob).

**Lisboa: 10.93/10**

Pull up a chez because this might just be my favorite trip abroad. First off, my seasonal depression was peaking pre-trip, so I greeted Lisboa’s 75-degree heat and UV 7 with open-fucking-arms. I don’t know what I did to earn Mami Natura’s favor, but I had a full sunburn when I returned to Paris. #WearProtection. There is truly no high like when your peers comment on your tan on Monday morning. Beyond the weather, the city was so beautiful, from the creative local brands to the mind-blowing food. ‘Boa should have been considered a top foodie destination yesterday. Speaking of magic, my last day in Lisbon, I met an “energy healer” with a speciality in magic water who—get this—lives ON my block in New York. What. Are. The. Fucking. Chances. Lisbon, I have absolutely no notes, and I am dying to get back to Portugal as soon as possible.

After eleven-plus cities, my European Google Maps has syphilis with all the little “favorite” dots, so be sure to reach out to me for recommendations #NoGateKeepersHere.

I hoped you enjoyed my highly biased reviews of these wildly famous and populated cities. I am sure it will drastically alter your travel plans for the future.

Please look out for my next articles about serendipitous abroad moments (Harry Styles featured) and my sobering spring break adventures.

Ciao,  
Sadié

**SADIE KARGMAN ’26 (SADIEKARGMAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS CURRENTLY STARRING AS YOUR FAVORITE SHITSTAIN IN PARIS.**

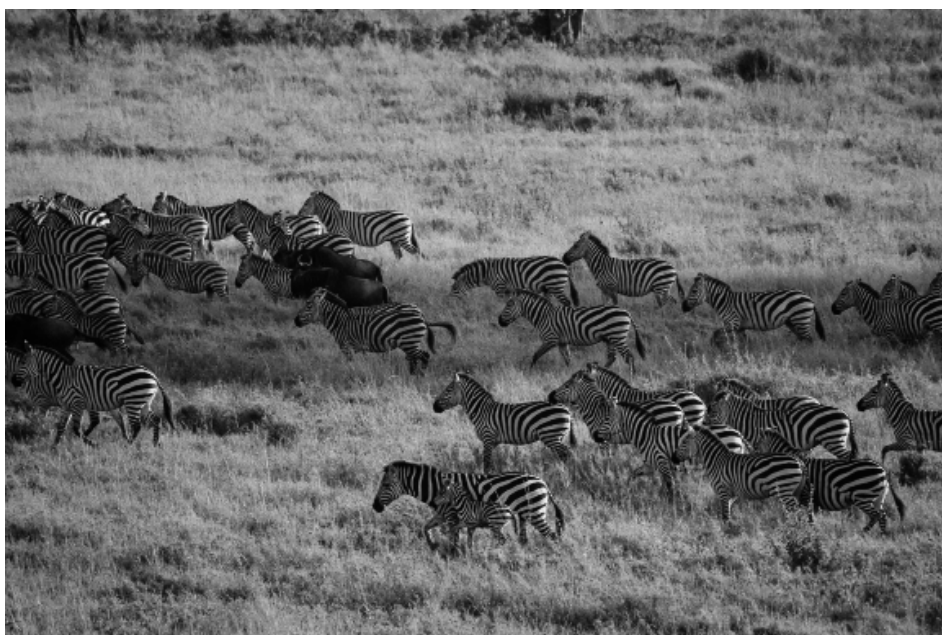
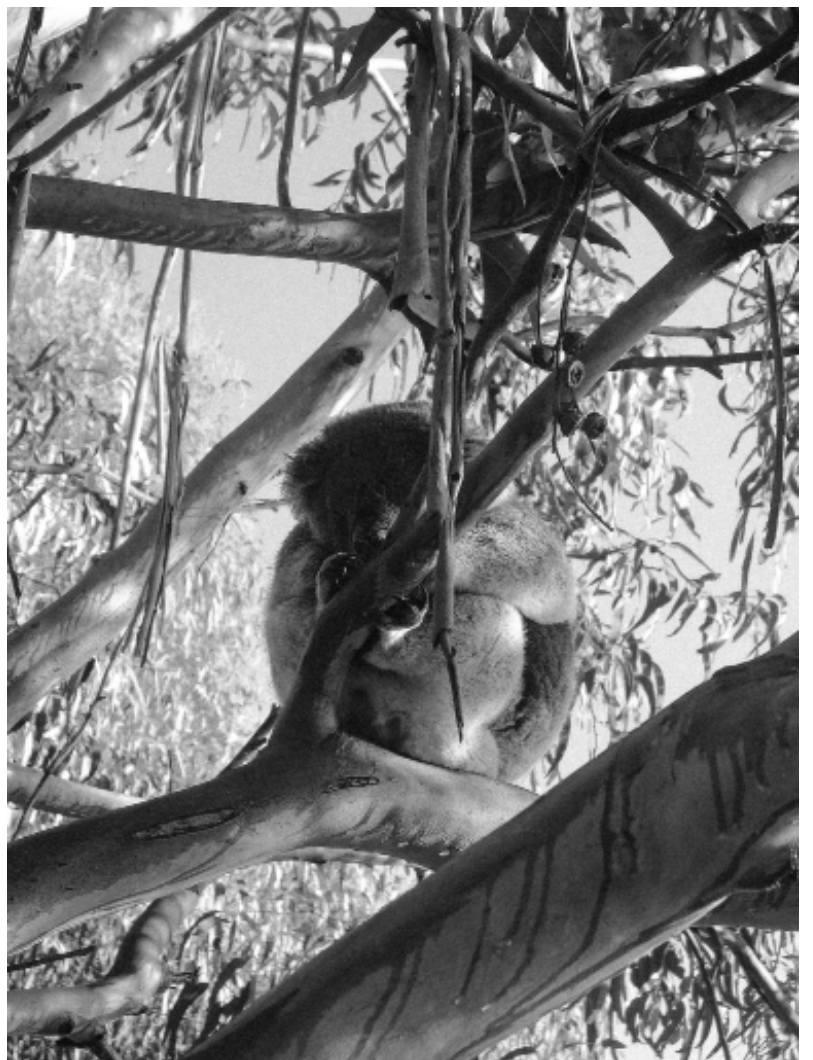
GRAPHIC BY JOYE WINGARD ’28



# Scenes from a Shared Planet

A glimpse at Mother Earth from our camera lenses.

BY SARA KUMAR '27, KATIE MERRIAM '26, AND JORDAN  
WASSERBERGER '27









# Earth Poems

Language translates the land.

BY AIDAN FITZSIMONS '25

*I*wamp poem (i)

we came to see gators of course but  
saw ourselves in a new wetness.  
this is an environment, different  
than we've known. in a new place  
you learn fastest at first, a child  
adapting to challenges, joys.  
everything touches me; i give body.  
on the other side of the imprint  
i feel myself, greener and browner  
and palmetto hands and still  
wetness and  
little green eyelets observing and  
absorbing the surface and i  
and the tiny bubbles and the novel  
birdcall  
and the thick moss floating loose  
and high  
held by the trees like the lightest  
kitestring,  
myself in the wind and the wind.

*B*lue Ridge

Rich is this new land,  
green the color of abundance.  
There is not a surface insight  
uncovered of living  
Breathers, lovers of light and  
obsessive rains.  
The peoples of the world could live  
good lives here,  
Folded into verdant hollows  
overflowing with blessings  
Soft and understanding like these  
oldest mountains  
Well worn with the ways of this  
wild world,  
Watery and relinquishing of all  
rockiness—  
A waving shape which will approach  
but never reach

*T*he limit of acceptance.

Green bleeds into blue along my  
edgeless vision  
Seamlessly, greenblue shading into  
infinite distance as  
A westward fog of container +al  
possibilities,  
Contingent and contiguous  
With the mystery of myself.

**AIDAN FITZSIMONS '25**  
**(AIDAN\_FITZSIMONS@**  
**COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)**  
**WROTE THESE POEMS IN**  
**DIALOGUE WITH THE LAND**  
**WHILE HITCHHIKING AND**  
**LIVING IN A BUS AROUND**  
**AMERICA.**

**GRAPHIC BY KELLY TUNG '28**



# A Superstar in the Loeb

A review of HRDC's and Black CAST's mainstage production of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

Ever wondered what a more modern-day version of Jesus might look like? Do you think you would be on Jesus's side of history? The hit rock opera musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" sets out to answer these very questions. Created by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, the musical follows Jesus in his final days of life, told through the modern lens of rock music. Viewers follow Jesus and his disciples through storylines drawn from the bible, from witnessing Jesus's resurrection to Judas's betrayal and the ultimate crucifixion of Jesus.

This production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" was co-sponsored by the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club and Black C.A.S.T. The show was set in 1970s Oakland, Calif., a shift from the show's original location in Jerusalem. Director Hannah Alexis '27 gave many characters originally from Judea a 1970s Californian equivalent. "On our version, it's like we have Jesus, who's being played by a black woman that's representative of Angela Davis in 1972," said Alexis in an interview with the *Independent*. This reimagining continues with other casting changes—former California Governor and U.S. President Ronald Reagan is reinterpreted as the Roman King Herod, played by Justice Sirotek '27.

The deviation from the original show helps clarify its message, in Alexis's opinion. "We are taking quite a few liberties in this shift... In that way, I think it is helpful to understand the time period from which [the play was written], and it's helping to clarify a bit more, in my opinion." This production is set in 1973, the year the show was originally written. As a result, many of the themes explored in the performance reflect the social and political issues that inspired its creation.

The set was designed to emulate the urban architecture of Oakland. The show used a relatively simple set design technique, with most set pieces remaining stationary and unchanged throughout the scenes. Among the many elements that went into creating the show, costume design stood out. Costume Designer Amina Salahou '25 explained that she used costumes to express each character's personality, especially in cases where their traits might not be immediately clear through dialogue or action alone.

"People could watch this, and even [if] they didn't really understand exactly what was going on or didn't exactly understand the story, you can kind of see each character's personality through what they were wearing,"

Salahou said.

Despite a few technical hiccups from the speakers, the vocal performance did not disappoint. Kiese Nanor '26 played Jesus, and Cybèle Fasquelle '25 played Judas. Both showed off their pipes throughout the show, with Nanor having a standout in "Gethsemane" and Fasquelle performing an amazing opening rendition of "Heaven on Their Minds." The ensemble's "What's the Buzz" performance left me buzzing; I still can't get the song out of my head.

The show presents the story of the final days of Jesus's life. Jesus performed miracles witnessed by his disciples. Word of Jesus spread, and soon the government (in this case, Ronald Reagan and the police force) became weary of the message spreading among the people. They set out to make an example and kill (or rather, arrest, in this interpretation) Jesus. Despite the religious origins, Alexis doesn't prioritize Christian retelling. "We're not putting crosses on everything when we know it's not quite going to be Jesus the Christ," she says. "We have a different conversation to be had that isn't just strictly religious."

Fasquelle concurred with the director's changes to the show. "If you are a fan of Jesus, if you're not a fan of Jesus, this is the show to come see," Fasquelle shared.

Although Alexis's vision for the show heavily shaped the final product, she believes it could not have happened without the cast. "I think I'm just very grateful to my cast, especially for their openness in telling the story in this way," she said.

Alexis also pointed out the importance of the show for the Black C.A.S.T. affinity group. "It's the first time Black C.A.S.T. as a solo organization has had the mainstage in like 15 years," she added.

While a central theme in this show is black oppression by the police force, Alexis designed the show to be multi-thematic. "I'm very proud that it's not as simple as just racial dynamics. It is also gender; it is also economic standing. It is also that all of those things have an impact," she explained.

One example of this she used was the Black Panther Party member who represents Peter, played by Joshua Eneji '28.

"Peter denied Jesus three times, and he is very explicitly representing the men of the Black Panther Party, which was a very patriarchal organization, despite it being an activist-like group," Alexis said. "I love reading about the Black Panthers and all the work they did in their community organizing. However, it was a different story to understand how they treated women within the organization, which was not just as simple as verbally excluding people. Still, it was also to the point of violence in some cases."

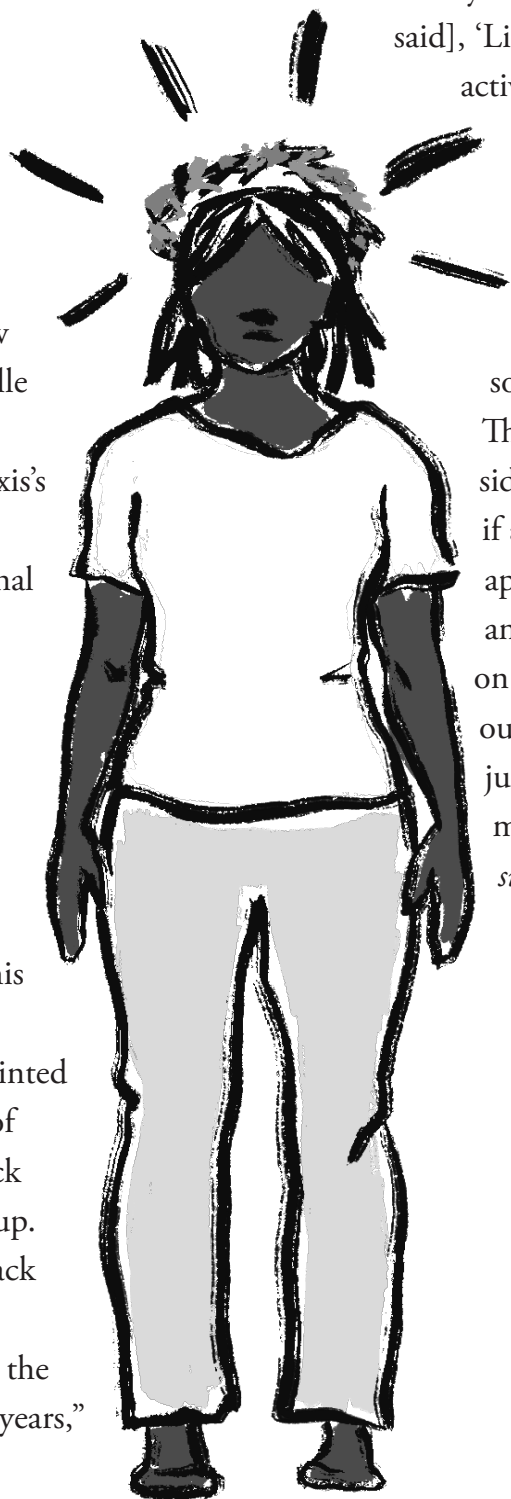
Ultimately, Alexis wanted spectators to enjoy viewing this show, but she also took away a message from it. "I think that theater should make you feel. I think theater should make you think... Maria Irene Fornese [once said], 'Life is theater; Theater is life.' It is actively happening," she said.

"You are not a bystander in this life. You are always actively in the narrative, whether or not you feel so, there is always actively something you do or can do that affects something," she said.

This show left me questioning what side of history I am on. As a Christian, if another reincarnation of Jesus appeared tomorrow, would I recognize and support him—or would I stand on the sidelines? Am I genuinely living out the values of compassion and justice that the Messiah would call me to uphold? Would I see Jesus as a *superstar*?

**KALVIN FRANK '28**  
**(KFRANK@COLLEGE.**  
**HARVARD.EDU)**  
**THOROUGHLY**  
**ENJOYED JCS.**

**GRAPHIC BY RILEY**  
**CULLINAN '27**





# “We’re Not in Kansas Anymore”

Somewhere after home.

BY AJAX FU '28

## S oftness Breaks Quietly

you're breakfast in bed  
takeout when it's raining  
jumping over cracks in the  
sidewalk  
lying on fresh laundry after a  
shower  
skipping down an empty  
street

but  
we fall

you tear out a page and  
leave it with me  
you smile with your eyes and  
hesitantly touch

don't start without me!

but  
you

were

almost

done

and

I

knew

it

too



## To Avoid

Sometimes I still think about  
our to-do list:

Howl's Moving Castle  
Percy Jackson show  
The Lorax

*-always-*

The Magic Forest  
HyperSpace Los Altos  
Redwood Shores Library

Road trip to Monterey Bay  
Aquarium  
to see the octopus that could've  
remembered us  
Organize the polaroids

*Stay in touch—*

**AJAX FU '28 (AJAXFU@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS  
LOOKING FOR THE YELLOW  
BRICK ROAD.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANNA SHAO '28**



# Weekend Arts Wrap-Up

A recap of last weekend's performances at Harvard.

BY SACHI LAUMAS '26 AND KAYLA REIFEL '26

**T**his past weekend, arts groups across campus were busy sharing their talent and work from all over the world with our Harvard community. This week, we'll be highlighting four student-run performances that wowed their audiences on Friday and Saturday.

## **The Harvard Undergraduate Candela Latin Dance Troupe Annual Showcase: "Un Viaje Por El Mundo"**

This past weekend, Harvard's premier Latin dance troupe took the stage at the Harvard Dance Center for their annual showcase. This year's show, titled "Un Viaje Por El Mundo," took its audience on a tour of the numerous Latin dance styles that Candela members have mastered, including bachata, salsa, cumbia, ballet folklórico, and more. The group performed at two shows, the first on Friday night at 7:30 p.m. and the second on Saturday at 4 p.m. Each show embodied the energy and range that Candela brings to all of its performances.

Candela is one of Harvard's non-competitive performance dance groups, led by presidents Sam Schumann '25 and Nicole Calderon '25. According to their website, their larger aims include "celebrating and disseminating Latin culture through an array of genres." The dance styles that they perform and honor in each performance are pulled from all over the world, including "three continents and countless cultures." The group is truly global in scope and scale, befitting the title of their annual showcase, which translates to "A Trip Around the World" in English.

## **The Harvard Ballroom Dance Team's Spring Showcase: "Vignettes"**

Taking the stage at Lowell Lecture Hall was another piece of Harvard's dance scene: the Harvard Ballroom Dance team. On Saturday, this group performed their Spring Showcase show at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. titled "Vignettes." The performance was completely student-organized and choreographed, featuring dozens of ballroom dancers from Harvard's student body. Their repertoire is varied and vast, including styles such as the Waltz, the

Jive, and "pieces inspired by Lindy Hop, Jazz, and other non-ballroom styles," said the ticket order form. The show also included guest performances from other dance groups, widening the scope of the 75-minute performance past what the audience might have expected at a ballroom dance show.

The show demonstrated the beauty and art of ballroom dance at the competitive level. But audience members and fans looking to get involved need no prior experience to join the organization's Rookie Program. The group, led by president Ida Fladhammer '25, offers classes beginning in September in numerous ballroom dance styles, allowing dancers of all skill levels and interests to participate. "Vignettes" may have just inspired us to add some ballroom dance shoes to our Amazon carts.

## **The Harvard Radcliffe Orchestra's Performance**

On April 19, 2025, the Harvard Radcliffe Orchestra performed Claude Debussy's *Jeux* and Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 1, both conducted by Federico Cortese. HRO, led by president Veronica Li '26, is known for its consistent, high-quality, beautiful performances, and this past Saturday was no exception. Cortese and the orchestra executed a beautiful performance of the dreamlike, playful melodies of Debussy's *Jeux* and the dramatic narrative arc of Brahms' Symphony No. 1.

Orchestra members of HRO were just as satisfied with the performance as audience members.

"I was thrilled with how HRO's final concert of the season went! I loved the program this cycle—Debussy's *Jeux* is a really fascinating piece that was very progressive for its time, and the long process of putting it together in rehearsals made the performance all the more rewarding. And Brahms' first symphony is classic repertoire with some stunningly beautiful melodies," wrote trumpet player Harry Epstein '25 in a statement to the *Independent*.

"I thought the orchestra played their best, and performing for so many smiling and familiar faces in Sanders is a wonderful privilege. I'll treasure those moments with the other seniors onstage and the whole orchestra very fondly for a long, long time," he continued.

## **The Harvard Contemporary Collective Show: "Cadence"**

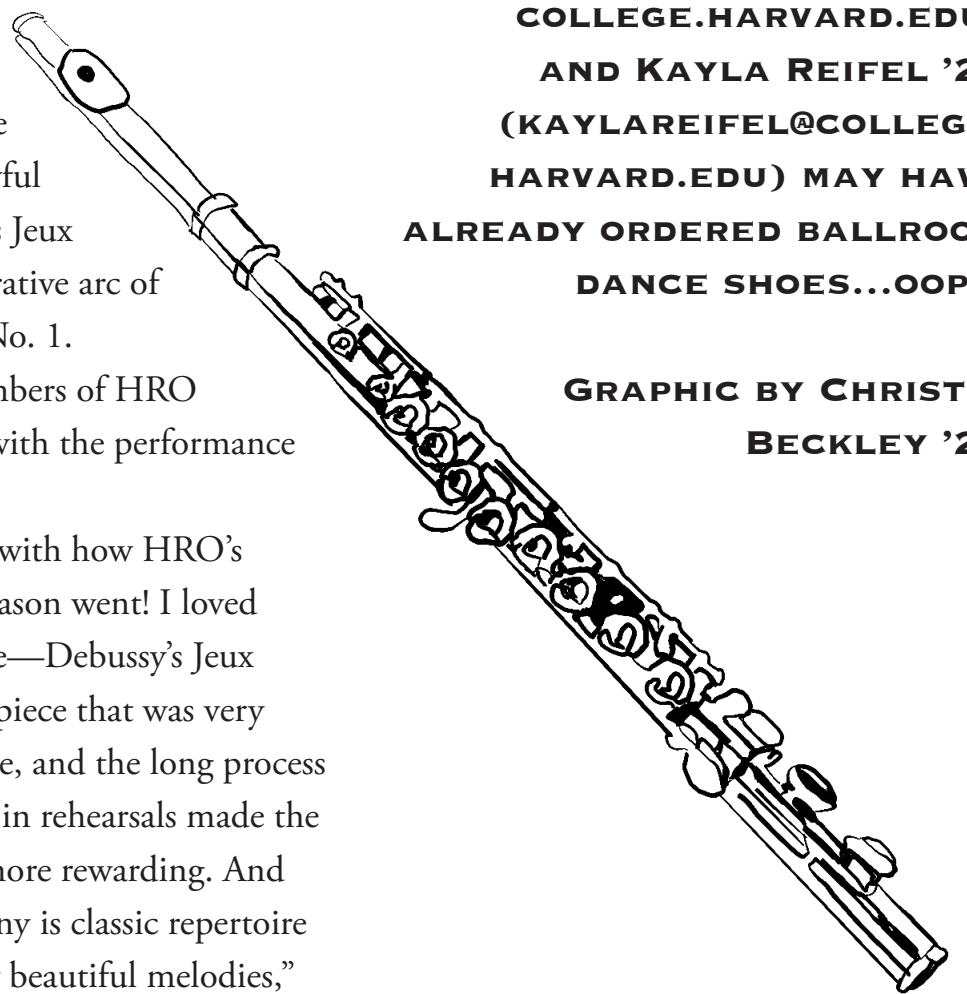
The Harvard Contemporary Collective had another successful run of shows this past weekend, with one show on Friday and two on Saturday in the Loeb Experimental Theater. This semester's sold-out showcase was titled "Cadence."

Cadence presented a joyous celebration of movement, emblematic of HCC's signature style, which is equal parts experimental and captivating. Founded in fall 2022 by Liliana Price '25, Payton Thompson '25, and Gianna Zades '23, HCC has cemented itself as one of the premier dance companies on campus.

This past weekend at Harvard saw numerous impressive performances from established and newer arts organizations alike, setting a high bar for the rest of the semester.

**SACHI LAUMAS '26 (SLAUMAS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND KAYLA REIFEL '26 (KAYLAREIFEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MAY HAVE ALREADY ORDERED BALLROOM DANCE SHOES...OOPS.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27**





# SPORTS

## Sports Spotlight: Harvard Men's Lacrosse

Highlighting one of Harvard's most successful teams this season.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

This past weekend, at Harvard's first annual Cambridge Day, the No. 10-ranked men's lacrosse team welcomed its largest crowd ever at Jordan Field. The high-profile game for this team made the event a success on a day full of athletic competitions. Despite their 12-20 loss, the men's team stayed within four points against the NCAA No. 3-ranked Cornell until the last quarter, when the Big Red pulled away. This season will be the team's most successful since 1998.

A significant part of the team's success is attributed to Head Coach Gerry Byrne. Finn Pokorny '26 shared that he thought Coach Byrne was a central piece of the team. "The big sell coming here was playing for Coach Byrne and him growing you more, not just as a player, but as a person. I guess it sounds kind of cheesy, but it is

true—he does value you outside the team," said Pokorny. "I know other players [whose coaches call them] by their number, but Coach Byrne really learns about his players and hopes for the best."

Coach Byrne has recruited many top players in incoming classes: six of the top 100 players in the country in the Class of 2028; four of the top 100 players in the Class of 2029; and five top 100 commitments in the Class of 2030, including Cooper Brozek '30, the third highest recruit. Since the addition of Coach Byrnes to the team, it

is clear that Harvard has been able to rack up some great new members of the team.

Finn Jensen '26 cited an improvement in the team's work ethic as a reason the team has seen such great success. "Our team has become a lot more disciplined, focused, and tight-knit," said Jensen. "I think each year, we've grown more focused on the little things and more locked in. We go to lift 15 minutes early, the locker room is clean... I think when your whole team is focused on executing at the smallest levels of detail, then that goes into the game, where everyone's then also locked in [on] the smallest details."

Pokorny also applauded the strong leadership from the team's captains.

"Sam King '25 is arguably [one of the] top two players in the country, but I think he's the best player in the country. So rallying around him and his energy and commitment to the team is pretty easy," said Pokorny.

King is one of the best lacrosse attackers in college lacrosse. He has the third most goals per game in NCAA DI, and was recently one of 25 players nominated for the Tewaaron Award, which is considered "the Heisman of lacrosse" according to the NCAA website.

Jensen echoed Pokorny's praise and credited a past captain for their success.

"I think over the past few years, we've had really strong leadership from Sam King this year, especially, and Martin Nelson '25, as

well, is one of our captains this year, and then Logan Ip '26 is a junior captain. We had great leadership last year from Andrew O'Berry '24," he said.

"The new goalie we have is a freshman, Graham Stevens '28, who's been super good for us, and playing around him is really nice and easy," said Pokorny.

As a freshman, Stevens has started every game and played the full 60 minutes for 10 of their 12 games.

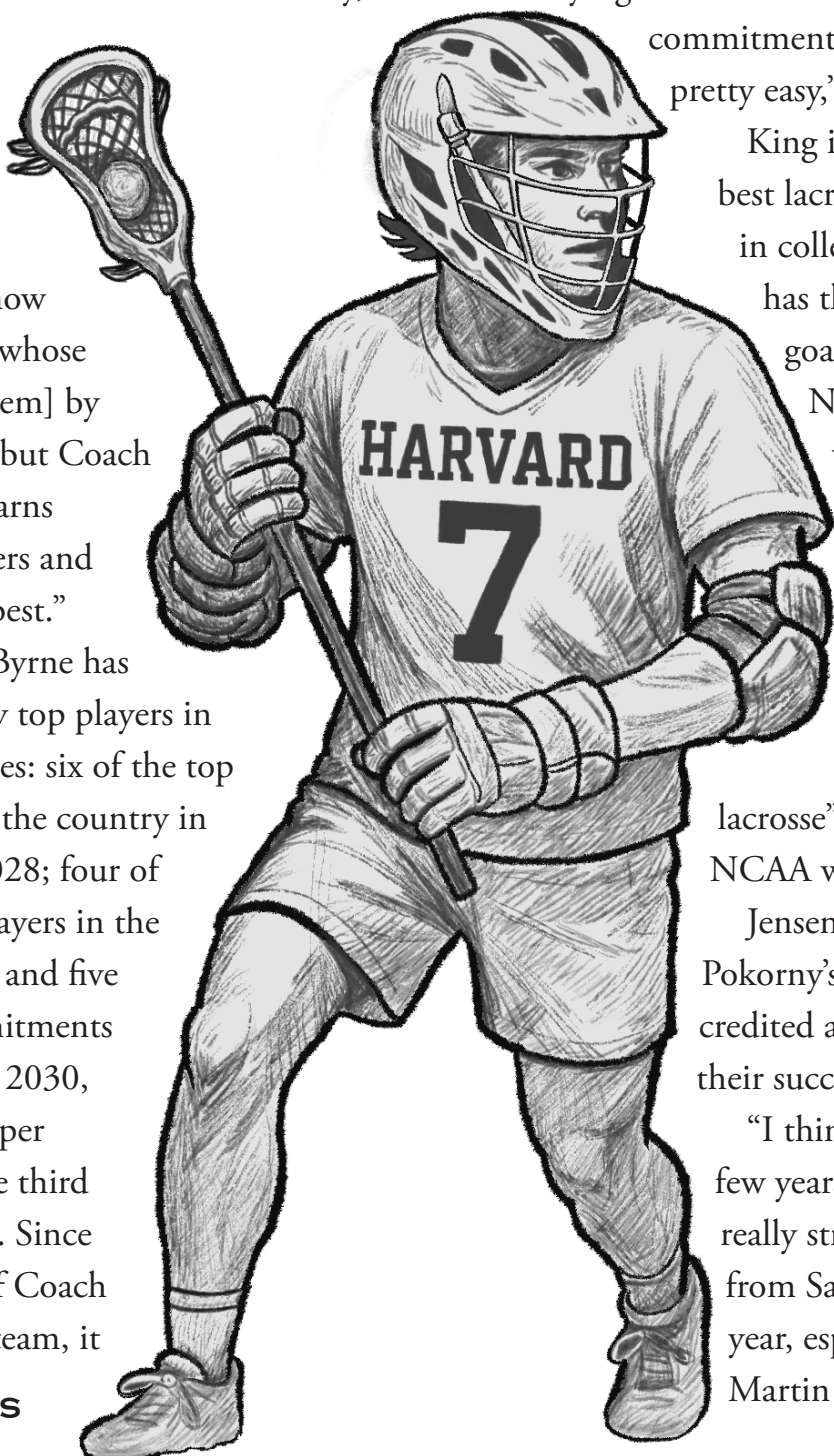
The team is on track to finish their season with an away win at Brown and a victory in the Ivy League Championships. "We have this big game against Brown this weekend that we need to win, and then we'll have the Ivy League Tournament. Hopefully, if we string together some wins there, there'll be no issues," said Jensen.

Besides his desire to win the two trophies, Jensen shared that he hopes the team will look back with pride on their work, regardless of the results. "You don't ultimately know how the ball is going to bounce or how things are going to work out, but [I hope] that everyone is dialed in and locked in," said Jensen. "When the game is over, regardless of the result, no one looks back and says, 'Well, we should have done this.'"

Supporters and fans can watch the team at their upcoming game in Providence against Brown on Saturday, April 26. From there, they will compete in the Ivy League Tournament at the start of May. If chosen by the selection committee, the team would then spend the rest of May in the NCAA tournament.

**KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE ROOTING FOR THE LACROSSE TEAM IN THE IVY LEAGUE AND NCAA FINALS.**

**GRAPHIC BY CARA CRONIN '28**





# The Case for Outdoor Miles

Why I run outside (and why you should too).

BY KATE OLIVER '26

For almost half a year, Massachusetts has been endlessly dreary, wet, and cold.

After this past weekend, it finally feels realistic to hope that the weather has finally turned from winter into a gorgeous spring.

The banks of the Charles River are once again full of students and tourists enjoying the beautiful scenery, and outdoor seating has returned to almost every bar around the Square. In the spirit of fixing our vitamin D deficiency and seasonal depression, now is the perfect time to return to joyful outdoor exercise.

Just being outdoors is a natural antidepressant, as sunlight increases the level of serotonin in our bodies. Specifically, when your retinas are exposed to sunlight, chemical signals are sent to your brain to produce more of this neurotransmitter, which is then diffused throughout the body.

Exercise is another catalyst for serotonin production, as it increases the presence of free tryptophan in the brain. Tryptophan is the chemical precursor of serotonin, so an increased supply makes it easier for the body to produce higher levels of this chemical. Exercising outdoors, therefore, creates the opportunity for two different sources of increased serotonin production, allowing you to reap more benefits.

Sunlight is a free and needed source of vitamin D. An estimated 42% of the U.S. population is vitamin deficient, and as little as five minutes a day in direct sunlight can help maintain healthy levels. When the Ultraviolet B rays from sunlight hit your skin, they provide the energy for vitamin D production by the cholesterol in skin cells. These UVB rays cannot be absorbed by sunlight that passes through windows, so the only way to maintain healthy levels is to spend time outside. With the temperatures warming up, it is the perfect time to swap your 12-3-30 on a MAC treadmill for a speedy walk along the Charles.

Want to take it one step further?

Consider removing your shoes and feeling the grass between your toes to really get in touch with nature. While it may seem a bit strange, walking barefoot strengthens the muscles of your feet and calves to walk on uneven surfaces and decreases stress. Part of the fitness community even believes this type of exercise is the best way to reconnect with the physical activity that kept our ancient ancestors alive. Unlike walking on a treadmill, barefoot walking requires cognitive energy that cannot be found from setting the treadmill to 3 MPH and walking at a 12% incline. Whether you buy into this or not, who would have thought that touching grass could be a good thing beyond when you are deathly hungover?

For anyone new to working out, walking into a packed gym might lead you to spend 30 minutes on the treadmill just trying to figure out what equipment you have the confidence to use. Why not spend that time outside in a low-stakes group setting, getting all the benefits of the outdoors while socializing and moving your body? Enter Harvard On The Move.

Harvard On The Move is a University-wide program dedicated to getting everyone from students to faculty and staff outside for holistic exercise. They offer both walking and running groups

three times a week, meeting at various locations throughout campus to begin their

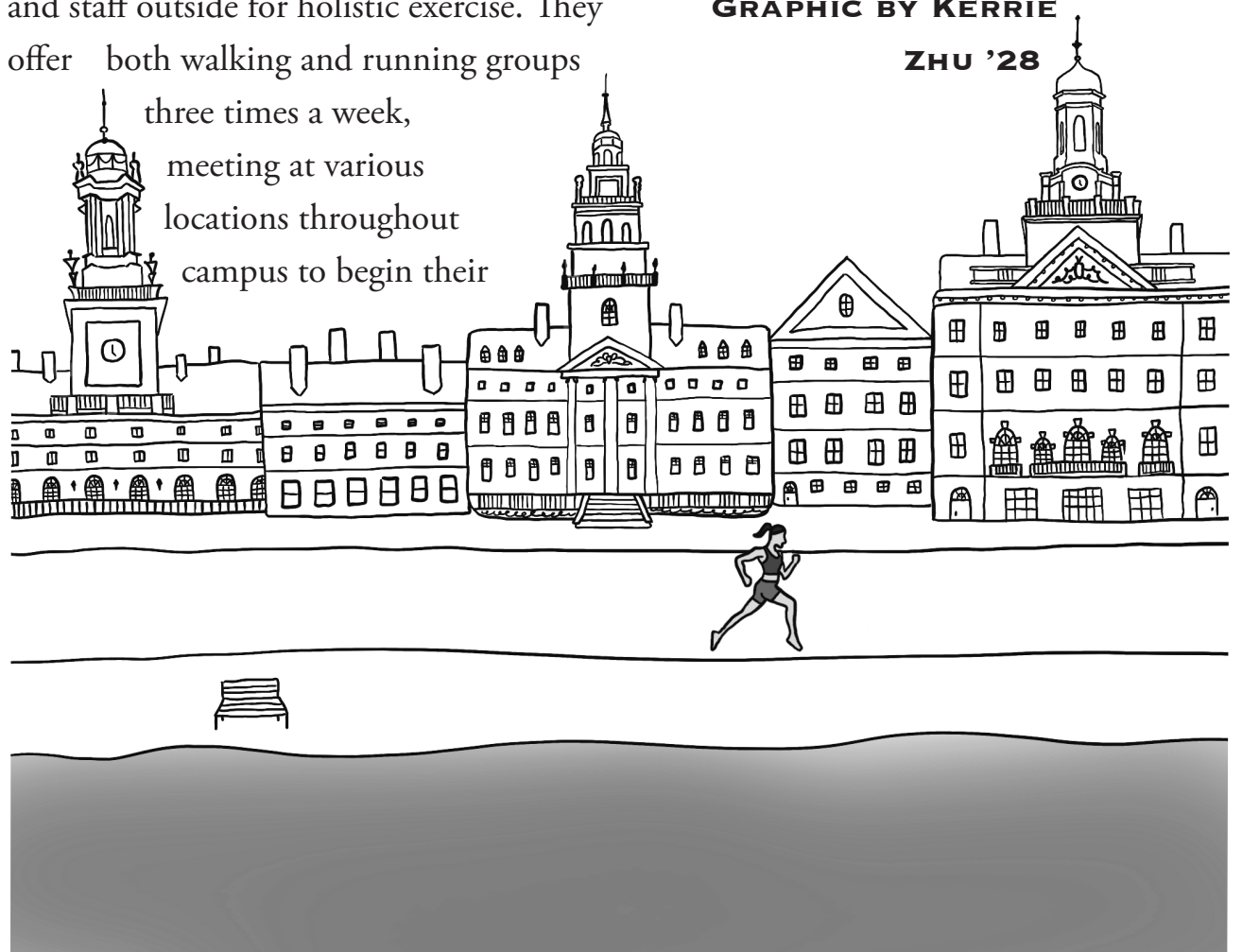
routes. This is the perfect opportunity for anyone who wants to get outdoors for their run and socialize. You may even run into professors like Daniel Lieberman '86 and walk away with a burning desire to read his book, "Exercised: Why Something We Never Evolved to Do Is Healthy and Rewarding."

Walking and running along the Charles River are the best forms of outdoor exercise at Harvard. Strolling along the banks, you are greeted by crew boats on the water, students soaking up the sunset on a picnic blanket, and fellow runners soaking up the beauty of nature. The winding path closely following along the river remains the perfect scenic route. After exclusively running laps around the Square, a jog on the river is truly unbeatable—to me, nothing compares to the loop between the MIT and Harvard bridges. In that spirit, throw on your tennis shoes and walk along the river; it might just surprise you with how much you love it.

**KATE OLIVER '26 (KOLIVER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ALWAYS FINISHES HER RIVER RUNS WITH A DINING HALL DIET COKE.**

**GRAPHIC BY KERRIE**

**ZHU '28**





Katie Merriam Layla Hassanani

COVER ART BY CLARA LAKE '27  
LAYOUT BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27 AND RILEY CULLINAN '27

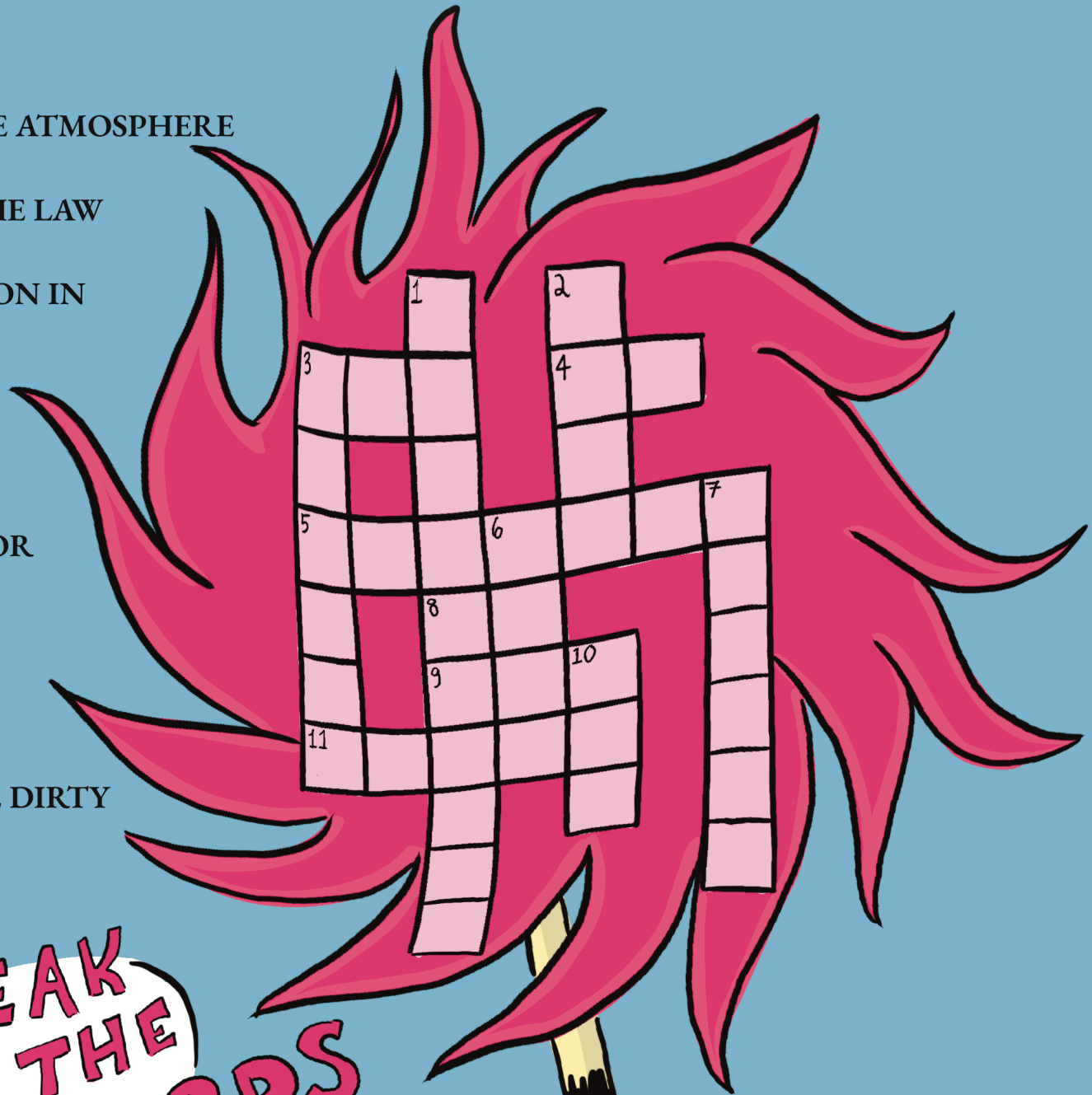
OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE WRITER  
AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES OF THE *INDEPENDENT*

## DOWN

1. EFFECT THAT WARMS THE ATMOSPHERE
2. FINISHED
3. ACTIONS THAT BREAK THE LAW
6. SECTION OF THE BIBLE
7. ADAM AND EVE'S LOCATION IN EDEN
10. SNAKE-LIKE FISH

## ACROSS

3. LIGHTNING MCQUEEN, FOR INSTANCE
4. OFF'S BUDDY
5. TOOK DOWN TITANIC
8. OPPOSITE OF YES
9. GARDEN TOOL
11. THESE STACKS PRODUCE DIRTY ENERGY



I SPEAK  
FOR THE  
CROSSWORDS  
BY FRÉD KLEIN '28



JOIN  
CERCA  
∞



DESIGN BY CLARA LAKE '27

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