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America's Birthday



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

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Harvard Students Urge University to Resist Trump Administration Orders in Open Letter

Following reports of a potential settlement with the Trump administration, Harvard Students for Freedom encourages continued opposition to the federal government.

BY HARVARD INDEPENDENT NEWS STAFF

On July 2, the undergraduate organization Harvard Students for Freedom began gathering online signatures across the University's students on a letter urging Harvard to maintain its opposition to legal and political pressures from the Trump administration. After internally circulating for two days, the letter will start publicly gathering student signatures on July 4.

"What we're trying to do is really a reflection of the broader opposition to what President Trump is doing to America right now," SFF press chair Jordan Schwartz '27 said in a statement to the *Harvard Independent*.

"The vast majority of Harvard students are aligned against the Trump administration's attacks on our University, but that doesn't matter unless all of those voices are heard," he continued.

Founded in April, SFF was created to advocate for student rights following the Trump administration's focus on American higher education. The group has used social media to amplify Harvard affiliates' voices and organized several protests on campus opposing executive orders threatening international student visas.

"Harvard is not Harvard if it is ruled over by the Trump administration," their letter reads. "Any deal with the White House must not involve banning any aspect of the curriculum that President Trump dislikes, firing professors, or punishing students for peaceful free speech. And it certainly must not involve turning over disciplinary records of international students, risking ideological deportation. Doing so would set a dangerous precedent for the entire country."

SFF contends that the University should continue to uphold values like personal and academic freedom, even amid increasing political pressure.

"We understand that as the fight goes on, it gets harder and harder for the Harvard administration to handle the stress," explained SFF co-chair and co-founder James McAffrey '26 to the *Independent*. "This letter was drafted with the goal of demonstrating the entire student body is united behind Harvard to support protecting our freedoms and independence as a university."

Another SFF co-founder and co-chair, Karl Molden '27, emphasized to the *Independent* Harvard's role as a symbol of institutional courage, especially for international students.

"As an international student who co-drafted and signed this letter, I want to signal that many international students support Harvard's battle against the Trump administration. Some of them have signed the letter to demonstrate their support, others have expressed it to us personally, yet are hesitant to put their name under a letter in these difficult times," Molden said. "Many international students come from countries that have experienced authoritarianism in their country's present or recent past. We know that democracy can never be taken for granted."

The sentiment to uphold democratic ideals expressed by international students is one they believe is being upheld by the University's acts of institutional courage. "We know that Harvard's administration doesn't want to cave to Trump," added Schwartz. "But at the same time, we recognize that they're under a lot of pressure, so we're doing everything we can to show them that the students have their backs when they fight for us."

Their efforts come just days after the resignations of the University of Virginia President James E. Ryan and Columbia University President Katrina Armstrong, both of whom stepped down amid pressure from the White House. Following a recent Truth Social post from President Trump alluding to a potential deal with Harvard and internal discussions of a possible settlement, SFF quickly mobilized the student body.

Over 200 students have signed the letter upon release.

"It's so inspiring to me to see so many Harvard students make their voices heard through this letter," SFF co-founder Tova Kaplan '26 said. "The signatories come from every community and corner on our campus."

Kaplan also emphasized notable support for the letter from Jewish students.

"As a Jewish student, it is particularly powerful to see so many Jewish signatories. Back in April, over 100 Jewish Harvard students signed a different statement criticizing the Trump administration's freezing of funding. Harvard Jewish students have been clear all along: President Trump's efforts are not about combating the very real and serious issue of antisemitism," Kaplan said. "President Trump is not seeking Jewish safety: he is seeking power and control over Harvard."

The SFF letter and the letter signed by 100 Jewish students are not the only messages sent by Harvard affiliates concerning recent developments from the Trump Administration. On June 9, more than 12,000 Harvard alumni signed an amicus brief in support of Harvard's fight against the Trump administration. "The Government's escalating attacks—and this case—are about much more than funding," they wrote. "The Government's end goal is to narrow our freedoms to learn, teach, think, and act, and to claim for itself the right to dictate who may enjoy those freedoms."

"As alumni, we attest that Harvard's true greatness resides in the ways we share these values and exercise these freedoms, which have long shaped how we understand and connect with one another, and how we anchor our continuing efforts to make a difference in service to the world." Alumni signatories include comedian Conan O'Brien '85 and Massachusetts governor Maura Healey '92.

On June 23, Crimson Courage—a growing nonpartisan alumni group—sent a letter to University President Alan Garber '76, the Harvard Alumni Association, and the Deans of all Harvard schools.

The group's letter cited Garber's June 6 Alumni Day speech: "Harvard is a strong institution, but our strength doesn't derive from our physical resources or our financial resources. It comes from our people. If we work together effectively, there's no limit to what we can achieve as an institution," Garber said.

The 400,000 Harvard alumni are among those people... We alumni will stand strong—alongside you—against any attempt to extort or deny our Constitutional rights or our integrity. We have your back, and we trust that you have our backs as well," Crimson Courage echoed.

"Unless people speak up and speak out en masse, not much is going to change," Schwartz said. "Movements become credible when they gain support from more than just the hyper-engaged partisans—that's the type of movement we're trying to build."

As the University pursues legal action to challenge federal policies, SFF says it remains committed to holding Harvard accountable for defending academic freedom and protecting international students.

"Today, on July 4th, I believe in the promise of Harvard, just as I believe in the promise of America," Kaplan said. "Harvard University educated many of the Founding Fathers who created our nation almost 250 years ago and wrote our Constitution—and now Harvard gets to play a role in defending those same liberties."

The law is on our side. The truth is on our side. Even the ever-elusive court of public opinion is on our side. And so long as we maintain our moral clarity, history too will be on our side," the SFF letter concludes.

Harvard has not yet responded to the open letter or commented publicly on the initiative. The letter and signature form remain publicly available here.



WRITTEN BY NEWS STAFF MEMBERS OF
THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT

PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN
WASSERBERGER '27

The Big Beautiful Bill: A Warning to Harvard?

Trump's recent legislation promises growth while delivering deep cuts to American healthcare, student aid, and universities—with Harvard hit first.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

 In July 3, the Republican-dominated House of Representatives passed President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill" in a 218-214 vote. The extensive legislative package has cemented 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act while pulling federal funding from healthcare, social programs, and higher education.

Passing the OBBB is a major step towards the Trump administration's broader agenda of expansionary fiscal policy, immigration control, and increased defense spending. For many observers, the bill amounts to a sustained financial assault on American universities—especially Harvard. The bill is projected to remove \$349 billion in educational funding, compounding nearly \$3 billion already stripped from Harvard through terminated medical research grants and cancelled federal contracts. Beyond elite institutions, the OBBB jeopardizes access to loan programs used by millions of college students nationwide.

The bill narrowly passed in the Senate after significant internal Republican dissent, forcing Vice President JD Vance to cast the tie-breaking vote. The bill's enactment followed weeks of political gridlock among Republicans in the House and Senate who challenged its terms and demanded greater concessions in exchange for their support. Key to the deliberations were concerns regarding the increasing national budget deficit, projected to amass \$3.3 trillion over the next decade.

A core part of the legislation is the permanent extension of national tax rates and brackets, first introduced during President Trump's first term in the tax cuts. The bill is projected to reduce total federal tax revenue by \$4 trillion between 2025 and 2034 on a conventional basis. When factoring in predicted economic growth, revenue loss falls to \$3.1 trillion—a 22% offset. America's gross domestic product is expected to rise by 1.2% over the same period, but this growth would recoup just 19% of the tax cuts' total cost.

Although businesses saw immediate gains in Trump's first term, the cuts failed to pay for themselves and substantially increased the federal deficit.

The OBBB further proposes increased government spending, with a large portion redirected to the U.S. immigration detention system. The new law immediately allocates \$45 billion to the Department of Homeland Security to continue immigration detention efforts. As a result, the change boosts Immigration and Customs Enforcement's annual detention budget by roughly \$11.25 billion, with allocated funds intended specifically for family detentions.

Democrats have overwhelmingly opposed the bill, criticizing tax cuts favoring the wealthy in conjunction with significant reductions to social welfare programs, notably Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Medicaid was created in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty to provide healthcare coverage to low-income Americans. Today, it insures over 71 million people, including children, elderly adults, and people with disabilities. Under the OBBB, that safety net could shrink dramatically. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that roughly 12 million

people could lose coverage due to new eligibility rules. Starting in December 2026, adults 19 to 55 who are considered "able-bodied" and do not have dependents or disabilities will be required to work, volunteer, or attend school for at least 80 hours per month to keep their benefits.

Also established in 1964 under Johnson, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the nation's largest anti-hunger initiative, providing monthly food assistance to more than 42.1 million Americans. Starting in 2028, states will be required to shoulder more of the financial burden to ensure food security. Full federal funding will be available only to those with a payment error rate below 6%—the percentage of SNAP payments that are overpaid or underpaid due to administrative mistakes, not fraud. Similar to its Medicaid provision, the OBBB raises the work requirement age for "able-bodied" adults without dependents from 54 to 64.

As for elite universities, the bill increases endowment tax rates for wealthy private institutions like Harvard from 1.4% to as high as 8%. This follows months of legal disputes between the University and the federal government over existing funding cuts, including \$2.6 billion of 350 Harvard Medical School research grants, halting studies on cancer, HIV, Parkinson's, and pandemic preparedness. The OBBB seals these restrictions—and Trump's rhetoric against research institutions—into law. "I am considering taking three billion dollars of Grant Money away from a very antisemitic Harvard, and giving it to TRADE SCHOOLS all across our land," Trump wrote on Truth Social in May, justifying his administration's targeting of elite universities.

Beyond financial limitations for universities at large, the OBBB affects overall access to higher education by extending repayment timelines and removing deferment options for economic hardship—changes that place a heavier burden on low-income borrowers. The bill also replaces GRAD PLUS loans, which previously allowed graduate and professional students to borrow up to the full cost of attendance, with fixed annual borrowing caps—\$50,000 for professional degrees and \$20,500 for other graduate programs, aligning with lifetime limits already in place for federal student aid. Moreover, it limits Parent PLUS loans to \$20,000 per year ending the current policy that allowed borrowing beyond covered aid.

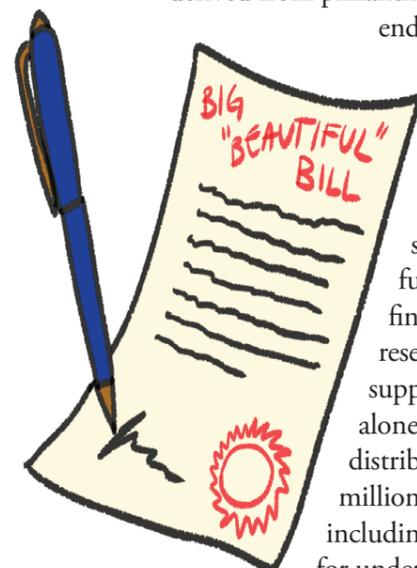
Federal grant and aid calculations also face changes: eligibility for Pell grants will be restricted to students enrolled at least half-time, and applicants whose Student Aid Index exceeds double the maximum grant amount will be excluded. Instead of basing federal aid on a college's actual cost of attendance, the OBBB uses a standardized "national median program cost." The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators has noted that this shift will disproportionately affect students at higher-cost private and flagship public universities, such as Harvard, where institutional aid may not be able to counteract the loss of federal support.

The OBBB arrives amid growing concerns over academic censorship and ideological scrutiny, issues in which Harvard has become a central figure. Supporters argue the measures address inefficiencies and accountability in education, while critics say

they may disproportionately affect institutions that have voiced opposition to the administration's policies. Many in the academic community see the administration's stance towards Harvard as a larger strategy to redefine elite education by undermining its institutional power.

Harvard concluded fiscal year 2024 with a \$45 million operating surplus on \$6.5 billion in revenue, but that margin—less than 1%—was narrower than in prior years, reflecting a 9% increase in expenses. Over half of that spending went toward compensation, including new faculty hires and rising healthcare costs. Investments in infrastructure, AI capabilities, and campus expansion in Allston also contributed to a spending surge. Meanwhile, Harvard's \$53.2 billion endowment remains the University's financial backbone, providing \$2.4—or 37%—of operating revenue through endowment distributions. Still, 80% of those funds are restricted, limiting their flexibility in the face of federal cutbacks.

The OBBB's increase on endowment tax would amount to hundreds of millions in additional costs for Harvard. With nearly half of its revenue derived from philanthropy and



endowment returns,

Harvard's financial model depends on maintaining those streams to support core functions—financial aid, research, and faculty support. In FY2024 alone, the University distributed over \$749 million in financial aid, including \$250 million for undergraduates. That aid is directly threatened by reduced federal funding and new limitations to loan programs and grant eligibility.

Compounding these financial pressures is the administration's rhetoric. Since returning to office, President Trump has repeatedly singled out Harvard as emblematic of what he views as academic failure. Posting on Truth Social, "Harvard is a JOKE, teaches Hate and Stupidity, and should no longer receive Federal Funds."

The first provisions of the legislation, including tax exemption on tips and overtime, go into effect during the 2025 tax year and will expire in 2028. Most American universities begin their fiscal year on July 1, meaning these changes could influence budget planning and financial aid policy ahead of the 2025-2026 academic year.

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GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

“This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land”

Harvard College Mexican Americans and Mexico City residents offer their opinions on recent U.S. ICE raids.

BY JOCELYNE DELGADO '28

Mexico City residents are frustrated as a result of years of redevelopment in the area. Animosity quickly turned into actionable fury on July 4. Mexico City civilians took to the streets, protesting the sizable influx of foreigners—mostly American—who have relocated and made the area their home. “Gentrification is colonization!” shouted Mexican civilians.

Mexican American Harvard College students studying abroad in Mexico City witness a dissonance now being brought into the national spotlight: seeing Mexican families face discrimination in America, while Americans are freely settling in Mexico.

Adelina Escamilla-Salomon '27 is one of five Mexican American Harvard College students currently studying Spanish abroad in Mexico City.

“It is such a deep contradiction, the way our current government is treating Mexican people, immigrant people, those who have built our country on their back with their blood, sweat and tears,” Escamilla-Salomon said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. “Meanwhile, I’m in this place [Mexico City], where Americans are coming constantly...living here and ripping the benefits of all this work once again.”

Migration from the United States to Mexico City increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as Americans working remotely sought lower living costs and more ideal weather. Locals, however, have come to view the influx of American expatriates as a threat to their way of life.

According to the 2023 National Survey of Demographic Dynamics, out of the 1.2 million migrants in Mexico City, about 70% of them are Americans. Most of those U.S. citizens who migrate to Mexico City and work remotely often receive pay in American dollars, contributing further to gentrification.

As newcomers continue to flood into areas of Mexico City—particularly high-end, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods like Roma and Condesa—rents have skyrocketed. Long-time residents have been priced out of their homes, contributing to the loss of family businesses and displacement from communities their families have been part of for generations.

Some Mexican civilians, however, are now negatively reacting against migrants—the ones that accelerate gentrification and displace local working-class families. The 12 Harvard students taking part in summer programming in Mexico City are watching the conflict unfold.

The summer program: “SPAN S-64 Study Abroad in Mexico: Encountering Mexico - Public Art in the Contemporary City,” is one of the many programs sponsored by the College that brings undergraduates across the North and Central American border. Others include the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies

Summer Internship program. Both the study abroad and internship programs include cultural immersion experiences where students interact closely with the country and its citizens.

Escamilla-Salomon suggested this migration of Americans into Mexico City is a “hypocritical situation,” especially when juxtaposed with the harsh treatment Mexican migrants face in the United States.

In recent months, Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportations have been at an all-time high, with an increasing number of immigration raids in predominantly Hispanic communities, including in Los Angeles and San Antonio. Since the start of FY 2025, 204,297 individuals have been booked into ICE detention centers.

“Living in Mexico, [I noticed that] there is always someone in your family, a neighbor, or someone close to you, that lives in the United States,” Carmen Fajardo, a Mexican citizen, told the *Independent*. “And I think that the narrative that used to exist [in Mexico] was that if you went to the United States, you would have a better life. It was seen as a way that your life and the lives of your family members left behind would be better, but recently, due to the existing anti-immigrant discourse in the United States, this narrative in Mexico is starting to change.”

At 23%, Mexicans account for the largest percentage of immigrants to the United States. Fajardo’s statement speaks to a broader reality: immigration does not always lead to an easier or better life, but it does often come with a financial advantage. In 2024 alone, the U.S. sent almost \$70 million in remittances to Mexico toward housing, education, healthcare, and everyday expenses.

This income is earned all while Mexican immigrants are actively contributing to the American economy. In 2023, 67% of the Mexican population in the United States were part of the labor force, playing crucial roles in construction and agriculture.

“Here in Mexico, everyone is very conscious of the difficulties that migrants working in the United States face,” Fajardo continued. “Those first few years are not easy and are filled with difficulties, which I think is a discussion often lost in the U.S. Instead, the dominating discourse there is

usually that

immigrants steal jobs and don’t pay taxes.”

Mexican Americans across the United States have not taken ICE raids lightly, with more than 40 cities hosting anti-ICE protests.

“When I first heard about the ICE raids happening in the U.S., I was in shock and utter disbelief,” shared a Mexican American Harvard student studying in Mexico City with the *Independent* who requested anonymity. “I could hardly believe the news coverage. I was watching on my phone screen, and it was hard to comprehend that such a thing was even allowed to happen... I felt guilty for not being there in person to protest or advocate against these ICE raids.”

At least 565 anti-ICE protesters have been arrested across the U.S. since January, indicating the sheer intensity of the risk that many are willing to take to defend immigrant rights. Fajardo says that ICE is “taking advantage of their power” by “violating the rights of Mexican Americans” which will leave a lasting impact on Mexican families and communities.

There are notable divergences in migration patterns between the United States and Mexico. While many American citizens have relocated to Mexico to take advantage of affordable housing, Mexican citizens have migrated to the U.S. due to safety concerns and economic challenges. Both groups of migrants are shaped by different motivations and challenges.

As gentrification in Mexico City continues to displace locals and ICE raids in the U.S. endure in disrupting families and communities, it seems there is a new reality: the forced movement of Mexicans is inescapable on both sides of the border.

“As someone who feels kind of in between these two worlds [Mexico and the United States] I think it always feels like my responsibility to really try to uplift my community on both sides of the border... to bring people together to really create a place where we can all be heard, seen and valued,” Escamilla-Salomon shared.

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GRAPHIC BY SARA KUMAR '27



Not Your Typical Internship

A glimpse into a Harvard student's summer farming experience in France.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

Throughout Harvard College's annual academic calendar, one thing rarely leaves an undergraduate's mind: summer internships. As the spring semester comes to an end, students anxiously confer with each other about their suitably prestigious occupations, often citing consulting in New York, public policy in Washington, D.C., or start-ups in Silicon Valley. However, not everyone follows Harvard's "typical" pre-professional route: Sylvie Wurmser '27 is cultivating a one-of-a-kind summer experience by working on organic farms in France.

A Social Studies and Environmental Science and Public Policy concentrator, Wurmser has long been interested in the intersection of food and the environment. "It's got these incredible implications for the individual—what you eat, how that affects you, how that affects your social spending, and how you perceive the world," Wurmser said in an interview with the *Independent*.

After taking GOV 1318: "The Great Food Transformation"—a course offered at Harvard—during her sophomore spring, Wurmser wanted to apply her studies outside of the classroom. "I wanted to just get some more tangible experience, because I felt like [food research] was this big, nebulous field," she explained. "I wanted to find a way to get hands-on farm experience, to explore a new place, get out of New Jersey, but also to improve my language skills."

With this goal in mind, she discovered Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms through a friend.

According to the organization's mission statement, WWOOF "links visitors with organic farmers, promotes an educational and cultural exchange, and builds a global community conscious of ecological farming practices." Since its founding in 1971, WWOOF has connected over 100,000 volunteers with 12,000 farmers across 130 countries—and Wurmser is now one of them.

WWOOF is made up of distinct national organizations, all of which are members of the Federation of WWOOF which facilitates the constant exchange of ideas and supports worldwide program development. Each member nation is managed by its own team. For countries without an established WWOOF branch, the FoWO will usually sponsor any interested independent hosts under its global umbrella.

Volunteers—also known as "WWOOFers"—agree to work on organic farms in their chosen destination for four to six hours per day. In exchange, they receive a horticultural and educational experience, a room to sleep in, and home-cooked meals. There are no offered financial incentives between hosts and WWOOFers. The respective host simply gains a worker on their farm while instructing a potential consumer on the nuances of organic farming practices.

Since beginning in June, Wurmser has already worked on multiple farms across France, starting with two and a half weeks on a family fruit farm in Normandy. "During the week, I picked fruit for five hours a day, or I did a lot of weeding," Wurmser said.

On weekends, Wurmser's host family made sure she was immersed in the local culture. "They would drive me to different cities, give me money, pay for my food," Wurmser recounted. "I accompanied them to all the markets that they

went to, and I would walk around and talk to the different farmers."

Beyond the work and French landscape, Wurmser expressed the impact her host farmer had on her, ultimately setting the tone for her next few months in the country.

"He and I worked side by side, and we would just talk for hours about why he started this farm, what it all meant to him, the importance of providing for his family," she said. "He couldn't imagine living any other way. He didn't want to raise his daughter where she didn't feel like a connection to the earth."

"He saw the world in such a deeply distinct way—such a unique way from [how] I see the world, coming from New Jersey and then



Cambridge and all of these really urban places where we're so removed from our food," Wurmser continued.

The differences in eating habits between urban America and rural Normandy, regardless of income, were likewise striking. "I feel [they have] this kind of connection between the Earth—their intentionality [with their consumption]," she explained.

In America and France, farm incomes are often variable and subject to wide disparities depending on the size of the farm. French newspaper "Le Monde" reported in 2024 that "farming appears to be the most unequal of professions in France today." Wurmser noted that despite living modestly, her Norman hosts were nonetheless focused on healthy eating. "In the U.S., these class distinctions manifest themselves through inequality in food," she said. "At least in this one small community, in this one family, that was just not the case... Status did not dictate health outcomes or their relationship to the earth."

In early June, Wurmser began making Camembert—a special brie-like cheese native to Normandy—after making a spontaneous request during one of her weekend outings.

"I met the second farmer at one of the markets. I was just talking to the different farmers, and one of them was a Camembert farmer," she explained. "I was like, 'Hey, I have a funny question. Do you need an extra hand on your

farm? And could I live with you? And could you feed me for, like, five days or something?' And he laughed, and he said, 'Why not?'"

Much like her experience at the first farm, Wurmser expressed how daily life brought conversations filled with personal reflections and life lessons.

"It's interesting to listen to him," she said. "He also felt passionately about climate change, so much so that he said he's never let an American live with him ever before in his life, because he doesn't believe in planes, and the fact that we have to fly over is something that he so deeply objects [to]."

This was one of Wurmser's shortest stays—she worked at the farm for only about five days.

"It was only me and the farmer working, and we worked long and hard days—more than 12 hours of work a day," she said.

"We milked the cows at 6:30 a.m., then rotated pastures, and made hay... We also made Camembert, which was fun but [very] time-intensive. I [ladled] the fresh curdled cream into the molds to become Camembert—this is a famous part of the process of Camembert, which we call moulé à la louche for only the most authentic camemberts."

Wurmser then moved on to her third farm in Lorraine for a larger-scale market gardening experience. "[I] loved the other workers with me, and also there was a lake that I biked to swim every day," Wurmser added in a statement to the *Independent*.

Continuing her journey across the French countryside, Wurmser began working at a direct-to-consumer vegetable farm in Bordeaux, a city in southwestern France. "Farm 4 was outside of Bordeaux, and market vegetable gardening recently converted from wine production [because] climate change was making it just untenable to stay in wine," Wurmser wrote.

Now, about eight weeks into the summer, Wurmser is on her fifth farm—another community produce farm in Provence, France, where she is staying with Seventh-day Adventists who are passionate about bringing fresh food to their community.

As the WWOOF mission suggests, the organic farmers remain at the core of Wurmser's summer. "I've been very lucky [because of] the farmers that I've met and just the kindness everyone has shown me," Wurmser said. "So it's only thanks to the kindness of all of these farmers and their hospitality that I've been able to have the amazing summer I have."

Though she has only a month left in the program, Wurmser feels that both her studies and worldview have been permanently enriched. "I feel I just have a new perspective on what food systems even mean and the role that food plays in society," she said.

"It has indescribably informed my academic studies by giving me this entire new framework of looking at the social implications of food and the climate implications of food."

KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MIGHT BE WWOOFING NEXT SUMMER.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SYLVIE WURMSER '27

FORUM

What We Do With Our Fear

What stories of repression and resilience can teach us about surviving political despair.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

Throughout high school, I spent much of my summers in the Honduran countryside.

Swaying in a hammock beneath mango trees, I'd lose myself in history books. I was always especially interested in those exploring the rise and collapse of authoritarian regimes through a humanitarian lens. I was drawn to the lived experiences of people who had survived unimaginable times. What I learned from reading these stories was not just how democracies collapse—but how people endure. That endurance, I've come to realize, often begins not with grand defiance, but with fear, and the quiet refusal to be broken by it.

These were stories that forced you to pause. My thoughts drifted from the bloodshed that followed the rise of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, to the civilian disappearances that plagued Argentina's military dictatorships, to the testimonies of Syrian refugees forced into exile following the 2011 uprising against the Assad regime. With each chronicle, it felt as though my mind stepped into worlds steeped in grief, fear, and an unshakable sense of uncertainty.

Every account demanded a kind of raw vulnerability to understand fully. Siblings identifying their parents' dismembered remains through government records. Protesters gunned down, their deaths reduced to numbers in the next day's headlines. Women, starved and violated, their suffering ended only by death. Each abuse left me asking: when does power begin to strip people of their humanity so completely, and how is it allowed to continue?

I distinctly remember the feeling that would wash over me after finishing a page: a profound sense of relief at being shielded from the unspeakable tragedies I had just read about. I'm safe, I'd think. But almost immediately, guilt followed. The only reason I was not living the realities those books described—and was instead able to hide behind them—was sheer luck. These stories'

fears felt so distant from my life in the United States that I could hardly imagine myself in their place. But for many in this country, fear doesn't arrive through history books—it arrives through flashing sirens, the presence of armed officers, and laws that determine whose bodies are protected and whose are deemed expendable. For millions living in the United States, state violence is not abstract. It is felt, not theorized. Fear shows up in the quiet calculations of how not to be seen.

I began to wonder how people have survived such perils throughout history. War and conflict have accompanied humanity since the very beginning. Suffering at the hands of power is a story as old as time. This is what British philosopher Thomas Hobbes meant when he described life in a "state of nature" as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Even knowing this, I still hoped I would never have to feel what it's like to be silenced by my own government—or punished for simply questioning the status quo.

But lately, I've begun to question the certainty of that hope. What once felt like a distant threat now inches closer to home. In recent years, concerns about democratic backsliding in the United States have grown more pressing. Under the renewed Trump administration, this possibility feels even more real. The use of immigration policy to detain or deport dissenting voices mirrors Cold War-era crackdowns, when the government surveilled, restricted, or denied entry to international scholars for perceived ideological threats. Censorship and mass layoffs of federal employees scarily echo the early years of Pinochet's regime in Chile, when political purges targeted government agencies and public universities alike. European regimes followed similar patterns: under Francisco Franco and Benito Mussolini, universities were purged, curricula rewritten, and intellectual life brought under state control. What may look like bureaucratic restructuring is, in practice, a targeted dismantling of systems

meant to hold a government accountable.

In a recent Fresh Air interview with NPR, Harvard Professor of Government Steven Levitsky—director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and co-author of "How Democracies Die"—argued that the Trump administration has already inflicted serious damage on American democracy. "We are no longer living in a democratic regime," he declared.

The United States has never been perfect, even under Democratic leadership. But the current administration's efforts to silence opposition and dismantle key institutions have brought a growing sense of dread.

In recent months, thousands of migrants have been detained in brutal conditions—including tent camps deep in the Florida Everglades, where heat and squalor seem designed not just to detain, but to dehumanize. International students and dissenting faculty have been arrested or deported. Universities have lost critical federal funding under the guise of fighting "ideological bias." Entire agencies—like the Department of Education and USAID—have faced sweeping funding cuts and staff reductions, dismantling the very infrastructure meant to protect civil rights and public accountability.



That same chill I once felt while reading about repression in faraway places now visits me in real time every day I see the news headlines. It's hard not to connect the dots. The censorship, the scapegoating, the erosion of civil rights—all of it feels eerily familiar. The stories I once read in the abstract have started to echo around me.

Naturally, this stirs fear. The idea of witnessing a democratic backslide, one that spirals beyond the point of no return, no longer feels impossible. It feels real.

It's hard to move forward when the ground beneath us feels like it's shifting so quickly. But I've started returning to something else I found in those stories—something buried beneath the horror. There was always a thread of resistance. A quiet defiance that refused to let despair win.

I've found that people survive by holding onto hope—the fragile promise of a future that still feels worth fighting for.

In “Why We Fight,” political economist Chris Blattman, who studies the causes of war and peace, outlines five core drivers of war, one of which is intangible or ideological motivation. He recounts how, during peasant revolts in El Salvador, many joined rebel groups not for strategy or gain, but simply in pursuit of justice. That has stayed with me. I've come to believe that what gives people the strength to resist isn't just necessity—it's a trust in something greater. A vision of what could be. The unwavering hope that, one day, these intangible ideals can become reality.

The stories I read were filled with unimaginable suffering—but also with moments of quiet, fierce resistance. A mother in Argentina who returned each week to the Plaza De Mayo, carrying a photograph of her disappeared son, long after

hope had faded. A dissident in East Germany who smuggled banned books across borders, not to start a revolution, but to preserve a truth the state was trying to erase.

These weren't grand gestures or headline-making acts. They were private, persistent refusals to stay silent and to let the machinery of power define what was real. They were everyday people choosing dignity, even when the world denied it to them.

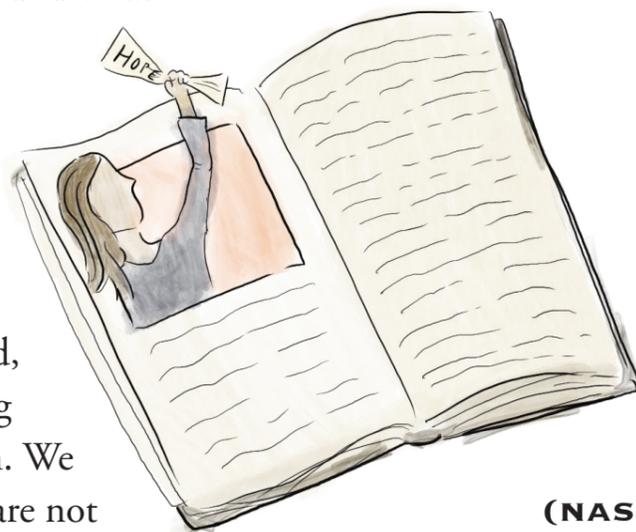


If history has taught me anything, it's that hope—when nurtured and shared—can outlast oppression. It can rebuild what fear tries to destroy. Fear, if left unchecked, paralyzes. It clouds judgment. It isolates. But when named, examined, and shared, it becomes something we can work through. We begin to see that we are not the first to feel powerless. And in that, we inherit a quiet strength.

So, how do we live through moments like these? Maybe not with certainty. But perhaps by learning to sit with fear, without letting it calcify into numbness. By letting ourselves feel panic, but not be ruled by it. By turning off the news when it becomes noise, but turning it back on when it matters. By reaching for those we love—not just to name what's wrong, but to remind ourselves of what we're still willing to fight for.

Resistance doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes, it whispers. In the books we read. In the questions we keep asking. In the refusal to let cruelty become routine. The people in those stories I read didn't survive because they were fearless. They survived because they chose, again and again, not to let fear swallow who they were.

I think back to the summers I spent beneath the mango trees, when I read those stories to make sense of a past I thought I was separate from. I know better today. The patterns are here, reshaped but familiar. And yet, resistance still takes shape: in students staging sit-ins outside Harvard Hall, in undocumented activists risking everything to be seen, in faculty building networks to protect each other when no one else will. We are not living in history, but we are not outside of it either. And the question now, the one I keep coming back to, is how we carry forward what those before us refused to let perish.



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GRAPHICS BY CLARA LAKE '27

What Makes Harvard, Harvard

A reminder of the good parts of Harvard.

BY TYLER DANG '28

Growing up, Harvard felt like an abstract idea. Raised in the South, where 90% of each graduating class from my high school went to the same few SEC schools, I had little exposure to the Ivies beyond TV references. For me, Andy Bernard was the quintessential Cornellian, while Harvey Specter embodied Harvard. These schools—especially ours—felt more like cultural symbols than real places, their names hinting at intimidating intellect and elitism derived from exorbitant wealth.

When I got accepted, I was, unsurprisingly, shocked. I hadn't expected my application to be read, let alone selected. Alongside the pride and excitement, though, came a twinge of embarrassment. Harvard's prestige also makes it a lightning rod for criticism. To many of my peers, I was deviating from the mold to attend the "wokest of the woke," a place where I'd surely be "politically indoctrinated."

This past April, Harvard publicly refused to comply with demands from the Trump administration to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. Not long after, a friend from high school reached out—unsolicited—to list Harvard's many alleged flaws, hoping to prove that the school was, in fact, "bad."

Harvard has indeed faced growing criticism in recent months. And amid external threats and political scrutiny, it's necessary to remember what the school still does exceptionally well and all the good that Harvard provides both to the broader community and to us as individuals.

A Variety of Opportunities

Whenever any teachers or family friends would ask what my long-term career plans were, I could never answer. My time in high school was great in informing me of the difference between a colon and a semicolon or how to solve a multivariate equation, but I had no experience in any profession that excited me. However, I knew that attending Harvard would give me the chance to truly explore different ideas and find what interests me.

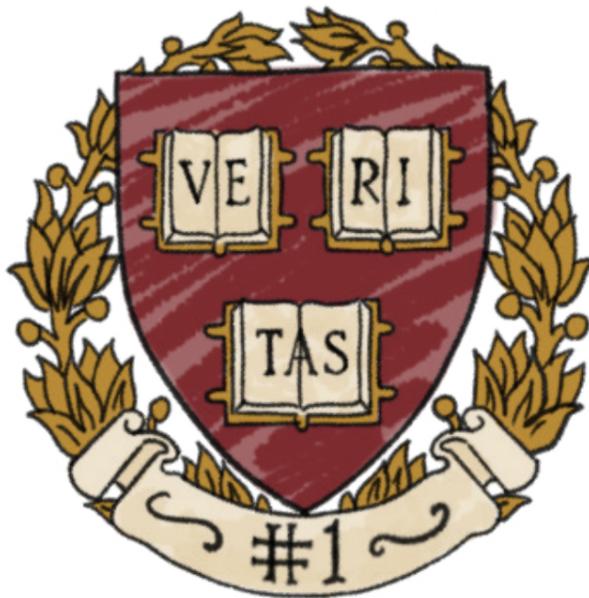
With 50 undergraduate concentrations and 49 secondaries, Harvard offers an extraordinary academic range. The over 3,700 courses available each year enable genuine intellectual exploration and academic growth. The Gen-Ed and distributional requirements ensure that every student gains exposure to a breadth of knowledge, whether they're learning about the history of firearms in the U.S. or examining apocalyptic themes in global religions.

But Harvard's opportunities extend even further than the classroom.

The College hosts more than 400 student organizations, ranging from civic service and

professional development to niche interests. If a student wants to join an organization that is not one of the 400 listed organizations, they have the resources and support from the College to create said organization. It's not uncommon to go from attending a Forum with the Secretary of Transportation at the Institute of Politics to playing quadball in the same evening. This diversity of extracurriculars allows students to tailor their Harvard experience—and often uncover interests they didn't even know they had.

While some students arrive with clear paths in mind, others show up as wide-eyed first-years with no idea of what they want to do. What sets Harvard apart is the sheer breadth of pre-



professional organizations that allow for meaningful exploration. Students can dive into finance, law, journalism, entrepreneurship—and not just through exposure, but through real, hands-on experience. Not to mention the Mignone Center for Career Success, which further prepares students to enter the working-world by facilitating internships and workshops for professional development.

When I first stepped on campus, I felt behind. I hadn't researched student organizations, and I had no idea what consultants did, much less how a student-run consulting group worked. But over time, I found the groups and academic paths that genuinely interest me.

Diversity in Experiences

Before college, my exposure to international perspectives was limited. My high school included students who had immigrated from Mexico or Central America, and a few first-generation Asian Americans. But on my first night at Harvard, I met two students from the UK and one from Pakistan—something that would've been unimaginable back home.

This diversity is one of Harvard's most underrated strengths. Over the past four years, an average of 26.4% of all admitted students have been international, representing more than 140 countries. Each of these students brings unique experiences

and perspectives that enrich the community.

The result is a campus culture that encourages curiosity and dismantles assumptions. Harvard urges students to ask questions, to seek out what they don't know, and to leave any preconceived notions at the gates. In a time of rising nationalism and a declining international reputation, this kind of exposure is not just valuable—it's essential. Tomorrow's leaders need to understand differences before they make decisions that affect others.

Harvard's diversity doesn't end with international students. Domestic diversity—across regions, class, race, and ideology—also fuels important conversations and broadens perspectives. Talking with my classmates about gap years in North Macedonia or training for the Olympics has helped me realize how much more there is to learn—and has inspired me to ask better questions about my own assumptions and ambitions, pushing my own curiosity past the status-quo of the South.

The current Presidential administration hopes to eliminate the enrollment of international students, which would severely diminish this diversity. Reports show the direct contribution that international students have on the economy, but beyond this loss, the Trump administration threatens the chance for future generations to better understand cultural differences. I would have never met some of my closest friends on campus. I would have never been able to become engrossed in how their experiences were unique from mine. I would have never developed such a perception of belonging to the world, not just the U.S.

Harvard is not perfect. No institution is. But amid criticism—some warranted, some not—it's important to remember the many ways it shapes lives for the better. The opportunities for growth, the diversity of thought, and the chance to learn from those entirely unlike yourself are all parts of what make Harvard good. To me, that's something worth fighting for.

TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS BORN AND RAISED IN MEMPHIS, TN.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

POLITICAL CARTOON BY RILEY CULLINAN '27,
REPRESENTING ONLY THE VIEWS OF THE ARTIST.





PROUD
FATHER

Hello.

WORLD'S
BEST
BOSS

Concepts

1. Declare peace in the Middle East
2. Bomb Iran
3. Preach isolationism to
4. Send more weapons to Israel
5. Golf

Sanders Theatre: Down With Dark Academia

The *Independent's* resident cultural theorist explains why a popular Internet aesthetic should remain in the shadows.

BY JULES SANDERS '28

As someone who until very recently spent a great deal of time scrolling through TikTok, I know a fair amount about aesthetic subcultures. Cottagecore? I've watched more than a few homemade ricotta tutorials. Tomato Summer? Lamented its rise; celebrated its collapse. Office siren? Got called that by *Indy Copy Editor* Megan Legault '28.

Suffice it to say, I've spent countless hours analyzing microtrends among the chronically online, mentally filing them away in spaces of my mind I ought to use more productively—I could use what precious limited space memory permits, for instance, to house my prerehearsed stance on the whole Fourth of July antipasto debate, or perhaps my assessment of the authenticity of the 24-karat-gold Labubu.

For the concerned few: I'm currently on a TikTok cleanse after misreading an Italian street sign that read "Torre Vanga" as "Tori Vega."

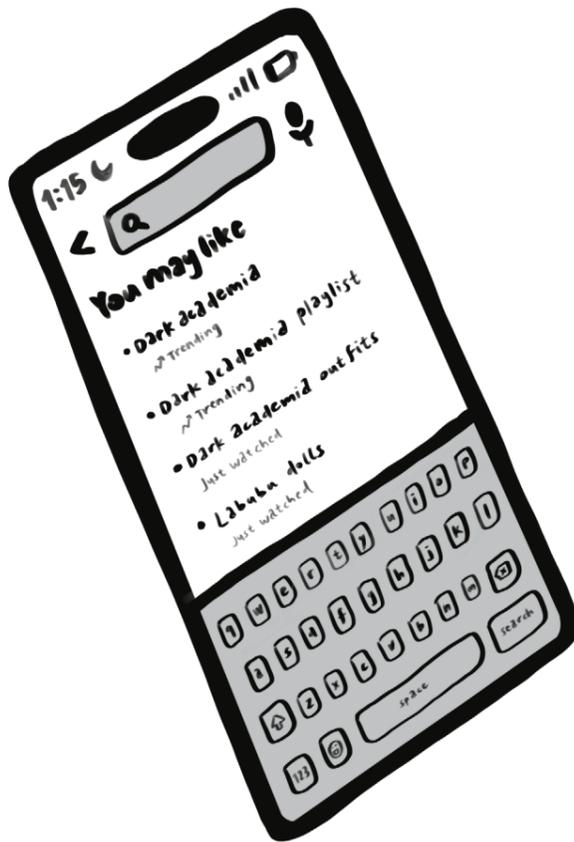
Anyway, there's one 2020s Internet subculture I've always detested—and, unfortunately, it happens to be one of the most popular: dark academia. Aestheticized melancholy, contemplative gallery strolls, an obsession with Collegiate Gothic architecture, 19th-century English literature, and tweed—it's all an exhausting spectacle to watch at Harvard.

For starters, at least visually, Harvard is just not the place to live out your "The Picture of Dorian Gray" fantasies. Aside from Swartz Hall, Harvard doesn't boast much in the way of true Collegiate Gothic. Annenberg Hall comes close, but your average dark academia enthusiast would probably hiss at the use of red brick before retreating to their Byron anthology. I could see dark academics thriving more among Yale or Princeton's grayer and pointier structures, but can you really imagine a circle of pea coats debating Tennyson in the Canaday courtyard? Have you seen the Cabot Science Library? I'd hardly call its olive-green and bright orange chairs or fluorescent lighting emblematic of dark academia.

A lot of my armchair theorizing about Internet aesthetics hinges on one central dogma: the idea that the aesthetics we choose for ourselves betray a corresponding emptiness within us. Those who romanticize 2020, for instance, are often those who were too young to have meaningfully engaged with the Internet culture of that time—a culture that served as a nursery for a lot of the content we see today: the cleaving of mainstream and alternative TikTok, the surging rise of cringe comedy, and

the ascendancy of Gen Z to its current position at the helm of the Internet.

Dark academia, in all its brooding affection for "high literature," doesn't own up to the second part of its name. There's definitely a romanticization of gloomy novels and poetry, but too often it seems like dark academics tend to invest more in appearances than in substance. You can kind of tell that dark academia prioritizes visuals over content by looking up "dark academia ideas" on Google Images and seeing how most of the results are about outfits that fit the aesthetic and not book recommendations.



Further, their canon skews white, Western, and pre-contemporary, eschewing much of the diversity and theoretical richness that define serious literary study today. Ironically, although dark academia emerged in ideologically progressive circles (mid-2010s Tumblr before its popularization by 2020 TikTok), its reading list looks a lot like the ones that conservatives are pushing for in secondary and higher education today.

The discordance in theory and application does not stop there. There's a dual romanticization at play with dark academia—one for the literary crucible of Regency and Victorian England and another for the mid-20th-century academic culture that exalted works of that time above all else. If anything, dark academia is a sort of pop-academia, craving an old-money, elite-college luster well-documented by "Dead Poets Society" and "The Secret History." The aesthetic sells because it provides a veneer of high-minded

intellectualism over a body of works that might have their own individual merits but are anything but representative of academic literary study when taken as a collective and exclusive canon. Want to make a dark academic really freak out? Tell them that their vibe is really giving "The Tortured Poets Department," and you'll see this dissonance play out firsthand.

Even the literary gloom they celebrate lacks catharsis. We read Greek tragedy for relief—the knowledge that the sufferings of Oedipus or Medea will not befall us. The dark academic is consumed by dreary literature with no such relief. This constructed baseline of negativity and the repeated training of the mind on the drab alone denies the dark academic the ability to understand the cathartic aspect of much of the literature that they read. The unabated consumption of gloom does not free the dark academic from worry that they will meet the same fate as the characters they envision but shackles them to an ever-increasing burden of dread.

And like most Internet aesthetics that escape the iPhone (or, in the case of *Indy Associate Arts Editor* Raina Wang '28, the Samsung), dark academia suffers from a gaudy artificiality. Adopting an aesthetic, yes, can give one some sense of community, but this comes with the forfeiture of one's individuality. Rather than presenting themselves as individuals, dark academics present themselves as dark academics. A shared aesthetic is, by definition, inherently not individual. And as with so much of dark academia, the performance feels dated—not in the nostalgic way they likely intend, but in a way that suggests an oddly retrograde desire for sameness.

Communitarianism in 2025—at a time when anybody with Wi-Fi can access millions of combinations of ideas and works by which to define themselves, retreating into a pre-packaged identity feels more like resignation than rebellion. Earlier, I wrote that I know a lot about Internet aesthetics—but I would never, and will never, adopt one.

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(JULESSANDERS@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) ONCE DELETED
TIKTOK FOR THREE MONTHS IN
2024 AND WAS REALLY PROUD OF
HIMSELF.**

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28

Thoughts from New Quincy: Why Higher Education Is Failing Students

Harvard's blanket suspicion of generative AI isn't safeguarding learning—it's throttling it, and leaving tomorrow's graduates unprepared for the world they're about to enter.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

During the last week on campus in Sever Hall, I spotted a fresh sheet of printer paper taped beside the door of a freshman expository-writing class. In bold Helvetica, it warned: “No ChatGPT, no Claude, no Copilot—ALL work must be entirely your own.” The sign wasn't just a classroom rule; it was proof that Harvard's current stance on AI is one of outright denial, ignoring the ways AI already shapes the professional and educational worlds its students are entering.

Step outside Sever's doorway, and the campus already hums with Silicon co-authors. Students lean on large-language models to untangle Kant; iLab startups build GPT wrappers for lab research; faculty test-drive AI Sandboxes for next semester.

Beyond the Yard, the hum grows louder still: a Bain & Company survey of 600 U.S. executives, released in May, found 95% of American firms now use generative AI somewhere in their workflow—an increase of 12% in just one year. McKinsey's global tally, published four months earlier, puts AI adoption at 78% across 24 industries—a jump of 55% in only eighteen months. Yet inside the classroom, policy runs in reverse.

Since August 2023, the Office of Undergraduate Education has offered faculty three sample AI policies—encouraging, mixed, or outright ban. In theory, instructors choose their modality. In practice, most professors copy and paste the nuclear option: “We specifically forbid the use of ChatGPT or any other generative AI tools at all stages of the work process... Violations will be treated as academic misconduct.” The result: a de facto blanket ban dressed

up as faculty discretion—an institutional reflex that already feels as dated as a “No Calculators” sticker from the 1970s.

The gap between rule and reality is vast. A February survey from the Higher Education Policy Institute found that 92% of students now use AI in some form, and 88% have used it for assessed work, nearly double last year's rate.

An internal Harvard poll of 326 undergraduates, published on arXiv, found that almost 90% of students



AI

already use generative AI, with a quarter saying they sometimes use it instead of office hours. A blanket ban, then, functions less as a moral stance than as an inequality amplifier: students who follow instructions abstain; those who don't, benefit. Academic integrity becomes a tax on honesty.

Administrators defend zero-tolerance policies on cognitive grounds, arguing that overuse will erode student skills. They're partially right. In June, an MIT Media Lab study had 54 volunteers write SAT-style essays while wearing EEG caps. Those using ChatGPT showed the weakest neural connectivity across prefrontal and parietal regions

and produced the least original prose. When the tool was removed, those same students “consistently under-performed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels,” a drift the researchers called “metacognitive laziness.” In other words, it can dull your brain, and the dulling sticks.

But Harvard's policy does not prevent that risk—it intensifies it. When AI goes underground, it also evades critique. Students copy AI output directly because no one is teaching them how to question a probabilistic sentence generator. Faculty, lacking access to prompt histories, cannot trace hallucinations or stylistic flattening and detection software is not a fix. UK universities report accuracy as low as 22% in adversarial tests, and Turnitin's own marketing team admits to high false-positive rates. The result is a game of academic whack-a-mole where everyone loses track of actual learning.

We've seen this movie before. In the 1970s, schools attempted calculator bans for algebra exams, fearing the death of mental arithmetic. A decade later, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publicly endorsed integrating calculators, arguing they enhanced student understanding and problem-solving without undermining basic arithmetic skills—a shift widely reported at the time.

The calculator didn't make math easy; it expanded the frontier of what could be asked in a fifty-minute class by offloading routine work and letting students delve deeper, prompting more creative thinking. Today, that expansion is institutionalized: the College Board's 2025 AP policy not only permits graphing calculators on Calculus exams—it requires them. **FORUM | 13**

Nobody's banning them. Instead, we've kept mental arithmetic drills while pivoting toward Laplace transforms, because the machine handles the grunt work.

The deeper flaw in Harvard's stance lies in what it forecloses. Generative AI isn't just a plagiarism engine; it's a cognitive exoskeleton. Used well, it frees the mind for higher-order thinking—just as the calculator once did. Before Texas Instruments shrank transistors onto plastic, students spent superfluous hours on long division and by-hand integration.

The problem was never the tool; it was the pedagogy. Word processors went through the same rite of passage. Then search engines. Then Wikipedia. Across disciplines, the pattern holds: in STEM labs, AI parses data sets and designs molecules; in humanities seminars, it drafts translations and surfaces archival sources—yet the pedagogical puzzle is identical. Generative AI is just the latest guest star in a decades-long debate over introducing new instruments into the classroom.

Peer institutions are already pushing forward. Stanford's Teaching Commons advises faculty to permit AI use "whenever internet sources are otherwise allowed," provided students attach a full prompt log as an appendix. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development—no techno-utopian think tank—urges governments to embed AI literacy across all education levels so graduates can thrive in data-saturated labor markets.

Even within Harvard, contradictions abound. The University touts its AI Sandbox, which gives faculty secure access to GPT-4, Claude, and PaLM for course design. But only instructors—never students—get to experiment. The message to most undergraduates is bizarre: play with the future, but only after you've graduated—and certainly not in my class.

Meanwhile, industry has moved beyond the "whether" phase to the "how much." At Carlyle Group, 90% of the firm's 2,300 employees now use ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot, cutting due diligence research from weeks to hours. Whether in law, pharma, consulting, or advertising, the adoption curve will look the same. Students trained in AI-free classrooms will soon join teams where AI prompting is already a second syntax.

Harvard can close the gap—but only by shifting focus from prohibition to institutional practice.

Start with transparency. Require a prompt appendix, just as bibliographies are required, and mandate that students submit assignments with version history enabled—for example, sharing Google Docs or Word files that show tracked changes and edit histories. This would allow instructors to review not just the final product, but the full process: the original prompts or queries used, human edits, fact-checks, and rewrites along the way.

By making the evolution of the work visible, educators can assess how students engaged with AI tools, where they intervened, and how they refined the output, shifting focus from mere outcomes to intellectual process.

Embed "adversarial reading" drills in the core curriculum, where students must fact-check or rebut AI-generated outlines line by line, learning to detect statistical nonsense. Equip English-language learners with AI grammar coaches—but require them to annotate every suggestion, so support never slips into ghostwriting. Publish departmental rubrics that assess critical engagement with AI as a skill, not a sin.

None of these steps lowers standards. They raise them, making intelligible the intellectual work that current rules push into untraceable chatbot DMs.

If Harvard insists on a moral frame, it should consider equity. Blanket bans harm the very students the University pledges to support: working students who rely on summarization tools to manage heavy reading loads, international students who use AI for idiomatic clarity, and neurodivergent students who brainstorm more effectively when given a starting point. A policy that treats every prompt as cheating denies them legally available accessibility technology while rewarding classmates who quietly break the rules.

Harvard loves to remind donors that it pioneered the case study method and the open-courseware revolution—both initially met with hand-wringing before becoming brand-defining. In the early 1980s, critics warned that word processors would erase handwriting skills. By the mid-1990s, they were ubiquitous across higher education.

Generative AI now sits at the same

hinge. If the nation's richest university clings to digital abstinence, it will fail its students twice: first by withholding a literacy they urgently need, and again by failing to teach the judgment that makes that literacy meaningful.

The sheet of printer paper outside that classroom may survive the semester. But the world it imagines—where thinking happens in walled gardens, untouched by predictive text—already belongs to the past. Harvard can keep policing the gate, or it can train its students to navigate the wider landscape with discernment.

Zooming out, Harvard's choice is less of an Ivy League quirk than a bellwether for U.S. higher education. Public flagships like Arizona State University are already rolling out campus-wide AI training modules, while Miami Dade College is embedding prompt-engineering basics into its general-education core. If only elite enclaves teach AI literacy, the digital divide widens into a chasm: a Harvard or Stanford grad joins McKinsey fluent in prompt chains, while a state-school peer is relegated to low-leverage tasks the model has already automated.

So what exactly does an AI-literate graduate look like? Someone who can frame a question in machine-readable language; iterate and debug prompts; audit outputs for bias, hallucination, and missing citations; and know when an answer warrants human review. They track provenance like a chemist logs reagents, and they understand the social stakes of algorithmic error. These are the competencies admissions offices love to call "future-proof"—and they're the very skills Harvard's sweeping prohibition leaves off the syllabus.

LUKE WAGNER '26 (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) THINKS HARVARD SHOULD CHANGE THEIR AI POLICY AND START ADOPTING IT ACROSS ALL UNDERGRADUATE COURSES.

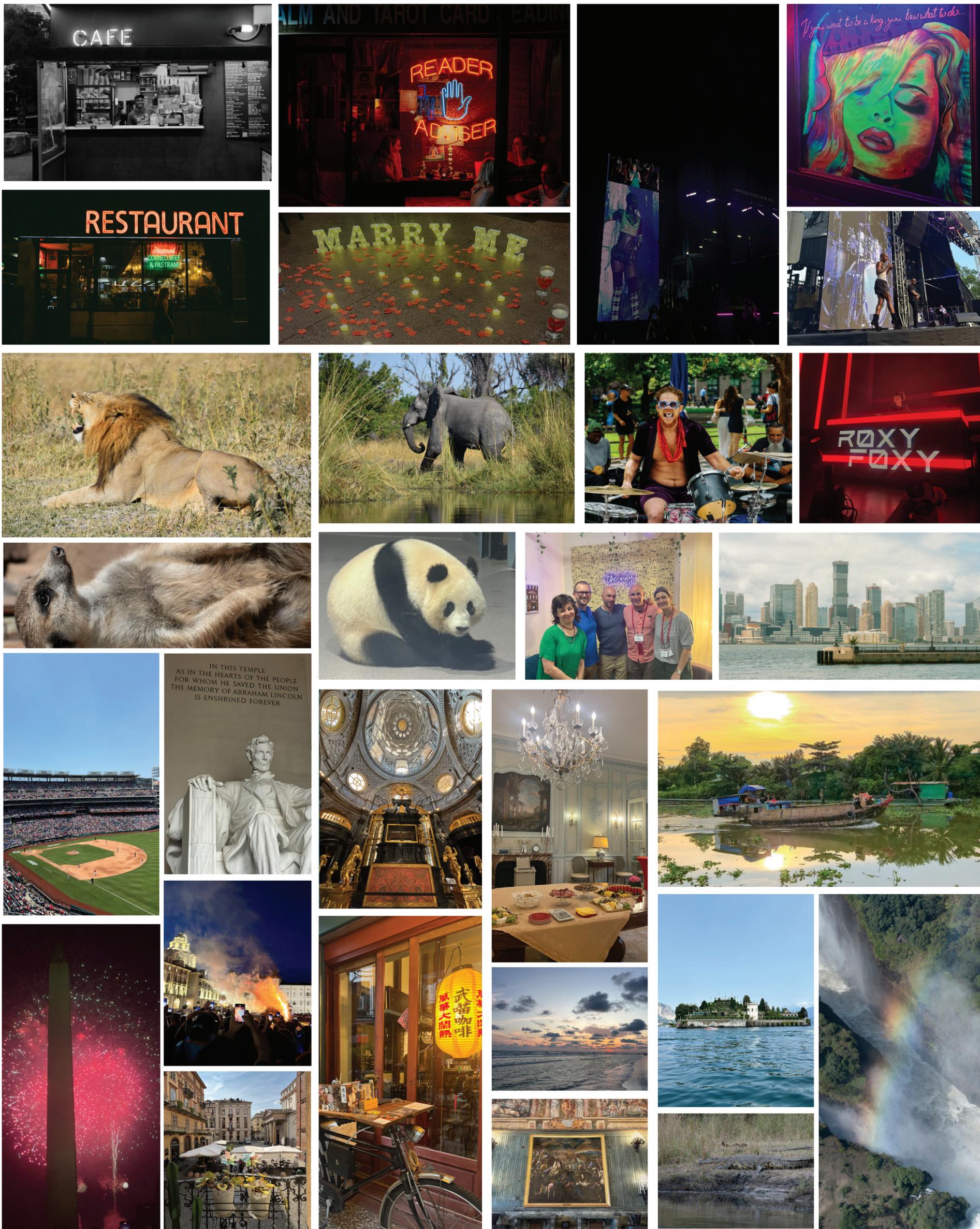
GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28

ARTS

Our Summer

Scenes from summer 2025 so far, courtesy of Indy staff members.

BY HARVARD INDEPENDENT STAFF



What's on Broadway?

Theatrical madness in “The Picture of Dorian Gray” and “Oh, Mary!”

BY MIA WILCOX '28

Author's note: spoilers ahead!

The Picture of Dorian Gray:

One of the first Saturdays back from school, my mom told me that she'd acquired high-demand matinee tickets to the Tony Award-winning show, “The Picture of Dorian Gray.” At first, I would have preferred shopping in SoHo or a walk in the park, but I opted for the cultural experience once I learned that Sarah Snook was starring—flashback to my short-lived “Succession” obsession—in the play written and directed by Kip Williams, based on Oscar Wilde's novel of the same name.

I read Wilde's classic years ago. The tale follows a young Dorian Gray, praised for his beauty. During Dorian's youthful prime, the artist Basil Hallward paints his portrait. But as Dorian ages and his soul becomes corrupted by vanity, he loses sight of right and wrong—yet somehow remains physically flawless. Instead, it is Hallward's portrait that bears the marks of his decay. Dorian becomes haunted by this decaying image, but remains steadfast in his vanity until he is sent into a spiral of madness, isolation, and violence, resulting in his demise. While I'm sure I appreciated it at the time, the story did not really stick with me beyond the premise of introspective moral decay.

We took our seats on the right section of the orchestra, and the lights dimmed. But when the curtain rose, I was confused, to say the least. Snook sat alone onstage in a tailored pantsuit, surrounded by a stagehand camera crew projecting different angles of her face onto large screens hanging from the ceiling—not your classic period piece. There was no set beyond a grey brick wall in the background.

The “script” was simply an audible narration; in a smooth, flat voice, she began speaking Wilde's florid words. The sound of her voice, accompanied by a minimal setup, was hardly distinguishable from an audiobook. In fact, as her voice filled the theater, I felt my eyes become heavy and began nodding off despite myself.

Thankfully, I was awoken by the jostling of stagehands as Snook slowly transitioned from the simple narrator to the opening protagonists of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton.

As a lifelong fan of Broadway classics—“The Lion King,” “Wicked,” and other timeless productions—I was skeptical of a one-woman show featuring cameras and screens in place of costumes and sets. However, Snook's genius transformation into more than two dozen characters in the ensuing 90 minutes fostered an unbelievable immersion into the world of Dorian Gray, allowing the cameras and ever-present stagehands to fade away amidst the drama.

Snook's ability to shift into so many characters so seamlessly using hardly more than slight voice inflection, facial expressions, and change in demeanor was astonishing. Despite her presence as the only one on stage, she created a world full of characters, only adding to the fragmented sense of identity Wilde's words invoke.

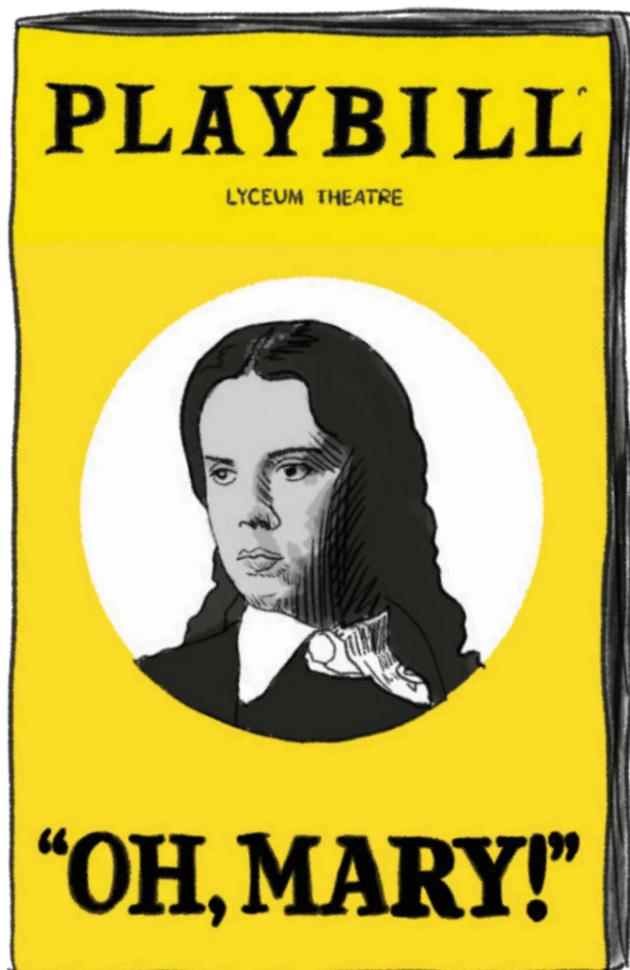
As Dorian Gray descends into madness and loses his sense of self, Snook confronts the camera in front of her. Her face is grotesquely close—every wrinkle and bead of sweat projected onto the massive screen above her. It was close to the point of discomfort. And yet, I found it impossible to look away.

Beyond the simple projections, as Dorian's sense of self becomes distorted and he loses his conscience along with any moral compass, the screenplay employs iPhone camera filters to warp the projections of Snook's face, demonstrating the effects of vanity and warped self-perception in a visual manner.

In this way, Williams's adaptation of a timeless story became a commentary on a digital age consumed by cameras, filters, and falsity. These digital features of the play resonated with the effects of social media on comparison and self-perception, as filters and Facetune become the basis for comparison.

Snook's emotional commitment surpasses simple technical skill. She not only inhabits each character with intensity, but the psychological weight she brings to Dorian's madness as he is consumed by guilt and vanity additionally creates a sense of internal descent in the audience—it feels as if you too are spiraling as the projections warp. It also serves as a cautionary tale to the audience on the dominating presence of screens in our everyday lives, warning against the societally prolific vanity of generations dominated by social media, and the horrors they may result in. In doing so, “The Picture of Dorian Gray” creates a world all the more consuming.

For two hours, Snook was in conversation and conflict with herself. This play was not only an artistic masterpiece but a strikingly relevant portrayal of a centuries-old story, deserving of the Tony Snook was awarded.



Oh, Mary!:

Meanwhile, down the block at the Lyceum Theater, Cole Escola pranced on stage, cross-dressed as one unstable and miserable Mary Todd Lincoln in his Tony Award-winning performance of “Oh, Mary!,” directed by Sam Pinkleton.

Though the dark humor and vulgarity are comparable to preceding classics like the timeless “The Book of Mormon,” I have not seen anything quite like Cole Escola's unhinged interpretation of an all-American story—the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, played by Conrad Ricamora.

Mary is portrayed as a drunken, hysterical madwoman, suffocated by an infantilizing Lincoln. Lincoln, in turn, is portrayed as an angry, closeted satyromaniac, unraveling under the pressure of the Civil War and sexually abusing his servants, with no interest in his wife.

As Mary wrestles with Lincoln for her bottle of whisky throughout the show, he places her in sophisticated painting and acting classes in an attempt to keep her at bay and fulfills a false promise of allowing her to perform in a cabaret.

John Wilkes Booth, played by James Scully, is her acting coach—a failed actor himself—and a love interest for the bored and lonely Mary. In a twist, he turns out to be Lincoln's secret lover.

The play has an ultimately subversive ending for Mary, in which she is the true killer of her despised husband. She frames Booth and escapes with one of Lincoln's abused servants to live out her lifelong dream of being a cabaret star, culminating in a final, glorious rendition of “Copacabana.” She perseveres, rising above her subordinate condition as a despised wife and widow to become an independent star, even if she remains within her own delusional fantasy.

Escola plays Mary like a walking train wreck—their genius dialogue was witty, cutting, and always walking the line between hilarious and horrifying. The crowd (myself included) was laughing out loud the entirety of the show. Like “Book of Mormon,” it is probably not a show you want to see with your dad and grandpa (which I unfortunately did for both), but it is the unapologetic vulgarity of Escola's screenplay that makes it so effective.

The plays share a common theme of emotional spiral, but where “The Picture of Dorian Gray” reads as a moral parable of vanity and introspection, “Oh, Mary!” combines history, gender, and theatrical excess that renders identity, spectacle, and satire as a subversive mechanism. Together, the two shows act as foils: one interrogates identity through introspection and solitude, and the other through spectacle and chaos.

Both productions use gender-blending as a theatrical device to expose how unstable identity really is—Snook's fluid transitions between male and female roles create a surreal detachment, while Escola's drag performance turns gender itself into satire and spectacle. In the case of Snook's rendition of Dorian Gray, her fluid and ever-changing role, sometimes male, sometimes female, enhances the sense of fractured identity that is so thematically central. Meanwhile, Escola's cross-dressed performance of Mary offers a historical critique by presenting a caricatured version of the shunned hysterical woman.

Beyond their plots, both “Oh, Mary!” and “The Picture of Dorian Gray” are examples of the broader implications of Broadway's evolution. Rather than sticking to their sources, these shows use technology and vulgarity as theatrical tools of modern storytelling.

While “The Picture of Dorian Gray” is no longer playing, “Oh, Mary!” remains on sale through Jan. 6, 2026 running at the Lyceum Theater with Tituss Burgess starring as Mary through Aug. 2, and Jinkx Monsoon starring through Sept. 28.

MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) NOW KNOWS WHO REALLY KILLED LINCOLN.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

“Superman” Review: The New Punk Rock

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's the best superhero movie I've seen in years.

BY RYAN IRVING '27

James Gunn did it. In October 2022, after directing the beloved “Guardians of the Galaxy” trilogy as well as an onslaught of other successful comic-book projects, Gunn took on the role of co-CEO of DC Studios. Responsible for launching an entirely new cinematic universe—the DCU—amidst studio struggles, Gunn made the high stakes decision to begin this new line of DC movies with a hope-filled Superman story.

I was nervous as I walked into the theatre opening night on July 11. Time and time again, Superman on the big screen has never really felt right to me. Not because the character isn't deserving of a cinematic appearance, but because since the 1978 version of the film, his good-heartedness and love for humanity have been effectively captured for audiences to see. While previous portrayals by such directors as Zack Snyder and actors like Henry Cavill are certainly worthy of high praise, depictions of Superman snapping necks or destroying populated cities paint the character as a violent and destructive force, not the warm, gentle figure to whom we ought to aspire. Further contributing to my nerves, the success of this film would dictate whether the studio could continue producing projects with the beloved characters of the DC universe following a series of disappointing releases.

Little did I know, my nerves would quickly be put to ease.

In short, Gunn's “Superman” drops audiences three years into his time as the iconic hero. Lex Luthor, canonical villainous billionaire hellbent on destroying Superman, does everything in his power to take the hero down, including inciting a foreign military conflict and the subsequent tarnishing of Superman's reputation. Joined by the Justice Gang—a group of superheroes including Mr. Terrific, Hawk Girl, and Guy Gardner—Superman fights against Luthor's forces and protects the people of Earth, all the while taking care of a superpowered

foster dog donning a red cape.

To start, I would go as far as to say David Corenswet was born to play the role of Superman. Trained at Juilliard, the 32-year-old actor disappears into the role of Clark Kent/Superman. He brings the physicality and presence of an incomprehensibly powerful being while simultaneously conveying a warmth and vulnerability that reflects not only the character's boundless love for humanity but also his innate desire to be a part of it.

While Corenswet soars in this role, it's the strength of the ensemble that makes this movie particularly special. Rachel Brosnahan's Lois Lane, journalist for the major Metropolis newspaper “The Daily Planet” and Superman's love interest, possesses a self-determination and individual purpose distinct from her relationship with the titular character. Still, her chemistry with Corenswet is off-the-charts, shining through politically-charged arguments, witty workplace banter, and vulnerable emotional moments. Nicholas Hoult's Lex Luthor embodies a pure unadulterated hatred for Superman in every moment on screen, capturing a sense of evil that defines his performance as an iconic villain. Krypto, a CGI dog with a red cape and superpowers, is arguably the most genius inclusion, tastefully bringing light-heartedness and comedy to each scene.

The magic of these actors in capturing their comic-book counterparts is only made stronger with set and costume design that looks as though it was ripped out of the comic books. At “The Daily Planet,” where Kent and Lane work as journalists, natural light illuminates the open office, shining brightly on journalists who hustle to capture stories in a universe with constant fantastical chaos. Whether in the vibrant city of Metropolis or the gloomy “pocket universe” where Luthor hides, the crew composes Superman's bright blue and red suit to pop in every scene.

Of course, like the character,

“Superman” is not without weaknesses. Visual effects occasionally appear slightly unfinished or misrendered, whether in the opening flight scene or in climactic battles. Scene changes sometimes feel abrupt and awkward, changing dramatically in tone and leaving the audience questioning the amount of time that has passed from scene to scene. While this film's use of humor is notably strong, comedic dialogue falls flat at times, unnaturally placed in narrative when it does not feel as though a character cracks a witty one-liner. For example, Mr. Terrific suddenly appears to tell Superman to “quit messing around!” almost immediately after one of the most violent fight sequences of the movie—a choice seemingly intended to break the tension created from the violence that instead takes away from the authenticity of the moment.

Further, for a film meant to launch an entire cinematic universe, Gunn's risk-taking certainly veers from the safe route. Gunn leans into an ill-explored narrative alteration in Superman's family origin—that Superman was sent to conquer humanity—with major implications for how audiences interpret his character. Superman's first depiction is not of him soaring through the sky or triumphantly saving civilians, but rather of him crashing down after losing his first fight, bloodied and beaten. The film's narrative is paced at lightning speed, simultaneously fitting several conflicts, multiple character introductions, and subtle explanations of off-screen character development in under 2 hours. Additionally, Gunn tells a Superman story while establishing a new group of other superheroes—the “Justice Gang”—to allude to a broader universe.

Yet, these risks work. Gunn's choice regarding Superman's family history serves to create a more complex character, accentuating the importance of Superman's intentional choice to love and protect. His choice to occasionally weaken Superman serves to

develop a relatable hero, who shares—in the capacity allotted to a supernatural hero—weakness and vulnerability with the rest of humanity. Although I would have preferred another 20 minutes with these characters, the movie’s pacing manages to feel like a roller coaster ride that seamlessly includes insightful, drawn-out scenes, including a near 10 minute debate on the ethics of Superman interfering in foreign affairs. It’s a roller coaster ride you don’t want to end. Juggling the simultaneous development of many characters, Gunn makes each one shine and hold a distinct purpose behind their relationship with Superman.

The movie’s risks don’t necessarily end with its filmmaking practices, though. Gunn faced backlash from audiences after referring to “Superman” as the story of “an immigrant that came from other places,” seemingly making a statement on a particularly charged contemporary political issue. Furthermore, a central conflict of the film exists between the fictional Middle-Eastern nations of Boravia and Jarhanpur. With Boravia—supported by Luthor—invading the poorer and seemingly defenseless Jarhanpur, some believe the conflict to be a metaphor for Israel and Gaza, with Superman’s intervention in the fictional conflict being a direct moral statement on the war.

While certainly a valid interpretation, I see this film also as a celebration of human goodness, as opposed to an allegorical statement on our current political climate. In their most desperate moments, the people of Jarhanpur raise the flag of the Superman symbol exemplifying the universal hope one can offer by striving to work for peace. Though he comes from another planet, Superman’s true strength is expressly defined by his humanity,

demonstrating the universal strength one can find in accepting others despite their differences. Many of Superman’s controversies, to me, are what serve to best define the character and his ability to transcend as an implicit model for humanity.

All of this is to say that I thoroughly enjoyed this movie and could not be more excited for the future of the DCU. This is the modern Superman I have been waiting to see on-screen my entire life—powerful but gentle, confident but vulnerable, fantastical but grounded. A relatable contradictory hero.

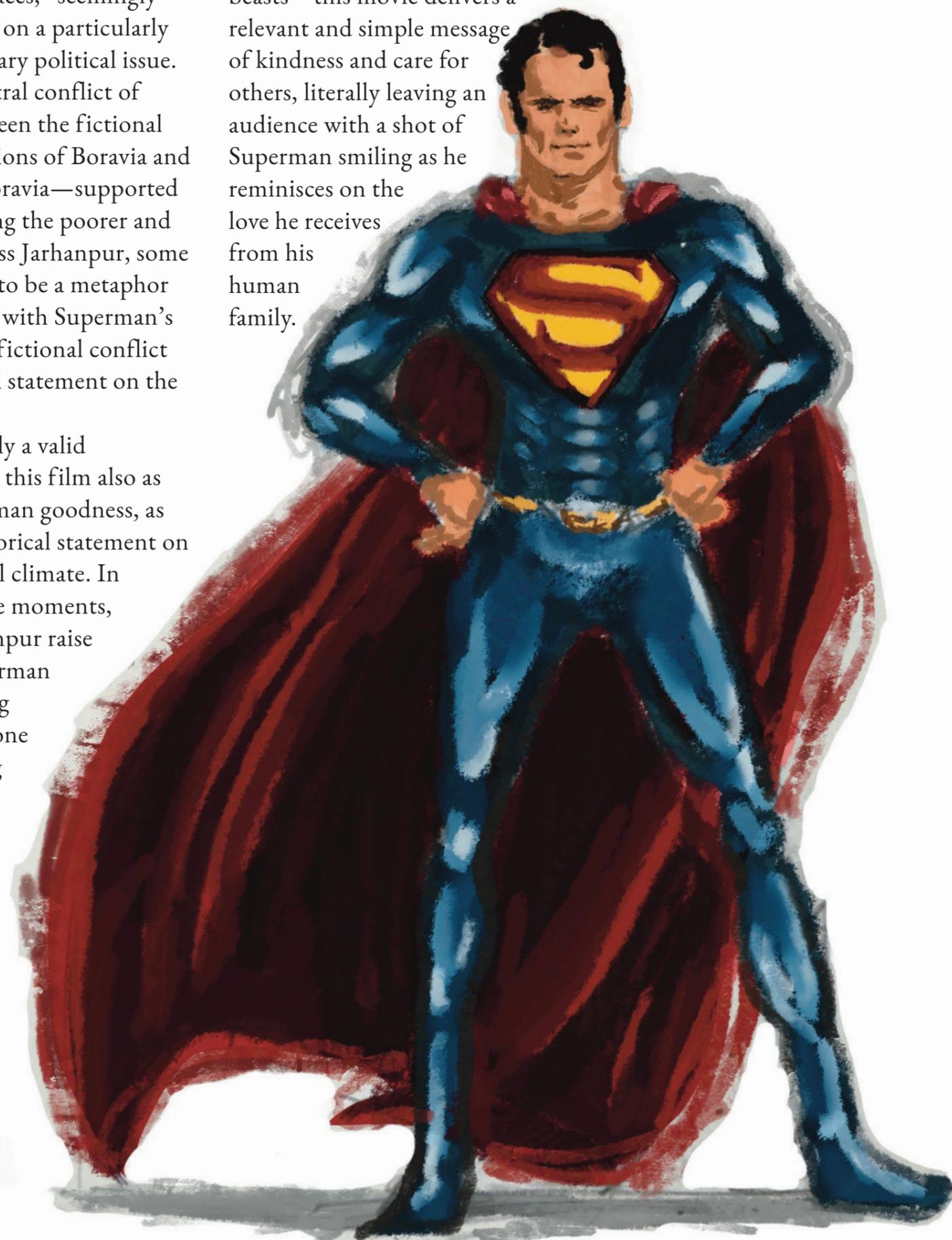
“Superman” balances a fun cartoonish narrative while not being afraid to explore more serious topics or display more intense violence. For all its fantastical elements—a flying dog, dimensional portals, skyscraper tall beasts—this movie delivers a relevant and simple message of kindness and care for others, literally leaving an audience with a shot of Superman smiling as he reminisces on the love he receives from his human family.

Though it is certainly finding success at the box office, the success of this film, to me, doesn’t have to do with the numbers. This movie describes kindness as “the new punk rock,” defining Superman as a punk-rock icon under this definition. Gunn did his job if just one person left the theater inspired by Superman to take on that punk-rocker persona—to be a better person, to treat others with kindness, or to go about their lives with more love for humanity.

I know I did.

**RYAN F. IRVING '27
(RYANIRVING@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS NOW
SEEKING A DOG WITH
SUPERPOWERS.**

**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE
LIMA '27**



Elote-Inspired Summer Corn Salad Recipe

An ode to my summer in México City.

BY NATALIE COOPER '28



Ingredients:

- 4 ears fresh corn, husked
- ½ small red onion, finely diced
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil (or butter)
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and finely dices
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- Juice of 1-2 limes
- ¼ cup crumbled cotija cheese (or feta, if that's what you have)
- 1 teaspoon Tajín or chili powder
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Extra lime wedges/cheese for serving
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Handful of cherry tomatoes, halved

Instructions:

- 1. Char the Corn:** Heat a grill pan or outdoor grill to medium-high. Brush each ear of corn with oil or butter. Grill, turning occasionally, until the kernels are slightly charred—about 8-10 minutes. Let the corn cool for a few minutes, then stand each ear upright in a large bowl and slice the kernels off with a sharp knife.
- 2. Prep the Rest:** For the **jalapeño**, cut it in half lengthwise (scrape out the seeds if you want less heat), then finely dice. Peel the **red onion**, then dice finely so it blends well. Peel and mince the **garlic** as small as you can. Rinse, pat dry, and roughly chop the **cilantro** leaves and tender stems. Halve the **cherry tomatoes**.
- 3. Combine:** Add the corn, cheese, jalapeño, onion, garlic, cilantro, lime juice, and chili powder to a bowl. Stir gently until everything is coated. Taste and season with salt, pepper, and more lime if you want it zestier.
- 4. Serve:** Spoon into bowls, sprinkle with extra cheese and chili powder, and serve warm or cold. Eat it with chips, pile it on tacos, or honestly, just grab a fork.

The best thing about this salad? It's a reminder to stick with what's good and to trust the season. In México, you learn pretty quickly not to rush what the Earth isn't ready to give you yet. You wait for the squash blossoms to finally show up, the mangoes so ripe they drip down your arm, and the corn to be sweet enough to eat straight off the cob.

This little bowl of charred corn is a taste of that mindset—and to my summer here in México City. It's bright and a little chaotic, like the food stalls and markets I wandered through for weeks. When you're back on campus, make it when local corn is at its peak at the farmers' market, when you can actually taste the difference. Or make it on an unseasonably warm day in Cambridge when you want to feel like you're somewhere sunnier, more energetic, and full of street corners where corn sizzles on open flames.

¡Buen Provecho!

NATALIE COOPER '28 (NCOOPER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATALIE COOPER '28

This summer, while studying abroad in México City, I've learned that some of the best meals are the simplest ones—the ones that start with what's in season and end with a little squeeze of lime.

Here in México, food is inseparable from time and place. As I walked through my local mercado in early June, I was stunned by the vibrant colors of fruits and veggies piled impossibly high for what seemed like miles. I saw towering pyramids of lime green calabacitas (tender squash), spiky nopales (cactus), ruby red sandía (watermelon), tangy orange maracuya (passionfruit), and of course, pale yellow maíz (corn)—milky, just picked, and ready to be charred over open coals.

This summer, I learned that for hundreds of years, maíz has been at the heart of Mexican cuisine and culture. From the Maya to the Aztecs, Ancient Mesoamerican civilizations considered corn to be sacred. In various creation stories, humans were even formed from corn itself.

I've seen that legacy everywhere: from the tortillas that cradle every meal to the tamales steamed at my friend's family gatherings. I've tasted it in elote—corn on the cob, charred on street corners, dripping with crema, cheese, chili powder, and lime. Or I've had it cut off the cob, served in a cup as esquites.

This salad recipe is my small ode to that legacy of corn. It's refreshingly tangy with a bit of spice, and best made when corn is at its peak—typically between June and August in the United States. Here, though, corn is nearly a year-round affair, thanks to staggered harvests across different geographic regions.

Piled onto tortilla chips, added to a burrito bowl, or just scooped with a spoon, this salad speaks to the flavors of México that I will miss dearly back in Cambridge. More than that, it may easily rival any corn salad attempt by Felipe's or Jefe's.

Sex in Books

When is sex in books a delicate artistic choice, and when does it become pornographic?

BY RAINA WANG '28

As a 19-year-old college student, I'd like to think I've finally reached that age where it's okay for me to read books that contain erotic scenes scattered throughout. As much as I'll slouch into my seat when reading explicit content in public, I can accept that sex is just a normal part of life, and should also be a normal part of books. What I cannot accept, however, is sex used as pornographic bait for a horny audience.

I've recently started reading "Intermezzo" by Sally Rooney, and the writing instantly blew me away. Rooney's narration is difficult to follow, but remarkably clever and strangely fitting for her two protagonists: Peter and Ivan, two brothers navigating inappropriate relationships with women in the aftermath of their father's death.

Peter, a 32-year-old lawyer, straddles two relationships—one with Naomi, a young, broke, and carefree college student, and the other with Sylvia, the ex-girlfriend he's still desperately in love with. Ivan, a 22-year-old chess prodigy, sneaks away on weekends to see Margaret, a 36-year-old divorcee.

What shocked me most, despite Rooney's reputation for writing sex-filled novels, was just how explicit the sex scenes were—and right from the second chapter, at that! Rooney doesn't hesitate to dive into the vulgar details (for five very long pages): "he touches with his fingers the black cotton of her underwear, damp," which elicits "another high moaning sound, closing her eyes." Or: "her mouth, wet, open in that way, he wants, and to make her come." And then: "it's nice. Throbbing inside her and wet she says this." It feels like I'm reading porn.

With so much narrative imagery, these sex scenes seem to serve a purpose more akin to entertainment than story-building. I simply can't imagine how the inclusion of this much detail drives the plot forward or develops a character's complexity for readers.

Rooney redeems herself in some instances, though, when she includes in sex scenes—like when Peter bathes with Naomi—dialogue and inner thoughts that reflect a broader theme of isolation and human company as a means of coping with loneliness. As she "rests still against him, the weight of her, fragrance of her dark hair," he tells her, "I just want you to be happy," and memories come back to him: "after the funeral, crying alone in a locked bathroom cubicle. And now the blocked number, [remembering telling Ivan] I've always hated you." He compares the "cold, desolate emptiness of the city outside. And in here... warmth of her body against him, sound of her voice, her laughter."

In these moments, I can see the merit of using the intimacy of a shared bath to evoke Peter's complicated feelings of love, lust, and self-hatred all mixed together.

But at a rate of almost one sex scene per chapter—and not all of them as emotionally substantive as the bath scene—Rooney's novel cannot justify all of its overt eroticism with some notion of narrative depth. I cannot come up with any other reason to justify the excessive sex other than to draw the attention of adult audiences indulging in the erotic nature of sexual fantasies.

Now, I am certainly not a prude. I'm not so stuck-up that I can't accept the carnal nature of humans in art. Instead of sexual tension serving as the driving force of a plot, I'd rather the sex be used delicately and masterfully to add substance. Take, for instance, Haruki Murakami's "Norwegian Wood." While Murakami's portrayal and sexualization of women are problematic (and deserve their own separate article), his strategic placement and development of sex scenes add not only to the plot but also to character development.

Murakami's coming-of-age story centers on Watanabe's unfulfilled love for Naoko. Their relationship is complicated with the memory of Naoko's dead ex-boyfriend, Kizuki—who was also Watanabe's best friend. So when Watanabe and Naoko finally sleep together, it stirs up complicated feelings for both.

Right before it happens, Naoko is crying in Watanabe's arms. Then, after a line break, sex is introduced abruptly: "I slept with Naoko that night." Followed up with: "Was it the right thing to do?" Although Murakami details their sex ("I kissed her and enfolded her soft breasts in my hands. She clutched at my erection"), he quickly steers the narration right back to both characters' emotional and physical pain, as the sex is tainted with the memory of Kizuki—"Naoko tensed with pain. Was this her first time?... I had assumed that Naoko had been sleeping with Kizuki." Although they're having sex, the moment feels more mechanical, with little arousal mentioned; instead, we can't escape the guilt they carry for betraying the memory of Kizuki.

The scene even ends with: "her cry was the saddest sound of orgasm I had ever heard."

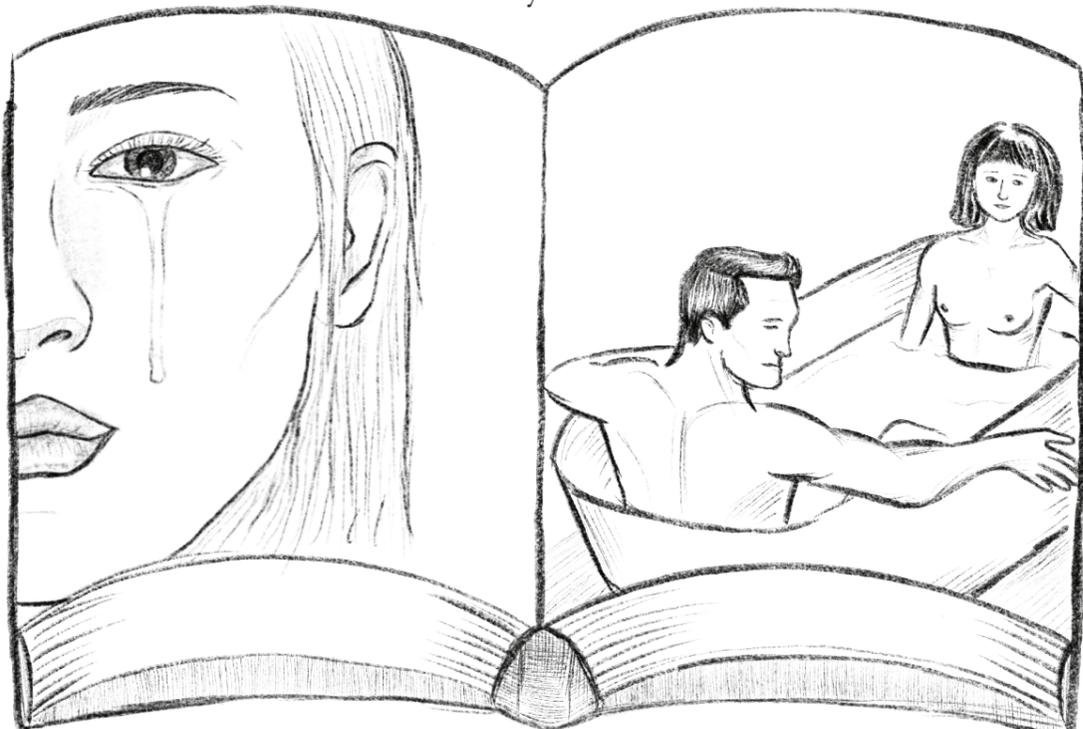
Murakami isn't writing to arouse; he's writing to explore the psychological and emotional weight that lust can elicit. In a story that addresses desire and companionship as a means of escape, it makes perfect sense for sex scenes to be written this way. The sex adds a fresh layer of emotional complexity to the familiar feelings of sadness, since in "Norwegian Wood," Murakami centers the narration around characters' reflections on sex rather than graphic descriptions of their carnal escapades. I really don't need to know about everybody's wetness, hardness, and lust.

To compare Murakami's first sex scene to Rooney's: his only spans one page, compared to five; his focus on Naoko's complex relationship with sex following her boyfriend's death, whereas Peter's scenes lean into the purely sensory aspects of sex; and most importantly, his doesn't read like uncomfortable smut. Though both books explore characters who use sex as a coping mechanism for loss and grief, Murakami illustrates it more tastefully by omitting the unnecessary, erotic details that Rooney depends on.

After reading both books, I much prefer how Murakami folds sex naturally into his pages. Murakami mentions sex just as much as Rooney, if not more, but he treats it as a matter-of-fact part of life (which it is), while Rooney glorifies sex as a solely lustful, pleasing, and agreeable act—which isn't realistic. Read Rooney's books anyway, since the characters are worth enduring the occasional five-page sex interludes, but be warned: I find the sex incredibly uncomfortable, and much prefer Murakami's more realistic portrayal over the more romanticized, perhaps even pornographic, depiction you'll find in "Intermezzo."

**RAINA WANG '28
(RAINAWANG@COLLEGE.
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RECOMMENDS "NORWEGIAN
WOOD," FIRST THE SONG THEN
THE BOOK.**

**GRAPHIC BY
NESHAMA RYMAN
'28**



SPORTS

Fallen Favorites and Newly Crowned Champions

A roundup of the Wimbledon 2025 Singles tournament.

BY WHITNEY FORD '28

Another year of battles on the grass courts of SW19 has come to a close, with the 2025 Wimbledon champions crowned and a tournament full of upsets and breakthroughs in the books. Jannik Sinner and Iga Świątek rose to claim their maiden titles in the men's and women's singles at the All England Club after early exits from top seeds, surprise semifinal runs, and five-setters that kept fans on the edge of their seats.

Men's Singles

For the second consecutive Grand Slam, world No. 1 Jannik Sinner and No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz faced off in the finals of the Men's Singles Championship in the latest edition of their developing rivalry. Last month, the pair delivered a spectacular performance in what became the longest men's singles final in Roland-Garros history—commonly known as the French Open—during the Open Era, with a match time of 5 hours and 29 minutes. Sinner was centimeters from clinching the win on multiple occasions with an astounding three championship points in the fourth set, but the fiery Spaniard battled back each time. In the fifth and final set, neither player relented, competing closely into a deciding tiebreak. However, Alcaraz's momentum proved unstoppable as he achieved a 9-2 lead before reeling off a final forehand that landed him his fifth Grand Slam title at just 22 years old, and ultimate heartbreak for Sinner.

After a first-round scare in which Italian Fabio Fognini pushed the defending Wimbledon champion to a fifth set, Alcaraz demonstrated an otherwise impressive level of consistency in his path to the final, taking out Andrey Rublev and Taylor Fritz in the process. Sinner's journey was not as smooth. In the Round of 16, a minorly injured Sinner dropped the first two sets against Grigor Dimitrov and appeared to be in hot water until his opponent suddenly tore a pectoral muscle. While Dimitrov attempted to continue, it was clear that he was in extreme pain and was forced to end his match due to injury for the fourth Grand Slam in a row; Sinner advanced to the quarter-final by the skin of his teeth in a walkover. He was able to carry the lucky momentum forward, defeating both Ben Shelton and Novak Djokovic—a grass court legend with

four Wimbledon titles—in straight sets to secure his place in the finals.

Leading up to their finals face-off, Alcaraz held the advantage as a former two-time Wimbledon champion and leading his head-to-head record against Sinner. After Sinner's near loss to Dimitrov, his chances of avenging the Roland-Garros defeat appeared slim, but after his win against Djokovic, he seemed to regain his footing just in time for the rematch. While Alcaraz reeled off four consecutive games to take the first set, Sinner used the start of the second set as his moment to turn the tables; he consistently applied pressure and played at the peak of his ability, fueled by the memories of his crushing loss in Paris. Alcaraz could not hold him off, as the world No. 1 captured three consecutive sets to secure victory and his first Wimbledon championship. Sinner became the first Italian player to win a singles title at Wimbledon, bringing his Grand Slam total to four—and achieving long-awaited redemption.

Women's Singles

With 10 seeded players falling in just the first round, most notably second seed Coco Gauff, the women's tournament promised excitement and ultimately led American Amanda Anisimova to face former World No. 1 Iga Świątek in the finals. While Świątek entered the tournament with five Grand Slam titles under her belt, Anisimova had only recently reached a career high, coming in as a No. 12—a notable rise considering her loss in the Wimbledon qualifiers last year.

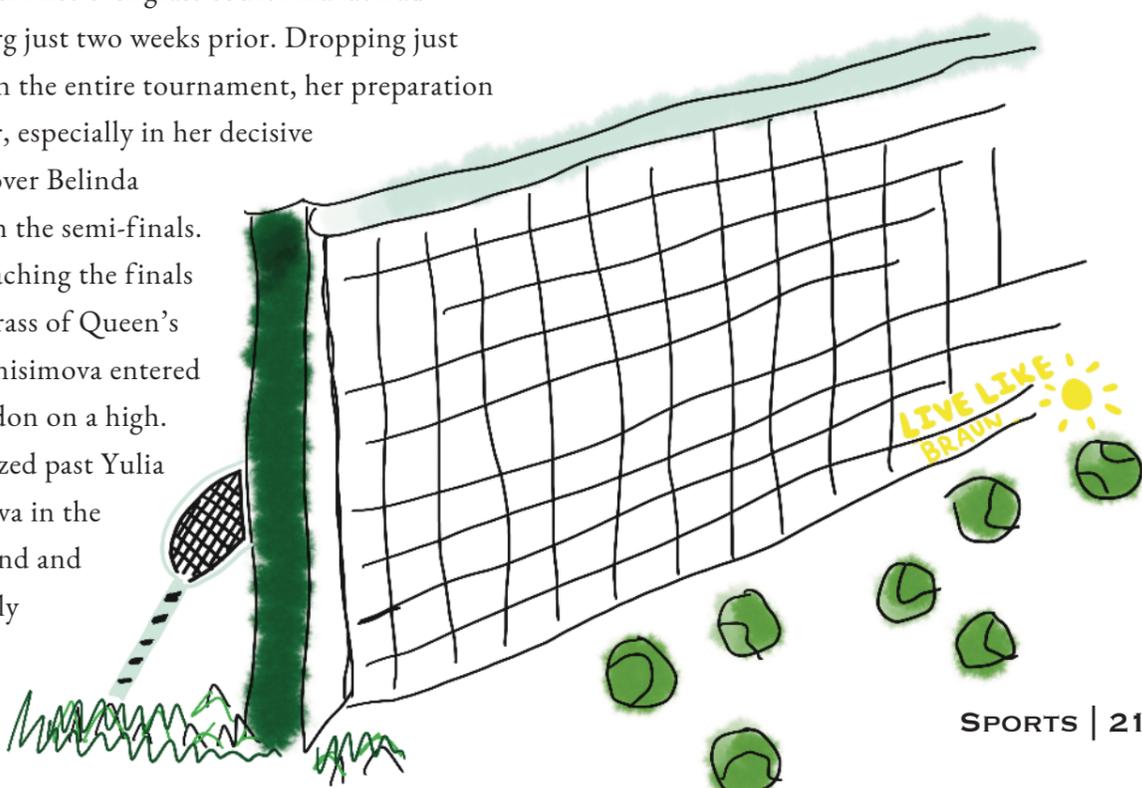
Świątek entered Wimbledon ranked No. 8, her lowest ranking since February 2022. She played her first-ever grass court final at Bad Homburg just two weeks prior. Dropping just one set in the entire tournament, her preparation was clear, especially in her decisive victory over Belinda Bencic in the semi-finals. After reaching the finals on the grass of Queen's Club, Anisimova entered Wimbledon on a high. She breezed past Yulia Putintseva in the first round and eventually

reached the semi-final to go head-to-head with first seed Aryna Sabalenka. Anisimova had won five of her previous eight matches against world No. 1 Sabalenka and had recently started to assert herself on grass courts. In 86-degree weather and difficult conditions, Anisimova outlasted Sabalenka in a close fight to achieve the biggest victory of her career in the third set.

Despite Anisimova's rise throughout the tournament, Świątek's performance in the Women's Final can only be described as a total massacre. A tense and teary-eyed Anisimova suffered a flurry of errors in the first set and appeared increasingly fatigued in the second. Świątek captured the title with her precise play in just 57 minutes with a 6-0, 6-0 scoreline. In doing so, she became the first woman to achieve a double bagel—a win without dropping a game—in a Wimbledon final since Dorothea Lambert Chambers in 1911. Finally conquering a Grand Slam on grass, 24-year-old Świątek also became the youngest woman to win Grand Slam titles on all three surfaces since Serena Williams in 2002.

WHITNEY FORD '28 (WFORD@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CANNOT WAIT TO WAIT TO WATCH THE U.S. OPEN.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27



Fast Facts: F1 Predictions vs. Reality

Revisiting our pre-season Indy Sportsbook predictions.

BY WHITNEY FORD '28

The 2025 Formula 1 season has officially reached its midpoint, and, per usual, there has been no shortage of surprises. Let's look back on our predictions for this year's championship, made in the *Independent's* Meltdown issue before the season kicked off at the Australian Grand Prix. Here is how things have unfolded.

Constructors' Championship Winner: McLaren

Starting strong, our first prediction was spot-on. In the 2024 battle for the Constructors' Championship, McLaren and Ferrari were in a closely contested battle for the title, going into the last race of the season tied in points. McLaren ultimately emerged on top, and in combination with their strong performance in this year's preseason testing, they were a safe bet to be the 2025 Constructors' champions.

In the first 12 rounds of the season, McLaren driver Oscar Piastri has driven his way to the top of the standings, achieving five wins and a total of ten podium finishes. McLaren's second driver, Lando Norris, has competed fiercely with his teammate, following close behind with four wins and an equal number of podiums. Together, the two have amassed a total of 460 points to take a decisive lead in the Constructors' standings, far ahead of Ferrari in second place with 222 points.

Despite a strong result in the 2024 season and promising times in testing, Ferrari has been riddled with technical issues and strategic missteps, even with seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton joining their roster. Likewise, Mercedes' limited upgrades to this season's car and slow development have not been able to challenge McLaren's dominance, and Red Bull's car performance seems to have taken a nosedive after the departure of their Chief Technology Officer, Adrian Newey. With a 200% margin over second place and clear momentum into the second half of the season, McLaren is set to achieve victory in the Constructors' Championship.

Hamilton vs. Leclerc: Charles Leclerc

Lewis Hamilton's move to Ferrari after 12 successful years at Mercedes came as a shock to the entire F1 community. At the beginning of the season, viewers eagerly watched to see how the team dynamic between the multi-time championship winner Hamilton and Ferrari's poster boy, Charles Leclerc, would unfold. Unlike teams such as Red Bull and Mercedes that clearly prioritize one driver over the other, Ferrari has maintained a strategy of keeping the peace and consistently collecting points for both drivers, especially in their pursuit

of McLaren in the standings.

After preseason testing, our Sportsbook pick for which Ferrari driver would emerge on top in the standings was Charles Leclerc; thus far, it has proven true, though not by a large margin. As of the Silverstone Grand Prix, Leclerc sits fifth in the Drivers' Championship standings with 119 points. Hamilton trails closely behind in sixth with 103 points. Leclerc shows more consistent performances across the board, with strong results in qualifying sessions as well as four podium finishes. Meanwhile, Hamilton has been vastly outpaced by his teammate and has yet to achieve a grand prix podium finish with Ferrari. As the two drivers are close in points and Hamilton continues to adjust to the SF-25, the rest of the season could go either way—but we're sticking with Leclerc.

Australian Grand Prix Winner: Oscar Piastri

The first race of the Formula 1 season is always guaranteed to bring surprises, as each team tests out its new upgrades and drivers make their debuts. Considering his preseason testing results and his home track advantage, our pick for the winner of the season-opener Australian Grand Prix was Melbourne native Oscar Piastri. Despite qualifying in second place to start and driving at the front of the pack until Lap 44 out of 57 of the grand prix, the sudden onset of rain quickly created full wet conditions on track. As a result, both McLarens, sitting in first and second place, suffered a slide into the gravel at Turn 12.

While Lando Norris slid just slightly off the track and was able to recover his car, Piastri was sent further into the gravel, resulting in a disorganized entrance into turn 13 and beaching in the grass. Piastri was eventually able to get up and running to continue the race, but ultimately finished in a disappointing ninth place at his home race as Norris took the victory.

Most Crash Damage: Kimi Antonelli

In predicting which driver would incur the highest repair costs in the 2025 season, we acknowledge that we fell short of the target. After being promoted directly from Formula 2 to a top-performing Formula 1 team in Mercedes, the 18-year-old Kimi Antonelli made his grand prix debut at the Australian Grand Prix and was not afforded a long adjustment period in his transition to racing at the top level. It was for this reason that we chose Antonelli as our prediction for the driver to amass the most crash damage.

Thus far, the young rookie has collected a mixed bag of race results in the first half of this season, achieving six points finishes, as well as four retirements, three from crash damage. In all, his crash damage record can be considered quite moderate.

Instead, it is fellow rookie Ollie Bearman who is on track to take victory in the so-called "Destructors' Championship." Bearman has had multiple heavy crashes, most of which occurred in free practice sessions, with a particularly bizarre crash into the pit lane entrance during FP3 at Silverstone. Though Bearman has been more consistent during races than practice, it is safe to say that his mechanics have still been quite busy. If this pattern of practice session incidents continues, Bearman will easily top the crash damage standings.

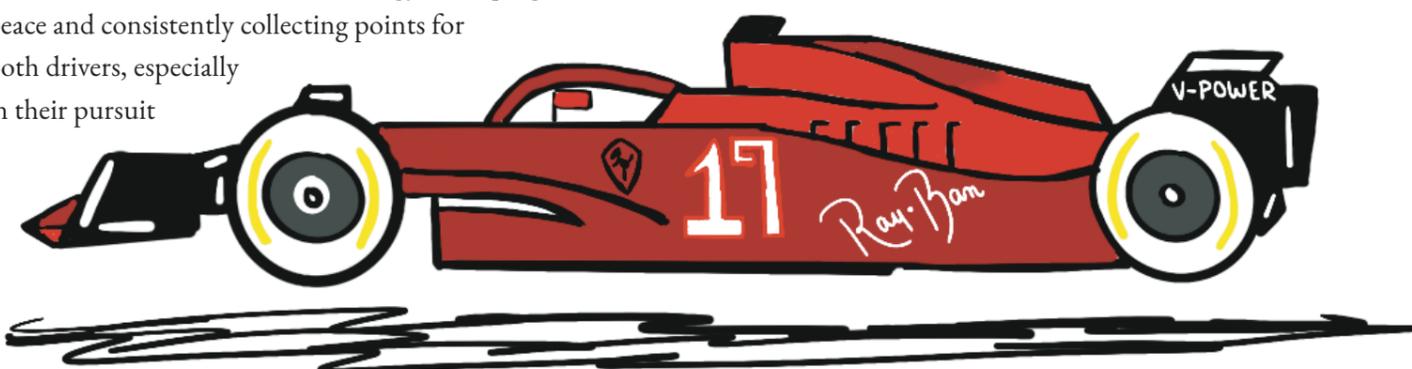
Drivers' Championship Winner: Max Verstappen

With four consecutive titles under his belt, Max Verstappen seemed like a logical pick for the winner of this year's Drivers' Championship before the start of the season. However, we did not anticipate just how dominant McLaren's cars would prove to be. While Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris have reigned supreme in qualifying sessions and races alike, Verstappen has struggled to control his car and has described the Red Bull as "undriveable" at nearly every race this season.

Suffering from understeer and balance issues as well as difficulties handling kerbs and bumpy circuits, it has not been an easy season for the reigning world champion. Though he has managed to pull off two wins and a total of five podium finishes with a car far inferior to the McLaren, he is sitting in third place in the Drivers' standings. Halfway through the season, McLaren seems poised to take the Drivers' Championship win, though it will be a fierce battle to see who comes out on top. However, the shocking announcement of Red Bull Racing CEO and Team Principal Christian Horner's termination on July 9 brings another variable into the equation. Will the promotion of Racing Bulls' Racing Director Alan Permane to Team Principal spur new growth, or will it further Red Bull's current decline?

WHITNEY FORD '28 (WFORD@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS STILL HOLDING OUT HOPE THAT CHARLES LECLERC WILL SOMEHOW WIN THE DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27



The NCAA House Settlement: Paychecks, Principle, or a New Path?

Will Ivy League schools fold under the pressure to pay?

BY PAIGE CORNELIUS '28

College athletics have entered a new era. On June 6, the final approval for the House v. NCAA settlement was signed, changing the landscape of collegiate sports. Moving forward, college athletic programs will be able to directly pay their athletes. This ruling will apply to the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pac-12 Conference, and Southeastern Conference, in addition to other schools across the NCAA. However, the Ivy League will not be joining, opting instead to prioritize education and a balanced student-athlete experience.

The \$2.8 billion settlement signaled the end of amateurism in major college sports. College athletes can now receive compensation not tied to education or third-party endorsements, extending the potential for revenue generation beyond the profits from the legalization of NIL payments.

The agreement includes two major components: back pay and revenue sharing. As part of the settlement, the NCAA has agreed to distribute up to \$2.8 billion over the next 10 years to former college athletes who competed between 2016 and 2024 in 'back pay,' compensating them for revenue they were previously denied under the old amateurism rules. Following the settlement, many athletic programs have begun developing revenue-sharing models to compensate their athletes directly. For the 2025-26 academic year, schools are permitted to distribute up to \$20.5 million—roughly 22% of their revenue—annually to athletes. This cap is expected to rise incrementally each year by approximately \$1 million, paving the way for high-level college sports to closely resemble professional leagues in structure and compensation.

Ivy League Executive Director Robin Harris was confident in the decision to opt out of the settlement. He argues for the "Ivy League model," "one that offers student-athletes an option with world-class academics and an opportunity for personal growth while yielding consistent national athletics success."

With cash now flowing to athletes in other conferences, is this vision still realistic? For revenue-generating sports like football and men's basketball, the Ivy League may face its steepest challenge yet. Already at a recruiting disadvantage because of its long-standing ban on athletic scholarships, the Ivy League now finds itself unable to offer athletes something even more valuable: a paycheck.

With Power Five schools now legally able to pay players, top recruits are even less likely to choose Ivy programs, no matter how prestigious the academics.

The decision to opt out of the House v. NCAA settlement is predicted to further erode the Ivy League's competitiveness. In the immediate aftermath of the ruling, players like Penn's former star running back Malachi Hosley have already begun transferring from Ivy League programs to schools offering direct compensation. This trend is leaving teams that are struggling to retain talent and rosters capable of contending at the national level.

It is estimated that over 70% of revenue-sharing funds will be directed toward football programs at power-conference schools. Concentrating a sizable portion of their budgets in just a few sports, many athletic departments will be forced to make cuts elsewhere, most likely to low-revenue sports like swimming, tennis, rowing, and golf. The Ivies historically untraditionally thrive in many of these sports. By opting out of the revenue-sharing model, they may avoid the financial pressures prompting other schools to cut teams. As a result, student-athletes in low-revenue sports who are seeking both competitive opportunities and academic rigor may increasingly look to Ivy League schools as their best option.

As the landscape of college athletics shifts rapidly, one question looms large: Will Harvard—and the Ivy League—stay their course, or eventually adapt? By opting out of the House v. NCAA settlement, Ivy League schools have doubled down on tradition, emphasizing academics, balance, and pure amateur competition. By doing so, they may be carving out a separate, isolated identity.

With Power Five programs embracing a professionalized model, collegiate athletics may soon split into two distinct cohorts: one where athletes are paid to perform, and another where athletics are treated as a complement to education.

If Harvard and its peers remain firmly in the latter, they risk falling behind in national standings and losing top-tier talent to schools that offer not just playing time, but real money.

The Ivy League model of a world-class degree, access to elite career networks, and a campus culture that prioritizes academic rigor is a powerful recruiting tool. But how long can they compete with six-figure paychecks, NIL deals, and media exposure? The conversation is no longer just about incentives—it's about values, priorities, and long-term vision.

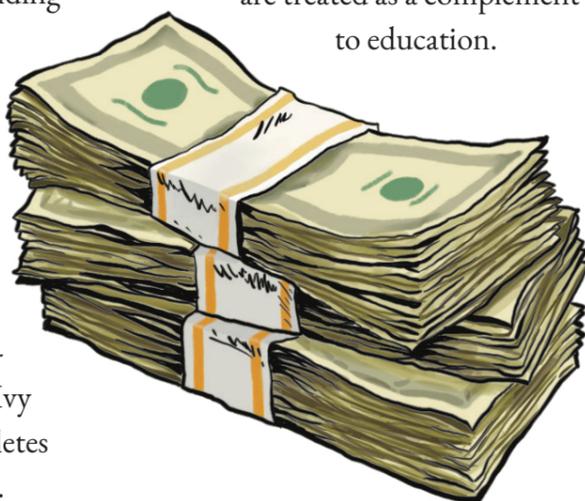
Above recruiting battles and championship banners lies a deeper meaning: identity.

What kind of institution does Harvard want to be in a changing world? As the college sports landscape shifts toward professionalism, will Harvard evolve with it or stand firm in its tradition? The House v. NCAA settlement has forced every school to reckon with this choice. For now, the Ivy League is betting on pride, purpose, and prestige. But as the stakes grow higher, the question remains: Will that be enough to keep it in the game? Or will schools like Harvard need to create new options, such as a model where athletes spend four years focused on academics, then use a fifth year to fully capitalize on NIL and professional opportunities?

In a world of shifting incentives, maybe tradition and innovation don't have to be at odds.

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GRAPHIC BY CARA CRONIN '28



OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS
OF DESIGNERS BELONG ONLY TO THE CREATOR
AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES OF THE *INDEPENDENT*



ACROSS

- 2. Time Off, Maybe
- 4. Refuse To Budge
- 7. Word Before "Bar" Or "Drink"

DOWN

- 1. Visa Competitor, For Short
- 2. Word Yelled In Unison By Party Guests
- 3. Some Are Bald
- 5. Take Legal Action
- 6. Many A Christmas Gift

Summer
Sparks

BY FRED KLEIN '28

DESIGN BY CLARA LAKE '27

Katie Morrison *Angie Li* *Clara Lake*