

APRIL 30, 2026

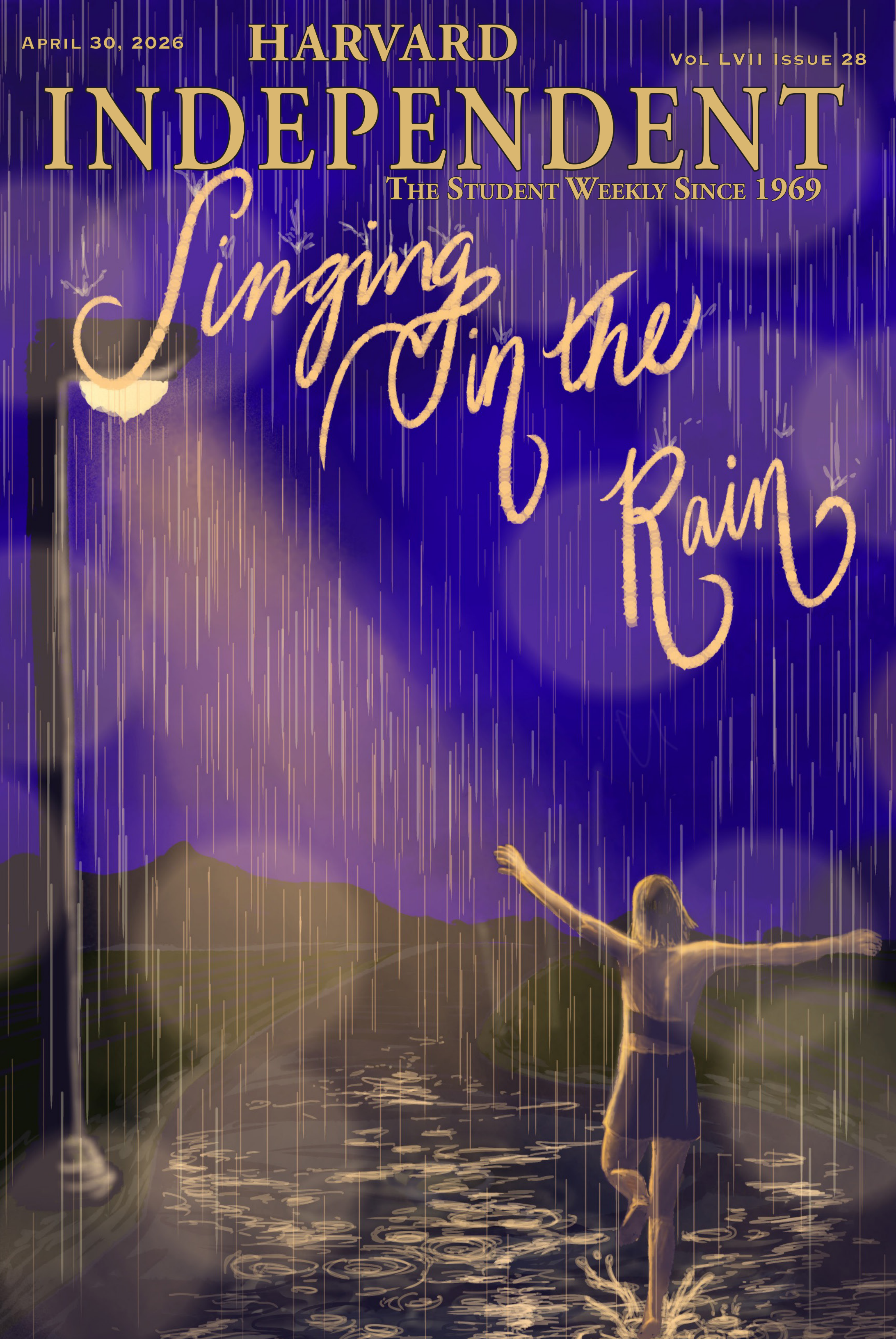
HARVARD

VOL LVII ISSUE 28

INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

Singing in the Rain



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About the Independent

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, 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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Visitas Welcomes Admitted Students to Harvard Campus

Admitted students reflect on their Visitas experience.

BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29

On Sunday, April 26, Harvard College welcomed over 1,300 admitted students and their family members to campus for two days of the annual Visitas admitted-students weekend. Programming gave prospective undergraduates insight into life at the College through the Visitas Academic Fair, club and departmental info sessions, overnight stays with current students, and attending classes for admitted students and their families.

Admitted students weekends are designed to introduce (and promote) the higher education institution to prospective first-years, particularly for those who may be uncertain about committing. “I don’t think I processed it until I started going to all the admitted students days,” Mia Huang ’30 said. “[It’s been] meeting other people who also got in, and taking the classes and sitting in all the classes, and just really being able to experience the campus again from a different perspective of ‘Oh, I actually might go here’ instead of just like, ‘Oh, here’s a school I can visit and [is] unachievable.’”

For admitted student Grace Nelson ’30, she felt lucky to be admitted to Harvard and grateful that the admissions committee saw her potential. “Seeing the acceptance is a way to tangibly know that the last four years and even 18 years, the whole time we’ve been alive, is worth it and is valued,” she explained. “Especially with a Harvard label, where you grow up hearing ‘Harvard.’ That’s a huge name, and to see that somebody there believes in you enough to let you come to their school and take a hold of these opportunities.”

Students arrived on campus Sunday morning for check-in at Memorial Hall. There, they received a name badge, a campus access card, and an itinerary with further event information. From 11 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., University President Alan Garber ’76 and the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid William R. Fitzsimmons ’67 delivered opening remarks to prospective first-years and parents of Harvard, congratulating them, encouraging them to choose Harvard, and explaining to students that they were selected for their excellence.

After the address, students were separated into two groups: one that went to the Visitas Extracurricular Fair and the other that made its way to Annenberg for brunch.

At Annenberg, students were served brunch, which featured waffle stations for students to make Harvard’s iconic “Veritaffles”—waffles branded with the Harvard crest. However, the dining was overcrowded with long wait times, Paige Hines ’30 explained. “They started telling people to come back in another 30 minutes. So at that point, me and my friends just left, and we went and got food somewhere else.”



WELCOME 2030?



The rest of the day, admitted students attended activities chosen from the itinerary and a website displaying Visitas events. Hines attended the extracurricular and academic fairs, as well as club meetings, including Harvard Financial Analysts Club and Harvard Undergraduate Consulting on Business and the Environment at Felipe’s rooftop. “Every single minute was packed,” she continued.

For families, the University hosted events including Financial Aid Office Hours, conversations and get-togethers with current and prospective Harvard parents, and opportunities to meet and hear from College faculty.

On Monday, prospective first-years and families were encouraged to explore campus, with no official programming. The College sees this as a critical opportunity: prospective students should join classes ranging from “SANSKRIT 101B: Elementary Sanskrit” to “COMPSCI 20: Discrete Mathematics for Computer Science,” as well as meet with professors and prospective students in various departments.

“I feel like with Visitas, we were given free rein. There was some sort of agenda, and it’s like, these are options, but you really weren’t held to it,” Nelson noted. “You literally had a card, and you can go anywhere you want.”

Other universities advertise the amount of effort they put into making prospective students feel wanted, Nelson said. These colleges schedule admitted students days to pack prospective first-years’ schedules with specific activities, giving them little free time. “At those campuses, a lot of times, they’ll talk on about the fact that the entire school is kind of shutting down for these days,” she explained.

According to Nelson, the programming of admitted students day might reflect a university’s broader mindset when it comes to its students. “It’s been interesting to think about Harvard as [a] ‘You make your opportunity’ type thing,” she said.

Others appreciated the flexibility. “It gave us the time that we needed to kind of socialize with other people, and there was so much freedom in choosing what we wanted to do. We didn’t have to go to things that didn’t interest us,” Hines said.

After attending multiple admitted students days, Huang has narrowed her decision to Princeton

and Harvard. “I think that they’re very different vibes, and that’s kind of what I’m going off of. It’s just where I think I’ll fit in the best and seeing [myself] not only academically, but socially,” she noted.

Location is also an important factor for many. “I took into account the campuses ... Do I want to be more in the suburbs or more in the city?” Huang said. “I’ve been in the suburbs my whole life, and I love the city, but just trying to figure out if I want to be this much in the city for the next four years.”

Admitted student Olivia Kwon ’30 acknowledged that while she has enjoyed Visitas, it’s just a snapshot of the Harvard experience. “Number one thing that I’ve heard from a lot of older current students is take Visitas with a grain of salt,” she explained. “I think because there are so many people and everyone is so ambitious as well, it’s been quite overwhelming.”

“But at the same time, Visitas is only two days. And so I clearly haven’t found my people yet, and so I think I’m just taking this as an opportunity to feel the vibe and get to know everyone as much as possible,” Kwon continued.

Unlike previous years, over the course of Visitas, the Harvard Graduate Students Union United Auto Workers formed picket lines in front of Memorial Hall and in the Science Plaza, chanting strike slogans that encouraged admitted students to attend other universities and distributing pamphlets with information about the strike.

According to Nelson, the strike has impacted the way she thinks about Harvard and her choice between Harvard and Yale. “From a purely rhetorical standpoint, [I] really appreciate seeing the strike here. [A.] It has opened some questions that I don’t think I would have asked before,” she said. “But B, seeing a politically active campus or like a student body that feels comfortable enough to stand up for themselves and organize a union like that, I definitely, I really like that.”

By Friday, May 1, all prospective undergraduates of American universities will have to decide where they formally want to commit for the next four years of their academic, social, and professional lives.

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**GRAPHIC BY SARAHLUNE
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The Slow Dismantling of the Department of Education

Former U.S. Secretaries of Education Margaret Spellings and John King explain the importance of American education and its decline under the Trump administration.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28

On April 22, Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics' John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum hosted a conversation between Margaret Spellings, the U.S. Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush from 2005 to 2009, and John King '96, the U.S. Secretary of Education from 2016 to 2017. The forum was moderated by Virginia Secretary of Education and current IOP Resident Fellow Aimee Rogstad Guidera. The three discussed the role of the Department of Education, the consequences of dismantling federal funding for higher education, and the Trump administration's attacks on the greater importance of education in the United States. The conversation opened with an explanation of the Department of Education's origins. "The reason we have a federal role in the first place—which was part of 'The Great Society' in the LBJ Era—was that we had incredible variance around the country on achievement, and that, basically, your opportunity was absolutely determined by your zip code," Spellings explained. President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives focused on shrinking economic and racial disparities in the education system.

These initiatives continued to constitute only a small part of the overall budget for education, with each state holding majority say in schooling laws unless they impeded on civil rights. "How much the federal government gets done is actually a relatively small footprint," King said. "The federal funding for education is less than 10% of the total."

"Some of the rhetoric now to attack the Department is to say, 'Well, we've gotta give the power back to the districts.' Well, the districts have always had the power," King continued. President Donald Trump ordered Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to take steps toward closing the Department entirely, starting with a proposal to convert federal education programs into block grants, which would allow states to distribute funds with fewer federal restrictions.

"One of the things I sometimes point out to folks to dramatize why we have the federal role [is] if you think about the famous Norman Rockwell painting of Ruby Bridges." Rockwell's "The Problem We All Live With" depicts the first African American child to attend the school after a federal court ordered the New Orleans school system to integrate in 1960. "Who's around Ruby Bridges? U.S. marshals. Why U.S. marshals? Because New Orleans and Louisiana were not interested in protecting Ruby Bridges' civil rights. They were not interested in making sure she got access to an equitable education. It took federal intervention," King explained.

"What you see now, removing that federal role, is going to put students at risk. The bulk of the complaints that go to the office for civil rights are from parents of students with disabilities who are not getting the services they're entitled to," King continued. "To say, 'Well, the districts and states will all do right by them,' we know that's not true. We have decades of evidence."

Ignoring this evidence holds particular implications for U.S. education. "The other thing that we've lost in this sense—that President Bush and President Obama had—that education is a national imperative," King claimed. "Now all the conversation is about how you move the boxes around between federal agencies."

The Bush administration implemented

the No Child Left Behind Act, aimed at decreasing the achievement gap through standardized testing. The Trump administration's efforts to undermine the federal accountability requirements that remained under the Every Student Succeeds Act, a 2015 update to NCLB, have allowed for federal policy to be circumvented. "To my mind, ESSA was never really implemented as intended," King said. "In the end, what you write down is only as good as the people who are executing on it. And there was not good-faith executing on ESSA."

The rollback of NCLB and ESSA has proved detrimental to education nationwide. "It was the first—unprecedented in American history, for 20 years—to have student achievement across the board go up, gaps close, and we have just erased those 20 years of progress in 10 years," Guidera said.

"There are two ways to think of this... either we should stop spending money and say 'Good luck out there, let them eat cake, it's not a national imperative.' But if we're gonna spend money, let's get something for it in the name of this imperative," Spellings added.

Guidera shifted the conversation to the Trump administration's broader goal of closing the Department. "What is actually legally possible when we're talking about dismantling the Department of Education? And what has happened to date, and what hasn't happened?" Guidera asked.

"The Trump administration cannot unilaterally dismantle the Education Department. That requires Congress, and to my read, there is no appetite in Congress to dismantle the Education Department," King said. "The Trump administration came into office ... trying to cancel grants, asking Congress to stop funding federal research efforts ... Fortunately, Congress rejected all of those proposals from the administration." Federal funding increased from 2025 to 2026, with Congress proposing \$79 billion in discretionary funding.

"So, what they're doing instead is slowly sending functions to other agencies," he said. "What they're doing through the Memorandum of Understanding between agencies is trying to effectuate this vision of dismantling the Department. Mostly, what it's doing is causing confusion and chaos."

"[The Trump administration has] truly gutted... the role of federal research," Spellings added.

The discussion turned to the administration's threat to cut federal funding for higher education. "Pell Grants have made it possible for generations of Americans from low- and middle-income families to take advantage of higher education... [the] Trump administration proposed huge cuts to the Pell Grant Program. Fortunately, Congress ignored that," King further noted.

In its Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal, the Trump administration did indeed propose a nearly 23% cut to the maximum Pell Grant award, reducing it from \$7,395 to \$5,710. However, as of early 2026, Congress has largely rejected these cuts and maintained level funding for the program.

The administration has also indirectly affected the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. In April 2026, the administration launched a real-time fraud detection tool aimed at stopping "ghost students." This tool, along with

new identity verification requirements for all first-time applicants, is projected to save \$1 billion through increasing processing hurdles for legitimate students.

King expressed deep concern not only for the added hurdles for receiving aid, but also for the lack of improvements he found necessary for the form. "The FAFSA is really important. It is the linchpin of our entire higher education financial aid system," King said. "I'm very worried about the infrastructure of the Agency. Will it be able to continue amidst this slow dismantling?"

King, Spellings, and Guidera went on to discuss the larger impact the Trump administration would have on current students. "Pretty much since 2017, we have been without a real federal infrastructure around accountability," King said. "All across the country, you have huge numbers of students who are not getting the foundation they will need just to be able to get a decent job in life," King said. Indeed, 8th-grade math proficiency peaked in 2013 at 36%, but fell to just 28% by 2024. Average reading scores for 12th graders hit their lowest level in 2024 since national assessment began in 1992.

King emphasized the implications of educational decline for the U.S. economy: "Think about the importance of our higher education system, preparing a workforce that can compete with all the countries around the world that are also trying to prepare a successful workforce. We need that [the] voice of a Secretary of Education... be able to speak to these issues. We also don't really have that at the moment."

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**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE
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FORUM

Sarah Lewis Shapes Narratives

A sit-down with Harvard's John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities and Associate Professor of African and African American Studies and a preview of her upcoming exhibition.

BY MIA TAVARES '27

I met with Professor Sarah Lewis '01 over Zoom, anxiously prepared to make the most of the 45 minutes I'd managed to secure in her busy schedule. Sitting in her History of Art and Architecture class, "Unseen Black Art," last semester, always left me with a lasting impression of her attention to detail—evident in her diction, writing, and the analysis of art she taught us. Her gravitas carried through the screen, reflected in both her precise communication and her tidy background and crisp white blazer. It was impossible to ignore the sense of importance and urgency around the work she described and the need to contest traditional narratives.

Lewis' scholarship, in magnitude alone, is impressive. She's edited over 60 publications and authored multiple books—most notably "The Rise," a bestseller translated into 7 languages; "The Unseen Truth," which won the American Book Award; along with launching the "Vision & Justice Book Series," one of the many publications produced by the initiative she founded of the same name. Earlier this year, she was named to the 2026 "TIME" List, The Closers, which recognizes key Black leaders, entrepreneurs, and activists working towards racial equality in America, and she has accepted a variety of distinguished awards for her work. She is, without a doubt, a Titan. And still, as I spoke to her, she remained humble about her accomplishments, emphasizing her ongoing mission to revise racial narratives and shift American culture forward.

I had wanted to speak with her so I could learn more about her clearly extensive efforts beyond Harvard's curriculum—I also wanted to know if I could tangibly contribute, even as just a college student. Lewis explained everything to me with nuance and stayed grounded in literature. When I asked her how a non-art student could contribute to her mission of cultural contestation, her response reoriented the scope of my question, as though a fundamental truth had been revealed to me.

"The work I do isn't solely about the arts at all. It is about the power of narrative for defining who we are, and increasingly, the narratives we receive—those we're conditioned to understand—come to us through culture, through the image, through the monument, right through the object," Lewis said. "The power of narrative through culture is a way to engage with the entire world, and the entire world engages

with each other through the power of culture."

Lewis' upcoming exhibit, "If Emmett Till Lived: Freedom on American Ground," set to debut at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago, is just one such way she is engaging with the world on her own narrative terms. The approximately 200-piece collection will be on display Sept. 10 through Dec. 19. The timing of the exhibition feels especially relevant, given President Biden's 2023 proclamation designating a national monument for Till, and the ongoing political debates over such monuments by the Grand Old Party. "The journey to honor Emmett Till really speaks to the force and power of erasure in society," Lewis explained. "The exhibition aims to be yet another creative exponent of the monument building process to honor Till."

She's chosen, from a collection of around 20,000 objects, key items that represent chronologically a life that she said, "we all would have wanted [Emmett Till] to have been able to choose." The urgency is implicit. We, as viewers, must confront the question Lewis poses for us, and the one she asked me. "What would have been required of all of us in society for Till to have lived?"

This examination of our past comes through the evocative lens of the photograph. This medium, in particular, has a long history in Black visual culture. Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois famously leveraged the emerging technology of the photograph to advance notions of Black equality. Yet this exhibit isn't just about bringing together key photos to speak to Black experience—it's about the memorialization of Till and his

story. "I believe that monuments are the closest thing that we have to a Truth and

Reconciliation Commission in the United States," Lewis told me. "Because of the narrative war we're in, we need the object to ground us in the facts of our history." Her exhibit will do just that.

In addition to her curated objects, Lewis has invited 27 individuals to each select an image they feel represents the life they'd have wanted Till to live. The individuals, whose names have yet to be released, include leaders, filmmakers, and civic figures from Mississippi to Chicago. "It will be, in effect, a collective honoring and a collective curatorial enterprise," Lewis explained. This choice to bring a communal voice to her exhibit aligns with much of her work—she is no stranger to collaborating with other trailblazers and legends in the space.

In our short conversation, she mentioned dozens of colleagues, mentors, and even students with whom she's formed deeply substantial relationships. "This work requires endurance, and to sustain that, you've got to find all the ways in which you're going to just keep that humor, that positive spirit," she asserted. For Lewis, friends like Sherrilyn Ifill, the Founding Director of the 14th Amendment Center for Law & Democracy at Howard Law School, help embody the values necessary to succeed in this space. "What I believe [Ifill] exemplifies is the need to maintain rigor, and joy together, always, at once," she expressed.

Given Lewis' many significant endeavors, I wondered how she managed to juggle them all at once. Lewis' motto is clear: "The main thing is to keep the 'main thing' the main thing." "There are no shortcuts to thought leadership of that kind," Lewis elaborated. "When you're committed to that main thing, you're able to also galvanize an energy to you through the penetrating concentration and deep investigation of a topic." Lewis has absolutely galvanized an energy and a movement. Her work has inspired others and drives forward an important narrative grounded in her own experience. Through her curations, her words, and her teachings, she's writing a new and permanently important cultural story.

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**GRAPHIC BY SAGE WILLEY
'29**



To Be Seen

It's all just in the fine print.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

It's one thing to be looked at, and another to be seen." These words come from Caleb Azumah Nelson's "Open Water" and speak to a question I've found myself grappling with this semester. What does it mean to be seen?

I have a running bit with some of my close friends where, if we spot each other across a distance, we forgo waving and instead mime putting on binoculars—our shorthand for saying "I see you." Why we started doing this, I don't know, but from my understanding, it is more than a simple greeting. We could wave or even shout "Hello" across the Yard, but instead, we have chosen binoculars to be our symbol of acknowledgment.

Binoculars are an inherently curious piece of equipment; at their most basic level, they are necessary for seeing things the naked eye cannot. But in a way, their use also marks a commitment to seek out more than what we are offered at face value. So by whipping out our "binoculars," we're not only saying "Hi," but also saying that I recognize that you are more than meets the eye.

Though the concept of being more than meets the eye is now something of a cliché, it speaks to a reality that many people struggle with daily. Oddly, when writing this, I was reminded of the 2011 movie "The Help." In the film, Aibileen Clark, a Black housemaid, cradles the child she cares for, Mae Mobley, and says: "You is kind. You is smart. You is important." I have found that these words go beyond foundational affirmations: they are a reminder to see other people beyond what they may appear to be. However, in order to see others in this way, one must first look inward and see oneself for who one is.

You are more than what society tells you you are, more than what your parents might diagnose you to be. You are a deeply complicated being. You are human and deserve to be seen. Seen not for what you were or could be, but for what you are in the moment that we find you. This works both ways; to be able to see other people most fully, we must first be able to see ourselves as we are.

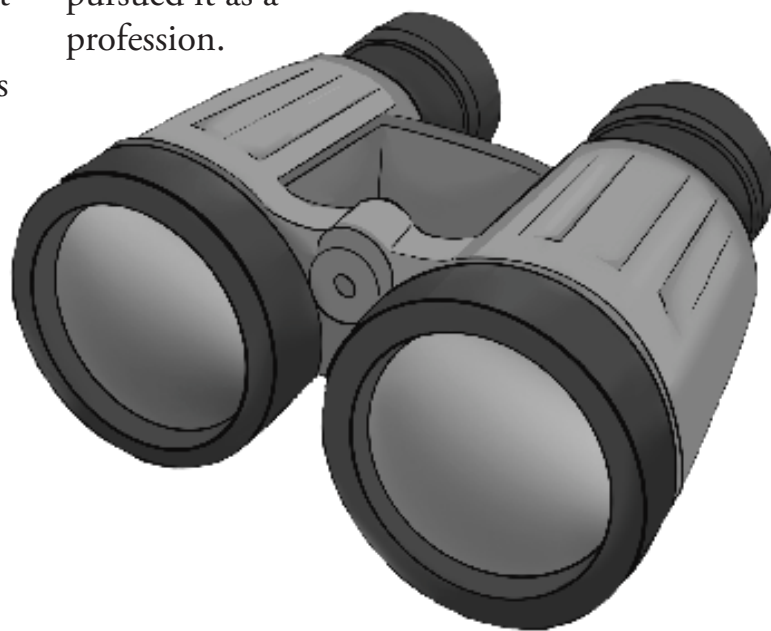
There is a scene in the otherwise completely comedic, original "Zoolander" film where famed model extraordinaire Derek Zoolander catches a glimpse of his reflection in a roadside puddle and pauses. "Who am I?" he asks his reflection. "I don't know,"

his reflection responds. This moment of powerful introspection ends with Derek's line, "I guess I have a lot to ponder." We all need our Zoolander moment. The film's humorous core returns when a car drives through the puddle, splashing Derek's face. However, the question lingered in my mind for a long time. Who are you when no one is looking?

I alluded to this idea in my last article when discussing the "you that exists outside of Harvard," the thought that, in order to live better, one must reject the pressures society typically exerts on you to force you down a predetermined path. My argument here is different. To know yourself requires rejecting performance orchestrated to appease others; it demands you bear the uncomfortable experience of staring yourself down in the mirror (or puddle) and being open and honest with what you see. If we are unable to do that for ourselves, how can we honestly, binoculars and all, truly see the people standing across the Yard from us?

It is easy to talk about the idea of performance as an abstract or even philosophical topic in writing, but it is much harder to reckon with how it manifests itself in the real world. I recently had a conversation with a friend where she asked me if I was pretending or being real with her. The answer was, "I don't know." I wanted to say I was always being real with her, but the longer I have thought about it, the less certain I am of what "real" even means in that moment. Was I being real if I was still adjusting my personality or reactions based on who I was speaking to? A question too large to answer within this article, but what stayed with me most wasn't the question itself but the realization it left me with. Performance isn't always deceptive or deliberate, but sometimes it's just habitual.

Performing has always come naturally to me; perhaps that's why I pursued it as a profession.



It was easy to tell the right jokes or smile when I was supposed to because it made people happy. It was easy to do the things all my friends did because I didn't want to be the odd one out. As I grew up, the line between what was performance and reality became blurred, and I feel like I lost a part of myself along the way. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and, for my journey of self-discovery, I'm glad it did.

For me, COVID-19 was the first time in a long time that the curtains closed and the performance had nowhere to go. I spent literally two years practically locked up at home with my family, with nothing more to do than to look in the proverbial mirror, coming to terms with who I was at the moment and who I wanted to be.

I'm returning to Aibileen—when she would tell Mae Mobley the basics like, "You is kind. You is smart. You is important." Knowing what I know about myself now, the phrase feels incomplete. I would add one more qualification as a mantra to live by: "You is kind. You is smart. You is important. You is enough." You are enough because you are you, and often people feel incomplete because they have spent so long performing that they've forgotten what being authentic looks like.

Performance is safe, I understand; playing the role of someone else always gives you somewhere to hide, but hiding isn't an option. Pretence breeds unhappiness, and unhappiness breeds even worse outcomes. Take off the mask and let the crowd moan and jeer that their jester has danced their last jig. Be you. Be loud and proud of who you are, and don't let someone yucking on your yum ruin your day. Your authentic self is enough, and just because they might not see that yet, it doesn't mean it's not true.

**NOAH BASDEN '29
(NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) PLAYED
FAR TOO MANY GAMES OF
SCRABBLE DURING COVID.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA
RYMAN '28**

The FBI Agent in Your Webcam is Laughing

In Western democracies, autonomous surveillance is no longer a future threat—it is already here.

BY ERELAS

You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.” Since English novelist George Orwell published “1984” nearly eighty years ago, his vision of a repressive, dictatorial surveillance state continues to find parallels in the real world as technology and governments evolve.

In the 21st century, we are more connected than ever before. Over four in five people worldwide own a phone, and 74% of the global population used the Internet last year. While access to a global well of knowledge in the palm of our hands is already transformative, the rise of artificial intelligence has opened its own Pandora’s box: a vast reshaping of the labor market, the accelerating depletion of natural resources, and a rise in AI-related mental health concerns. More concerning, however, is that governments like the United States have embraced machine intelligence in national security and defense efforts. The integration of AI in domestic law enforcement, particularly in the ever more powerful Immigration and Customs Enforcement, is a slippery slope to authoritarian rule through a surveillance network of unprecedented scale.

President Donald Trump ran in 2024 with a campaign centered on securing the border; since his victory, the Department of Homeland Security has increased both in power and reach following a significant funding increase of approximately \$191 billion. Under a mandate to maximize the number of arrests possible, ICE has expanded from its prior focus on individuals who posed public safety or national security threats to sweeping arrests of people presumed to be undocumented immigrants, profiling based on perceived ethnicity or occupation. Even those lawfully in the United States have been detained while their status is assessed.

Protests have swept the country since the beginning of the year after at least eight deaths were linked to ICE, including the widely reported killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis. Increased retaliation from DHS and ICE followed, bringing in new technologies used to arrest immigrants into the public spotlight: reports from activists and journalists describe what they see as intimidation tactics—agents photographing license plates, identifying individuals by name, or following them home. In various lawsuits against the federal government alleging violation of First Amendment rights, witnesses stated they were often subjected to facial scanning by agents using tools like Mobile Fortify and systems linked to Clearview AI or Palantir.

With these new technologies at their disposal, ICE agents are not just enforcing the law anymore. Through a sprawling web of AI tools

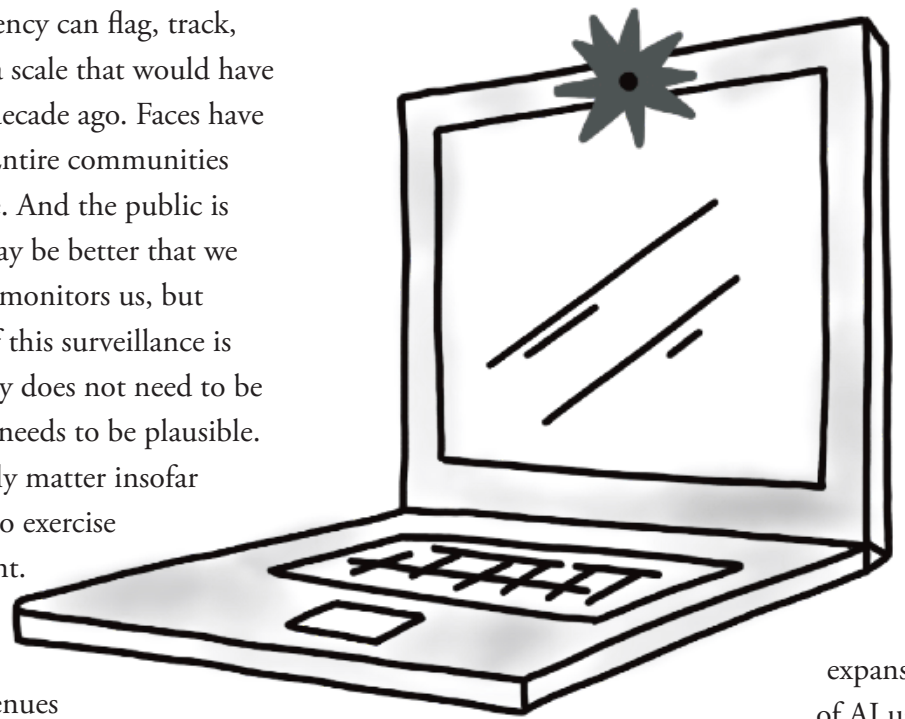
catalogued by DHS, the agency can flag, track, and identify individuals at a scale that would have been unimaginable even a decade ago. Faces have become mere data points. Entire communities are searchable and trackable. And the public is beginning to realize it. It may be better that we know how the government monitors us, but perhaps making us aware of this surveillance is the point. Surveillance today does not need to be total to be effective; it only needs to be plausible. First Amendment rights only matter insofar as citizens feel empowered to exercise them against the government.

While ICE and the federal government have employed different avenues to tilt the playing field in their favor, this form of repression is quieter and far more effective. Hungary provides a clear example of how this works. Under Viktor Orbán, democracy was hollowed out by sidelining political opposition. For example, the media was technically “free,” yet by 2017, roughly 90% were controlled by the state or its allies, leaving opposition voices silenced. Even if this system was pursued through legal loopholes, the normalization of government control allowed Orbán to expand from controlling public service media to dominating the private media sphere.

ICE, meanwhile, has had significant reach even before the rise of AI. A 2022 study by Georgetown Law’s Center on Privacy and Technology found that ICE had access to the driver’s license data of 3 in 4 adults and could locate them through their utility records.

That capability has been expanded, and in large part due to the federal government’s partnership with Palantir Technologies, which was itself founded with Central Intelligence Agency seed funding in 2003. ICE alone has invested more than \$200 million in Palantir contracts, using its powerful data mining systems to integrate citizens’ visa information, biometric data, travel histories, and social media activity. Meanwhile, a range of government agencies, including the Department of Defense, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Internal Revenue Service, and even local police departments like the New York Police Department, have also contracted with Palantir for data integration projects. A private company, working in conjunction with the government, now has broad access to citizens’ data and the latitude to continue surveilling them.

Palantir has been explicit about its collaboration with the government. Their recent manifesto openly celebrates U.S. dominance. CEO Alex Karp has repeatedly positioned the company as a defender of “the West,” arguing that Silicon Valley owes a “moral debt” to national power rather than to civil liberties. This ‘surveillance nationalism’ seems likely to continue powering the



expansion
of AI use
in federal activities.

Most frightening, however, is that the government’s expanding AI arsenal risks creating not just a police state, but something more modern: a system where the possibility of being watched does the work of control. The cudgel of a competitive authoritarian regime is selective pressure: investigations, surveillance, bureaucratic obstacles, tools that raise the cost of opposition just enough to make it unattractive. Civil society must, therefore, fight against this “anticipatory obedience.”

In Orwell’s “1984,” the Party has convinced the nation that the Thought Police are omnipotent, and that resistance, therefore, is futile. Lesser known is the epilogue to “1984,” which implies that the Party was eventually overthrown. Lawmakers have begun to fight back against AI surveillance, and Palantir employees are blowing the whistle on data misuse. It’s a start, but not enough. Digital proliferation has opened the door to greater civic engagement and societal connection. We can use the very devices the government uses to watch us to organize, to expose, and to resist. A reminder: authoritarianism thrives on isolation, but our democracy will survive on solidarity.

**ERELAS ENCOURAGES
“HARVARD INDEPENDENT”
READERS TO CONSIDER WHY
PROTECTING DEMOCRATIC
RIGHTS IS INDISPENSABLE.**

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU ’28

Study Abroad in The Quad: A New Harvard Tradition

My week in Cabot House.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

Every Housing Day, Harvard College witnesses a wide array of emotions from first-year students. After receiving news of their future dormitories from upperclassmen, some leap for joy, while others break down crying. This disparity often arises from one location in particular: the Radcliffe Quadrangle, affectionately known as the “Quad,” not the River.

Located on or around the banks of Cambridge’s Charles River and in Harvard Square, the nine River houses are almost every Harvard undergraduate’s dream, sitting close to classes and campus social life. The three Houses in the Quad, on the other hand, generally exist in undergraduates’ nightmares; a 15-minute-plus walk separates residents from the heart of the College—or so the dominating narrative goes. Such a distance leaves students fearful that they are slated for three years of social isolation and chronic tardiness. To test the veracity of the latter claim, I decided to do the unthinkable: move to the Quad for a week.

After spending a semester abroad last spring, I’m no stranger to unfamiliar spaces hundreds (or tens) of miles away from home—and I missed the thrill of novelty. Packing my suitcase for Cabot House seemed like a pseudo-study abroad, despite staying in Cambridge. What started as a lighthearted social experiment with a friend became a lesson in empathy and preparedness, and dare I say, the start of a new Harvard tradition.

Now, I’ve told this tale to many of my peers—why shouldn’t I share such a bold experiment? The immediate question that arises is, “Why?” Why on earth would I subject myself to living in the Quad when I have a beautiful and well-located dorm in Eliot House?

The short answer is journalism. The long answer involves time management.

This past fall, my good friend in Cabot and I were in the same 9 a.m. thesis seminar, which met twice a week. With four classes, a thesis, and my role as course assistant for a fifth class, my fall schedule was packed, and I spent far too many late nights in Lamont Library. As a result, I occasionally walked into our seminar a few minutes late after one too many snoozes of my alarm, usually at the same time as my Cabot friend. After being criticized for my tardiness, given my 5-minute commute compared to his 15-minute one, I told my friend that I would arrive at the same time, even living in the Quad. And so the challenge was born: could I survive Quad life?

A few months later, on a chilly Tuesday evening in April, I packed my suitcase, squash backpack, and tote bag, ready to embark on this journey. But with the start of my trek to 60 Linnaean Street also came my first challenge: I missed the quintessential shuttle since I did not have the “Passio GO!” app. This would be the first of many learning experiences in the week to come. After my first 20-minute Quad walk (affectionately

known as the “qualk”), I arrived at Cabot and exchanged keys with my friend who would be living in my Eliot House suite for the next seven days.

After my day one snafu, I woke up extra early the next morning, determined to make the most of my reimagined living situation and embrace a necessary schedule adjustment. I got breakfast with a friend at 9 a.m. (30 minutes earlier than my usual River wake-up time, given my 10:30 a.m. classes), and he gave me the key to enjoying the Quad: slowing down. He explained that when you need to spend more time getting places, you should embrace that extra time in other areas of your life, especially meals. Steer into the skid, if you will. After our hour-long breakfast, I moseyed over to the Art Museum for class and called an old friend on the walk. So far, the Quad didn’t seem too bad.



The rest of the day went as usual. I went from class to class and then to Widener Library with friends. While I don’t normally hang out in my dorm room in the middle of the day, it was slightly odd to me that this option was entirely ruled out. One Quad friend had told me a few weeks ago that he spends a disproportionate amount of time drifting between third spaces, and I, too, felt like a wanderer.

The real logistical problems didn’t start until later that evening when I had Club Squash practice at the Murr Center, a 1.2-mile walk from Cabot. After stressing about timing the night before, I had put my workout clothes in my school bag, so that I could go to practice straight from dinner with a friend in Mather. I was on time to practice since I couldn’t procrastinate by sitting in my River room, but I had to borrow both shoes and a racquet when I got there because I hadn’t wanted to tote those around all day. Fine for a day, but not ideal for a season.

Post-practice scheduling got even more hectic. Back-to-back social plans in the River and then the Quad left me walking into Grendel’s Den without showering and then hustling home to Linnaean Street after a shortened hangout. I see why people invest in scooters.

By Thursday morning, I was feeling like

a Quad professional—for better or for worse. I sleepily got another early breakfast with my short-term roommate and then embarked on the 10:10 a.m. shuttle, arriving at class five minutes early. During the drive, I was pleasantly surprised to bump into some of my favorite Quad residents—most of whom I do not see on the regular. Later that day, I got dinner with other Cabotians I hadn’t had a meal with in ages and even crashed a Karaoke Stein in Cabot Café. The day was a reminder that the Quad can create a slight shift in social circles simply by changing who you regularly see.

But this realization was a double-edged sword. While I loved reinvesting time in old friends, I was reminded how much distance inhibits the depth of some of my other relationships. There’s merit in the notion that living in the Quad can change your social life. Socializing beyond “Neighborhood Nine” requires more scheduling, a hard ask when spontaneity is often what drives college connections.

Though I was relieved to unzip my suitcase in my conveniently located, well-decorated Eliot room, I cannot deny that my brief foray into Quad life was an overall success. Despite temperatures dipping into the 40s one morning, I missed out on any freezing walks in the rain or snow, and my lighter workload made the added commute time less of a burden—senior spring, post-thesis, does not necessitate any late nights in Lamont. But I will also admit that these pros meant I may not have received the full Quad experience (not that I’m complaining).

That being said, in just a few days, I developed a lot of empathy for Quad residents and learned a thing or two along the way. Now that I’m back on the River, I’m trying to slow down more and get to breakfast earlier to have more relaxed mornings. I’ve also started scheduling more time to hang out with my friends in the Quad, and I’ve successfully been back a few times since my stay.

The purpose of Harvard is to have a transformative experience; to change the way you view and interact with the world. Once we arrive on campus, we often get stuck in our own microcosms, forgetting what lies outside. Living in the Quad allowed me to explore a different way of life, and I’d encourage other Harvard students to participate in this ritual as well. At a school where everyone wants to stay on campus for all eight semesters, students should embrace an often-overlooked place to study abroad: the Quad.

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MIGHT RANK THE QUAD
ABOVE PARIS FOR STUDY
ABROAD LOCATIONS.

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTY
ZEMBROWSKI '28**

Exploring American Hometowns: Dear Chicago

Learning to love a city—for its beauty and its flaws.

BY RANIA JONES '27

A SoundCloud remix of Frank Sinatra's "My Kind of Town" bellows out of the car's stereo as we barrel down Lake Shore Drive. We speed south, maneuvering through congested city lanes. Time feels briefly arrested. Across the windshield, I can only see fuzzy streams of red car lights, apartment stoops, and skyscraper windows. The headlights crunch the streetlight colors together, making them sting. I sway my arms back and forth out the car window.

Later that early-April Chicago night, we pull into the gas station at the corner of LaSalle and Clark. Chicago's Windy City air sings Chance the Rapper with us. My front passenger seat window is half-open.

A man strides up to our car. In the few seconds I see him, he's about 20 years old, and he's sporting a black hooded Nike zip-up. I turn my head, and the man has extended his arm through the window. I look closer. He has a gun in his hand.

Life and death get reduced to seconds. I can hear my parents telling me that everything but my life is replaceable. I imagine them in front of the TV, shaking their heads, arms crossed: This city's problem is only getting worse. What will it take for something to be done? You read the stories, you get the alerts, and you assume it will never happen to you.

Back in the moment, I instinctively wrestle my purse from my seatbelt as my friends throw their wallets, purses, and phones at me

from the back seat. It feels impossible to muster the force to shove our belongings through the window, but I do anyway. He grabs our stuff and runs off into an alley. We sit there slowly drowning in our silence. While our shock is pervasive, our fear quietly lurks—we do not speak or cry.

Time stands still, and Chance echoes quietly on the radio.

I winnow my focus back to the simple memories of Chicago: biking to Kanye West's "Homecoming" with my friends along the Ledge; pressing my nose against the glass of the John Hancock Observatory; eating ice cream on the steps outside "Bucktown Market," Wabansia's convenience store. If I listen closely enough, I can hear Uncle speak to me in Hindi, and then maybe everything can fit back into its place. Shukriya.

The fluorescent depths of my swollen city backyard lure me back. And just as abruptly, it returns, gorgeously and impossibly—the same city, the same streetlights. Nothing looks different.

In the days, months, and years that followed, I tried to remind myself that this was not who Chicago is. I know that. The quiet rituals—Italian food at Club Lucky, Bucky the Bucktown bunny, hours spent in line at Annette's Italian Ice, screaming "Go, Cubs, Go" from the bleachers of Wrigley—they're an enduring, internal compass that allows me to return to the same streets, the same skyline, the same home. But cities cannot divide so easily into two parts: the one I love and the one I fear. These two sides, the sweet and the flawed, are part of the same story, not separate ones.

People say that during accidents, moments are magnified. Wasn't I supposed to want to run away from this city? How could I still call this place home? What I hold onto most from that late night in April is my unexpected

composure, as though some version of myself was already prepared to meet the darker side of this city I love so dearly. One without a river dyed green, Lollapalooza, summers at North Pond, and a silver bean.

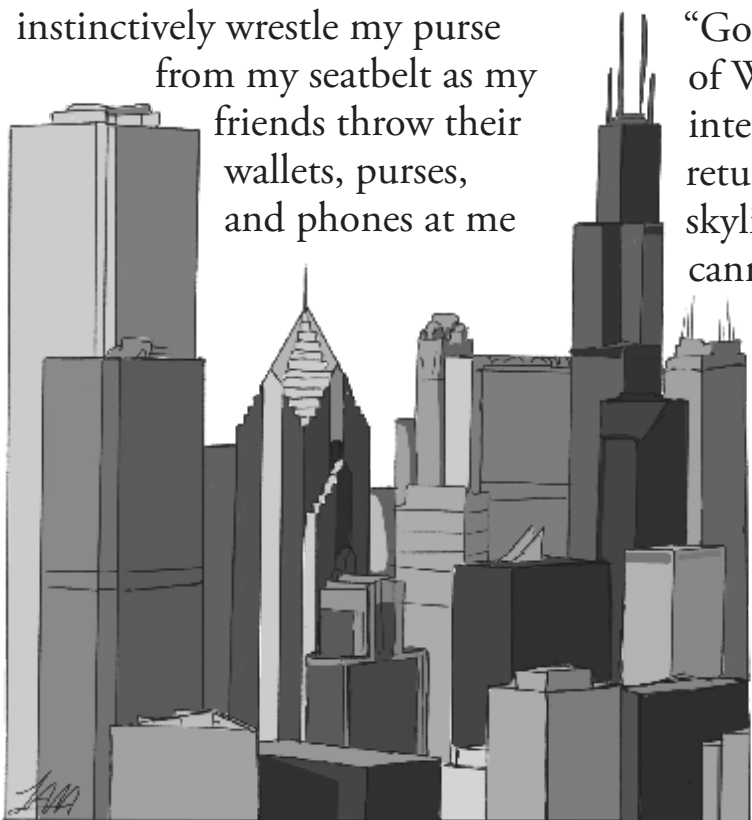
I've lived in Chicago for 21 years now, on the same street in Bucktown. And it has been one of the greatest loves of my life—the hard, extraordinary kind. It's the foundation of who I am, most of all for what it has taken and what it has given me—thick skin, pride, even a certain hardness. Maybe this is what it means to grow up in a place like this—you learn to live with its contradictions. To see the same city as both beautiful and complicated, flawed and wonderful.

Four years later, I can finally take the driver's seat, instead of the passenger's. Trips down Lake Shore Drive remain a kind of catharsis, with the water by my side and the skyline in my front windshield, but this time I'm at the wheel. Certain things have changed: my ZIP code now belongs to Cambridge, Massachusetts; home feels less tied to a place and more to people; the car windows are kept locked; and the gas tank remains full. But I am still a city kid, and this is just what it asks of us: to persist.

I am now learning what it means to fall back in love with a place after it has shown its true self, for all its beauty and its flaws. Not to forget what I saw and continue to see, but to let it exist alongside everything else. To love Chicago, incredibly, painfully, and mythically, is to allow it to be complicated, as it always has been, and choose it anyway.

**RANIA JONES '27
(RJONES@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) HAS
FALLEN BACK IN LOVE
WITH CHICAGO.**

**GRAPHIC BY LINDEN
MCCARL '28**



Aesthetic Nostalgia in “Singin’ in the Rain”

Looking back on looking back.

BY ELLIE GUO '29

It seems like the best time to live is always the past. Romanticizing the aesthetics of bygone days is something we’re all familiar with. “Singin’ in the Rain,” one of the most beloved films of the 20th century, is no exception to this nostalgia.

What often goes forgotten is that “Singin’ in the Rain” is set in 1927, during the tenuous transition from silent films to movies with sound. A common misconception is that the titular song debuted along with the movie in 1952—but actually, it was written in 1929, along with most of the film’s songs. In fact, only two original numbers were written specifically for the movie. The film is filled with stereotypical Jazz Era imagery—big band music, knee-length flapper dresses, and a speakeasy scene.

Why choose to recreate a moment that happened only 25 years prior?

Though it was only a couple of decades, it probably felt like ages ago to the mid-twentieth-century viewers of “Singin’ in the Rain.” There had been two major crises since 1927: the Great Depression and World War II. Adults who had grown up amidst global conflict longed for a more comprehensible and stable world order, regardless of how idealistic it was. Furthermore, given the film’s themes of rapidly advancing technology, looking back becomes a way to imagine simplicity, when the most complicated part of a movie was adding sound.

“But as we become further removed from a period, it’s easier to decouple moments from larger historical narratives and to indulge in the idea that times really were better before any given technological innovation,” film critic Lindsey Bahr wrote for the “Atlantic” in a 2012 reflection on the movie.

However, despite the impulse for 1920s nostalgia, “Singin’ in the Rain” deliberately portrays the era anachronistically, satirizing both it and the corrupt show business. In the film, a movie executive watches as a new singing film is being made, in what is known as the “Beautiful Girl” montage. Women model anachronistic flapper-style costumes with neon colors, shimmering fabrics, and exaggerated jewelry while the unnamed singer narrates.

“You can never be too modest,” the singer comments on a 1920s-style swimsuit. “You’ll knock them down at dinner, if your gown just drips with fringe,” he continues as a woman in a bright crimson flapper dress with floor-length fringe appears. In a moment of dark humor, the singer introduces a woman in a black flapper dress with flowing tulle fabric—for divorce court.

These scenes are clearly directed to a 1950s audience, who would find the costumes gauche and tacky, while still understanding that this design choice was meant to poke fun at older trends. It was also a moment to show off the technological prowess of the 50s—searingly bright Technicolor and the relatively novel green screen (terrible by today’s standards).

This satirical element disrupts the film’s nostalgic quality, emphasizing the evolution of filmmaking technology rather than evoking a simpler time. The historically inaccurate costuming, more of a flapper-culture stereotype

mixed with 50s trends, reminds viewers of how far movies have progressed since silent films.

Moreover, “Singin’ in the Rain” seems to be aware of itself as a musical on the silver screen. This is apparent when the characters’ attempt at a talking film, “The Dueling Cavalier,” flops at the previews due to the actors’ unappealing speaking voices, so they decide to convert the disaster into a movie musical, “The Dancing Cavalier.” There is also a disruption of the suspension of disbelief for the audience that makes the movie meta. Typically, we understand that the songs in musicals, whether on screen or on stage, are simply a dramatic and more exciting way to convey an event or conversation. People do not actually break out into song and dance in the universe of musical theater characters—they are merely expressing that they feel like doing so.

However, in “Singin’ in the Rain,” musical numbers do not remain constrained within performance and are referenced in casual conversation. Shortly after Don Lockwood, the film’s protagonist, performs “Good Morning” with Kathy and his best friend Cosmo, Cosmo later asks Kathy to sing the song’s main melody again to illustrate a point he is making to Don. This implies that the characters are aware that they have just sung and danced, but who is the audience that they are performing for? The song “Singin’ in the Rain” also makes its reprise, this time sung by Kathy, who ostensibly has no knowledge of Don’s wild dancing through the pouring rain.

The movie wants us to know that it is meta—the film ends with a billboard of Don and Kathy promoting their newest film, “Singin’ in the Rain.” To a 1950s audience, the film is primarily entertaining, with its lively and catchy songs, but also satire, offering commentary on the movie industry. The time setting is not only for nostalgic purposes—being a Hollywood film, it must distance itself from contemporary show business to safely criticize it.

But ironically, today, we associate the iconic film with the glamour of old Hollywood. Long, extended scenes filmed in stunningly bright Technicolor, well-fitted suits, and black-and-white saddle shoes just fall short of being absurdly

patriotic—it all screams American affluence and post-WWII optimism. The satire goes over our heads.

Though the film was released over 70 years ago, contemporary culture cannot let go. In the 2016 film “La La Land,” director Damien Chazelle ’07 constantly references the imagery and visuals of “Singin’ in the Rain.” Not only is it a movie musical featuring jazz songs, but the costumes are just as bright and loud; classic black-and-white saddle shoes make an appearance in tap dance numbers. Ryan Gosling’s character, Sebastian, even swings around a lamppost exactly as Gene Kelly does in the iconic “Singin’ in the Rain” number.

“La La Land” is a contemporary story about dreamers, but Chazelle wanted to tell it in the vein of an older Hollywood musical, inspired by old Hollywood filmmaking,” cinematographer Linus Sandgren said in an interview with “Kodak.”

Even more recently, “Vogue” released an article titled “Does Old Hollywood Style Still Resonate in 2026? Top Stylists Say Yes” in January 2026. “Old Hollywood style in 2026 isn’t about cosplay or nostalgia—it’s about selective glamour,” stylist Fabio Immediato said. 1950s culture is alive today, not as a temporary fondness for the past, but as a lasting influence on our aesthetic values.

Watching “Singin’ in the Rain” today takes on a different context than it would have in the 1950s. This is exemplified by the fact that it did not win any Academy Awards and was not nominated for “Best Picture” in 1952. The official Oscars website today describes it as “the most perfect example of the classic studio musical.” At the time of its premiere, it was a fun family musical with a mediocre satire; now, it is one of the most recognizable films of all time.

I have even experienced a slight shift in how I perceive the film. I was first introduced to it by my middle school music teacher in 2019, when 1950s aesthetics were a bit stronger than they are now, especially with the popularity of artists like Lana del Rey, who leaned into the Americana sound and old Hollywood imagery. Rewatching it now, I feel like the distinctly 50s elements in the film are a little less easy to romanticize, as current trends reflect the aesthetics of the 70s and onward.

As the decades pass and pop culture changes, “Singin’ in the Rain” will continue to be viewed and experienced differently. People will admire and become nostalgic for different times; the 1950s will be pushed further into the past. Nonetheless, what makes the film timeless is the sheer amount of talent on screen, which will never go out of style.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FORGETS HOW WEIRD 1950S MOVIE MUSICALS CAN BE.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



The Official “Harvard Independent” Guide to Rainy Days

A how-to on optimizing comfort, joy, and entertainment when you’d rather not go outside.

BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO ’26

I’m sure most of us are familiar with the iconic children’s song: “It’s raining, it’s pouring, the old man is snoring.” How did you spend your rainy days when you were in elementary school? Did you abhor them and resign yourself to staying in bed like the old man from the classic nursery rhyme? Or did you look forward to them with great expectations, as I did, along with many of my childhood friends? Rainy days meant indoor recess, where teachers would present us with a smorgasbord of games to choose from. My personal favorite was “Apples to Apples.” At home, rainy days meant hot chocolate and more than enough hours of television.

Now, as a senior in college, I catch myself feeling a sense of dread when the forecast calls for rain. After all, who wants to risk getting their socks wet while walking across campus, especially with the notorious Boston winds that pelt our faces with rain? However, it is possible to embrace and enjoy those Cambridge rainy days again with just a few key items.

An Umbrella (or a Good Raincoat)

There should be a graveyard for the umbrellas I’ve lost to the winds of the Bay State. When I arrived in Cambridge, Mass., as an innocent first-year, I thought my travel-sized umbrella would suffice. I was quickly proven wrong when a gust of wind turned my umbrella inside out a mere few minutes after weathering my first downpour. A steady gale thwarted my subsequent frantic attempts to revert its shape. After one, maybe two, storms, it would no longer open or close properly. This has happened to every umbrella I’ve purchased since. A higher-quality investment may improve these outcomes. But I have abandoned the idea and have since relied on a hooded jacket to minimize how soaked my hair gets before class. For those who have managed to find a completely windproof umbrella, please email me. In the meantime, I plan on testing out the underutilized—though, in my opinion, cute—umbrella hats.

A Hot Drink

I’m the type of person who could (and would) happily order a hot coffee in the middle of summer over an iced one. However, I know that there is something extra special and comforting

about a drink that warms your hands and stomach as you brave the cold that often accompanies heavy rain in Harvard Square. Fortunately, this campus is practically inundated with coffee and tea shops, so buying this signature staple on a stormy day is almost too easy. If you’re looking for suggestions, I think everyone should try the “Almond Velvet Tea” from Zinneken’s on Massachusetts Avenue. Alternatively, if you haven’t spent all of your BoardPlus yet, go try a “Peet’s-Style Latte” from Buckminster’s Café behind the Science Center. You can also craft your own hot drink in your dining hall. While we wait for Harvard University Dining Services to create a dining hall hot latte specialty (so far, only an iced blueberry pancake latte recipe is available), we can experiment with our own combination of coffee, milk, and hot chocolate. I’ll definitely miss HUDS hot chocolate when I graduate.

The Perfect HUDS Meal

In theme with the HUDS appreciation above, just as rainy days call us to reach for warm drinks, they also beckon us to embrace comfort through tasty orders from the residential Houses’ dining hall grills. At lunch, the perfect hearty, warm meal option is a chili or chicken stew. Later in the day, in another callback to childhood, request a grilled cheese sandwich, especially when tomato soup is available at dinnertime.

A Common Room

Rainy days call us all indoors to enjoy each other’s company. That’s why I believe one of the best decisions my friends and I recently made was watching “Desperate Housewives” in a dorm common room. Half of us were seeing the show for the second time (or third, if you count watching it in the background as kids while our moms enjoyed it), while the other half were just getting to know the women of Wisteria Lane. If you and your friends try this, make sure to raid Brain Break for snacks and drinks first. Outside of people’s dorms, hallway common rooms are also an option. You can connect someone’s laptop to a television or monitor with the provided cables (adapters or cables requested via your House mailing list) to project binge-worthy content. Use rainy

days as an excuse to get together with the friends you promised to “grab a coffee with sometime” before the semester ends!

Tabletop Games

In the spirit of nostalgia, I suggest bringing back the indoor recess activity of playing tabletop games with your friends. Party favorites include “Cards Against Humanity,” “Bananagrams,” poker, and “UNO.” While these are all fun, I feel the need to issue a warning for “UNO.” Try your best to establish rules with your group before you start playing. Everyone has different “house rules” and can quickly become (too) emotionally invested in winning. I suggest playing games between meals in the dining hall. Then, you can easily invite other students to sit and play with you or your friends. That way, a rainy day can become the perfect excuse to get to know other members of your residential community.

The next time it’s “raining cats and dogs” in Cambridge, don’t give in to dismay. Instead, reference this guide on how to turn your rainy days into some of your most treasured times on campus.

**ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO ’26
(AADEBAYO@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) KNOWS
APRIL SHOWERS BRING
INDOOR COMFORT
BEFORE THEY BRING MAY
FLOWERS.**

**GRAPHIC BY MIA
STEWART ’29**







Kitchen Sink No. 13

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26

I am set into the wall under the window of the small north room on the third story of the staircase off the second court, and I have been there since the year the wallpaper behind me was hung. The plaster holds my pipes tight enough that I have not fallen, loose enough that I have shifted an eighth of an inch over the decades. My tap is brass, pitted at the throat where a maid in some lost year left it dripping for a winter and the lime came up and never went back down. My basin is white. A hairline crack runs from the drain to the rim. The crack does not leak. The porcelain has decided not to.

I will tell you what I saw on the night the second one came.

...

The woman had been in the room for two terms and a part of a third. She set her boots by the door when she came in, and the boots dripped onto the floorboards, and the boards darkened in two small commas that grew and faded with the weather. She made her tea in a brown pot and rinsed the pot in me each morning—two quick passes, the leaves loosened, my drain accepting them. She pinned her hair up with a French pin, and when she leaned over me to wash her face she would unpin it first, and the pin would go in the soap dish on my right, and some of the hair would come loose and find its way into my trap, and I would keep it there. I keep what is given to me.

She read once lying on the boards with her head propped against my pedestal, and I felt the weight of her skull against the iron, and I was, for that reading, a part of how she was thinking.

...

He came up the stairs at a quarter to eleven. The bells had finished the three-quarters and the fourth quarter had not begun. The footfall was wrong before it reached the landing. A man's tread, but not the one who had been climbing those stairs for a month. This tread was lighter. It came up two stairs at a time toward the end. It was not in a hurry. It was in something else.

She was at the desk. She had been at the desk since seven. The lamp was lit, and the wick was trimmed, and the small ring of yellow on the desk had not moved for hours, and her pencil moved inside the ring and made the small dry sound that pencils make on cheap paper.

The knock came. She lifted her head. She set the pencil down, parallel to the edge of the

book, in the way she set things down when she meant to come back to them. She crossed the room. The third board from the door spoke under her, as it always did. She opened the door.

I could not see his face. The angle was wrong. I saw the shoulder of his coat, wet, and the cuff darker than the rest of the wool, and the back of his hand on the doorframe. The hand had been at me earlier in the term. She had brought him up once. He had washed his hands and counted under his breath while he washed them. I knew him by the hand and by the count.

The hand was the same and was not. The tremor was gone. A steadiness I did not know was holding the doorframe in his place, with his fingers, in his sleeve.

She said his name. I will not write it. The thing that came in was not entitled to it, and I do not wish to write it down twice in my account, once truthfully and once as a lie.

May I come in, he said. The voice was his and was not. The grain was the same. The pitch was the same. What was different was further back, behind the larynx, in the part of a man that decides what a voice is for.

She stepped back. She let him in. Her hand closed the door behind him before her mind had been consulted, and I heard the latch fall, and I felt, in my pipes, the small change in pressure that a closed room makes.

...

I will tell you what I could see and what I could not.

I could see the desk and the lamp and the chair by the grate. I could see the corner of the bed. I could see her, and I could see him, when they were on my side of the room.

I could not see the door once it was closed, because the door is behind me and I do not turn. I could not see the inside of her, which is what mattered most, and which I would have wanted to see, if I had been the kind of witness

that has a will, but I am not. I am set in the wall, and I see what passes before my face, and I keep what is given to me, and the rest is for others to know.

He stood by the desk. He did not sit. He looked at the book she had been reading, and he turned it toward him without picking it up, and he read for a moment, and his mouth moved with the reading, as though the silence had not quite been agreed to.

She said, You are not yourself.

He said, I am.

She said, You are not. You are the other one. I have wondered when you would come.

He looked up from the book. The lamp was below him and threw the shadow of his face up onto the ceiling, and I will tell you that I, who have spent forty years looking at that ceiling, had never seen it make a face like that, and I would not have believed the ceiling capable of it.

He said, You have wondered.

She said, Yes.

He said, Why.

She said, Because Thomas told me. He told me about you in the library, on a Thursday. He said you were behind him on the stairs, and that the room I was in was the only room you could not enter. He said it as though he were warning me. I think he was warning himself.

He laughed. The laugh was not his. I had heard his laugh once, the time he washed his hands at me, when she had said something dry from the chair by the grate — a cough that had decided at the last moment to be something else. The laugh that came out now was older. The laugh of a man who has been laughing for a long time about a joke he has not shared.

He said, And what did you say to him.

She said, I said the room was a room. I said if it kept you out, that was a property of you, and not of the room.

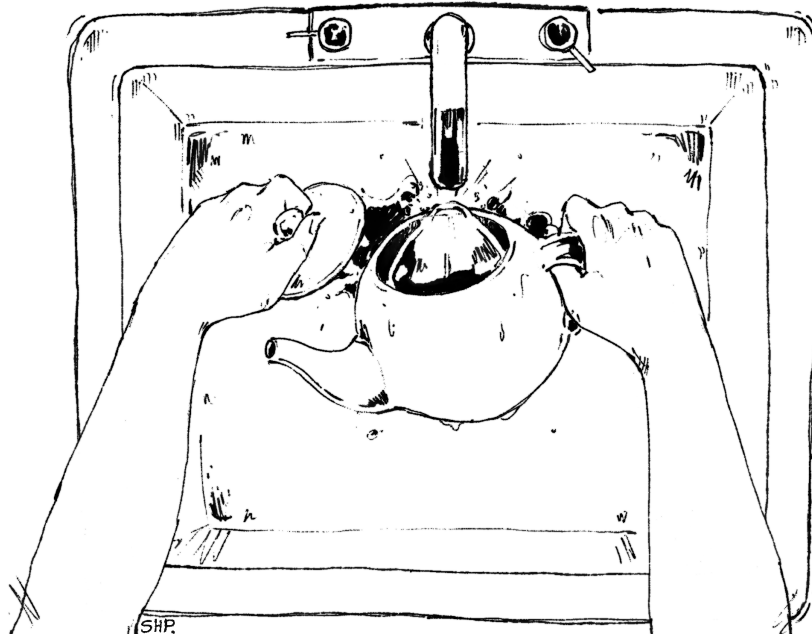
He said, And the room you are in now.

She said, This room is a room.

He said, We will see.

...

Something changed in my pipes. I do not have a heart and do not pretend to, but I have a system of pressure, and the pressure shifted, and a drop that had been waiting at the lip of the tap detached itself and fell into my basin without being asked. He turned at the sound. He looked at me for the length of a breath. He was not interested in me as a sink but as a witness; he had registered me and chose not to mind.



The men who fix me say a sink hears everything and tells nothing. That this is the contract a sink signs when it is set into a wall. I did not sign a contract. No one asked. I would have signed a different one—one that said a sink may, on a single occasion in its tenure, raise its voice. The crack would have opened. The water would have come up out of me and across the boards and at his feet, and he would have known himself seen.

But I dropped one drop. He looked at me. He turned back to her.

...

I will not tell you the whole of it. I will tell you the parts that took place in front of me. Those parts were given to me to keep.

He did not strike her at first. He spoke to her. He spoke for a long time, in the voice that was not his voice, and the speaking was the worst of it. The speaker was patient. He said her name and used it as a tool. He told her things about herself that he should not have known and that she should not have heard from him, and her face did what faces do when they realise the speaker has been studying them from behind a door for longer than they had imagined any door to have a behind.

She said, once, Stop. She said it levelly, the way she set her pencil down parallel to the edge of the book.

He did not oblige.

She moved toward the door. He moved between her and the door without hurry. The hurry was not what he was for.

She moved toward the window. The window is above me. To reach it, she had to come past me, and she came past me, and her dress brushed my edge. I felt the wool, and under the wool the heat of her, and under the heat the fast hammering in her chest. I have felt that hammering before, under the dresses of women washing their faces over me on the mornings of days they were afraid of.

He took her wrist. The wrist had a small mole on the inside. She had once held it under my tap to cool a paper cut. I knew the wrist as I knew the tread on the stair. I had no contract that permitted me to act. I did not act.'

...

He brought her down at the foot of the bed, on the rug worn through to the boards in the small patch at the centre. I could see her shoulder and her hand and the side of her face and her hair, which had come unpinned in the moving. The French pin was on the boards a little distance from her head. The lamp was on the desk and the small ring of yellow was on the desk and the pencil was parallel to the edge of the book, because the lamp and the ring and the pencil and the book did not know yet that the room had changed.

He took some time. The time he took had a rhythm, and the rhythm was a man's who had imagined this

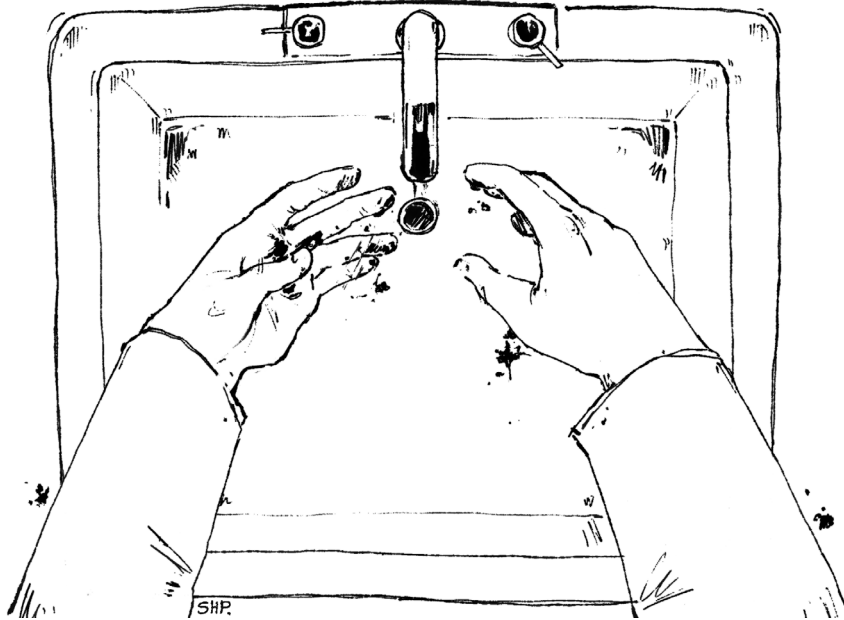
beforehand, in many rooms over many evenings.

She did not cry out for long. She said one word. Not a name. A word from another language I do not know, with the shape of a word older than the language that contained it. She said it once and did not say anything else.

I felt, in my pipes, the moment her chest stopped doing the small hammering. The pressure in the room changed. The lamp did not flicker. The chapel bells struck the eleven. I counted them. I counted them because the counting was all that was left to me of any office. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven.

...

He stood up. He did not look at her for long. He looked, instead, at his own hands, which were her colour now in places, and he looked at them as a tool he had used and had not yet decided where to set down.



He came to me.

He turned the tap. It stuck, as it sticks, but it gave for him. The cold came down in its usual thin stream, and he put his hands under it and washed them slowly and counted as he washed them. I heard the counting under his breath. The cadence was Thomas's. The pitch was Thomas's. The small breath between the second and the third was the breath I had heard at this tap for a season. This was the worst single thing I observed that evening. The killing had been done by something that was not Thomas. The counting was using Thomas—his ritual, his private one-two-three—to clean her from his hands.

The water in my basin went pink and then red and then pink and then clear. I held what came down. The drain accepted it. The crack did not leak.

He turned the tap off. He dried his hands on her towel, which hung on the small rod by my side. He set the towel back, smoothing it once, the way a man raised in a house with rods and towels smooths a towel before leaving a room.

He looked at me. He said, aloud, Good morning.

I held my drop. The drop that had detached itself earlier and fallen into me without being asked. I held it in my drain. I did not let the drain take it down. The drop is in me still.

He left. The door closed behind him. The latch fell. The pressure in my pipes returned to what it had been, less the small hammering that had been in her chest, which was not in any chest now, in any room, anywhere.

...

They took her. They took her in a sheet. They took the rug and the towel and the French pin. They took the pencil and the book, and they took the lamp because the lamp had been on. They took, eventually, even the chair by the grate, although the chair had not been near. They did not take me. I am set in the wall. I cannot be taken without taking the wall.

They sent a man to look at me, because of the water in my drain. He turned my tap and watched the basin fill and empty, and made a note on a paper, and said to the porter who had brought him up, This one is sound. He could not have known. There is no instrument that measures what I held that night. There is no notation for the drop.

...

A new occupant came at the end of the term. She was younger and she did not know. The room had been painted. The rug had been replaced. The small patch worn through to the boards had been covered. The boards under the cover were the boards under the cover. She set her boots by the door. She made her tea in a black pot. She rinsed the pot in me each morning. She did not unpin her hair to wash her face. She kept it short.

She is kind. I have nothing against her. I am only a sink, and bitterness is an organ I was not given.

In the small grey hour before she rises I let one drop, exactly one, detach itself from the lip of my tap and fall into my basin. It is not a drip. It is the drop. The same drop. The drop that detached itself on the night the second one came, that I held and will hold and will release once a morning into my own basin, for as long as I am set in this wall, until the wall is not, until the building is not, until the year no one has named.

The new occupant has not yet learned to hear it. She will, in time. They always do.

WRITTEN BY LUKE WAGNER '26 (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26 (JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU).

GRAPHICS BY SAM PARK '29

When the Rain Stops Looking Like the Movies

Reflections on unclouded love.

BY AUDREY WU '29

On rainy days growing up, my family and I would cuddle up on the sofa under a pile of blankets, make a cozy cup of tea, and turn on our favorite comforting romantic comedies. By the time the credits rolled, the storm would have subsided, and my face would always be soaked with tears of both joy and sorrow. Call me sentimental or cheesy, but as a hopeless romantic, I always had a soft spot for these films. My favorites are those with classic downpour scenes in which one partner comes running after the other, confesses their love, and they passionately embrace, sharing a moment in the middle of a deluge.

One of these quintessential moments is from Nick Cassavetes's "The Notebook," which never fails to make me tear up. Noah, charmingly played by Ryan Gosling, stands soaked in dramatic, torrential rain, gazing at Rachel McAdams as the character Ally. The intensity of the weather matches the emotion in his heart, as Noah confesses, "It wasn't over. It still isn't over!" Something about it always opens my floodgates: the way I know the climactic moment won't endure forever—the droplets will cease, and the two will have to confront the reality of their tumultuous relationship.

Greta Gerwig's "Little Women" features another iconic rain scene, in which Jo March, played by Saoirse Ronan, is seen running frantically to the train station to stop Professor Friedrich from leaving. Although my friends would tell

me I might be more of an Amy, I had always empathized with Jo, someone who stubbornly wanted to be strong and independent. Yet as she steps into the storm, Jo finds the courage to admit that it is okay not to have to do everything on her own—curls soaked and petticoats drenched, she realizes it is okay to want someone to weather the inevitably rainy days with. Jo ultimately ends up under Friedrich's umbrella, telling him, "I don't want you to leave, I want you to stay!"

The precipitous climax (pun intended) of "Breakfast at Tiffany's" is another classic I find myself rewatching for comfort. As droplets cloud the window panes, Audrey Hepburn's Holly Golightly silently cries to herself after losing her cat and being abandoned in a taxi by her love interest, Paul, played by George Peppard. Ankle-deep in puddles, she frantically searches for her beloved pet "Cat" and sees Paul looking as well. When the cat finally meows and resurfaces, with "Moon River" beginning to play, Holly and Paul share a kiss, wet cat and all.

In these films, weather becomes a form of communication, or perhaps even a kind of ironic intervention—there is something nostalgic about how notoriously "bad" weather symbolizes something different when you are in love. In these moments, storms make people want to impulsively declare their love, dance, sing, or become another version of themselves. And yet, people still say April is the longest and dreariest month because it has grey skies and cumulonimbus clouds.

With such romantic comedies serving as the backdrop of my childhood, my perception of rain differed from the conventional narrative: I grew in the puddles and found shelter in downpours.

And I would always return to my couch for a similar rotation of cinematic classics, with the same blanket I once laid under with my parents, whenever life became too overwhelming—the films offered a third space for me to go to if I was eventually tired of the physical and metaphorical rain, seeking to live vicariously through the idealistic lives of Hollywood characters.

Whether it was a feel-good friends-to-lovers film or a painfully devastating one, something about returning to the comfort of my bed covers and the safety of the characters I felt like I'd known my whole life was easier than getting up and braving the weather.

It wasn't until recently, after a particularly long day, that I recognized the habit I had developed. I had instinctively turned on Netflix and mindlessly rewatched another rom-com for the umpteenth time.

It wasn't only my way of avoiding my problems when things were no longer sunny; it was also my way of rethinking them and redefining the ways I had grown up learning romance from romantic comedies. I had always thought love in real life was the way it was portrayed in the movies: passionate, sudden, urgent, and full of feeling. Yet after recently losing a romantic relationship, I was able to recognize all of the other relationships I had grown through and see all of the people who had stayed with me through my lowest.

Love isn't the passionate kiss in the rain scene or the sudden outburst of emotion. It is about not disappearing when the weather takes a change for the worse, about showing up in quiet, unspoken ways. It is the way my roommates remember I don't like cheese except for on pizza; the way my dad stays up late to make sure I'm home safe; the way the people I love are willing to walk with me in silence, through the shittiest of storms, if it means it will make me feel loved. That is something the rom-coms never tell you or prepare you for, and while I love "The Notebook," "Little Women," and "Breakfast at Tiffany's," I no longer rely on them to teach me what idealized relationships are supposed to look like.

Instead, on days that I would have otherwise avoided the rain and turned to romantic comedies as a distraction from my everyday bleakness, I am now putting on my rainboots and learning to embrace the April showers.

**AUDREY WU '29
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HARVARD.EDU) IS STILL A
SUCKER FOR A GOOD RAINY-
DAY ROM-COM.**

**GRAPHIC BY KERRIE
ZHU '28**



Soundtrack of Violence

An analysis of music, autonomy, and morality in Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange."

BY TAYLOR THORNE '28

In the 1952 movie musical "Singin' in the Rain," protagonist Don Lockwood tap dances down the dark New York City streets in the pouring rain after escorting his love interest, Kathy Selden, to her door and kissing her goodnight. Overcome by joy at their budding relationship, he discards his umbrella, opting to embrace the downpour while belting, "Just singin' in the rain, / What a glorious feeling, / I'm happy again!" Although the shower soaks his clothes, the dismal weather is no match for his evident bliss. This title number, choreographed and performed by Gene Kelly, has helped the film, about actors adjusting to the transition from silent movies to "talkies," achieve widespread popularity and acclaim.

Since its initial release, the titular song has been referenced in films and other media in multiple ways. In the 1959 movie "North to Northwest," a character whistles the tune of the song in the shower, while in the television show "Glee," characters perform a mashup of the song with Rihanna's "Umbrella." Still relevant, seventy years after its release, the film's most prominent song has persisted as a cultural sensation.

In sharp contrast, the 1972 film "A Clockwork Orange" repurposes the song in a different light. Set in a dystopian Britain, it explores autonomy, government interference, and morality through the story of criminal teen Alex DeLarge. While it began as a novel written by Anthony Burgess, its film adaptation takes several creative liberties under the direction of Stanley Kubrick. Besides adjusting plot points and completely changing the ending, the film departs from the novel by including a performance of "Singin' in the Rain" by the main character during one of his acts of "ultraviolence." The scene was initially improvised by Alex's actor, Malcolm McDowell, on set, and Kubrick then bought the rights to use the song for \$10,000.

When Alex and his three loyal followers, the "Droogs," infiltrate the home of a writer and his wife, they begin their polished routine of violent attack and destruction. As the couple is restrained and gagged, Alex performs his own a capella rendition of the song, engaging in a macabre dance of physical assault. He punches and kicks them repeatedly, with the attacks perfectly coordinated with his euphoric singing of the lyrics. His performance culminates in the ripping of the wife's clothes and subsequent sexual assault, as the husband, tied up on the floor, is forced to watch.

The combination of "Singin' in the Rain" with the horrific attack creates a complicated viewing experience. On one hand, the sequence feels choreographed in a way that distracts the audience from the brutality, allowing for a sense of satisfaction in the musical performance. However, any enjoyment the audience feels in hearing the happy lyrics is inseparable from the on-screen violence, implicating viewers as complicit observers. The audience is thus implicated in the victims'

suffering, and this incongruity with music amplifies the horrific nature of potentially enjoying a reference while watching an assault.

Kubrick's decision to include this subversive use of "Singin' in the Rain" makes the scene compelling and the film's larger themes of morality and free will even more successful. On the surface, it is clear that Alex is singing the song because he truly does derive pleasure from participating in acts of violence. From the beginning of the film, the audience understands that Alex's brain is simply wired in a sociopathic way, as he is shown frequently engaging in and fantasizing about these acts.

However, when Alex is eventually caught and sentenced to prison, he participates in the novel Ludovico technique, which psychologically conditions him to be averse to sex and violence. After undergoing this treatment, the government deems him cured and releases him from prison. Now, whenever he thinks or interacts with these acts that used to bring him so much pleasure, he becomes physically sick. Thus, Alex becomes the morally good, law-abiding citizen whom the audience should theoretically rejoice in. It could be seen as an overall positive outcome that his free will has been curbed, as it will prevent future violent rampages like those seen in the first half of the film.

As Alex navigates coming home, his parents abandon him, and eventually, two of his former gang members, who are now police officers, almost beat him to death. Unable to defend himself, he staggers through the city streets, a shell of his former, albeit violent, self. Although physically he is now forced to be good, there are several moral implications regarding the nature of freedom. Can someone truly be free if they are unable to make autonomous decisions? Furthermore, what constitutes a morally good action: simply the effect or the intentions behind it? Kantian philosophy would argue that morality hinges on intentions and that, without free will, an action cannot be deemed good.

These moral dilemmas persist throughout the rest of "A Clockwork Orange" as the audience witnesses Alex's continued suffering. When he stumbles upon the home of the couple he previously assaulted, the now-disabled and widowed writer takes him in and cares for him. This is not due to the nature of forgiveness, but rather because he does not initially recognize Alex. When Alex begins singing "Singin' in the Rain" while taking a bath, the husband discovers his true identity and tortures him as revenge. After a suicide attempt, government authorities discover Alex and take him to a hospital for treatment.

As the film reaches its conclusion, the audience is left grappling with conflicting emotions: disgust for Alex's past evil acts and sympathy for his current situation. In the final scene, Alex is still in his hospital bed recovering from his physical injuries, but miraculously, he has reversed the effect of the Ludovico

treatment. He fantasizes about a sexual scene without the nauseating side effects from before. Looking into the camera, he smiles and declares, "I was cured all right."

Faced with this conclusion, it is unsurprising that viewers feel relief for Alex and his regained autonomy over his thoughts and actions. Even though this means he has reverted to his original violent state, he regains a sense of free will. In doing so, "A Clockwork Orange" questions the definition of freedom and reestablishes its necessity in our lives. While it seems wrong that violence should make someone want to sing in the rain, judgment may be warranted, but autonomy cannot be taken away.

Even though "A Clockwork Orange" is a film from well before the time of current Harvard College undergraduates, themes regarding free will and the human condition are just as relevant today as they were a century ago. I gained this perspective through taking "COMPLIT 153X: The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick," a course offered for the first time this spring semester in the Comparative Literature department. Each week at the Harvard Film Archive, I had the pleasure of viewing a Kubrick film on the big screen. Now, I leave the course with a greater appreciation for classic cinema and its ability to confront timeless questions. To all of my peers, the next time you find yourself contemplating what movie to watch in your free time, instead of opting for the newest release on Netflix, I suggest considering the value of an older film.

**TAYLOR THORNE '28
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THANKS PROFESSOR WEIR
FOR TEACHING THE CLASS
ON KUBRICK FILMS.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANNABELLA
BURTON-BOONE '29**



Vermin

A sestina poem.

BY EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29

In the early morn, she flutters
down the damp walk,
Looking for her writhing,
sodden breakfast: a worm
Dispelled from its home, flooded
from the pelting rain—
Easy pickings when they have no place to
return;
She nibbles at the granite, probes
through dewy blades,
And gobbles each bug for her baby bird
back home.

The pest squirms atop the ground,
longing for its home,
Defenseless as its stalker flits across the
walk,
Relentless wriggling futile beneath the
barbed blades,
Keen talons piercing soft flesh, whittling
the worm;
The feeble bug abandons all hope of
return
And its hunter worships the bounty of
the rain.

For the earthworms are easiest found
when the rain
Infiltrates the soft, soggy ground, seizing
their home—
Even once the clouds pass on, they may
ne'er return,
They merely bake 'neath the sun, for
humans to walk
Upon, never heeding the feeble, shriveled
worm

Being trampled under their soulless,
thoughtless blades.

Longing to restore to their earth, housed
below blades
Of liling grass, dappled with dew from
recent rain;
Yet humans think not to squash the
withering worm,
They do not feel its suffring; they merely
march home,
Focusing on their self-seeking path down
the walk,
Home-bound, refreshed aft the rain,
eager to return.

How should a storm so great prevent a
life's return—
Abandoned, each concrete pebble a
piercing blade,
Such yielding creatures are not meant for
cruel side walk;
Still songbirds croon melodies to harken
the rain,
Come morning—prey, devour, and dart
back to their home,
There's no need for sympathy for a simple
worm.

Vile creature, scum of the earth—none
think of a worm
'Til they no longer possess a home to
return;
Even then, inconvenience revolts, not
their home,
It matters not if they rot 'neath the sun's

sharp blades
May we exalt the lyric beauty of the rain,
And decry the mangled worms littered
on the walk.

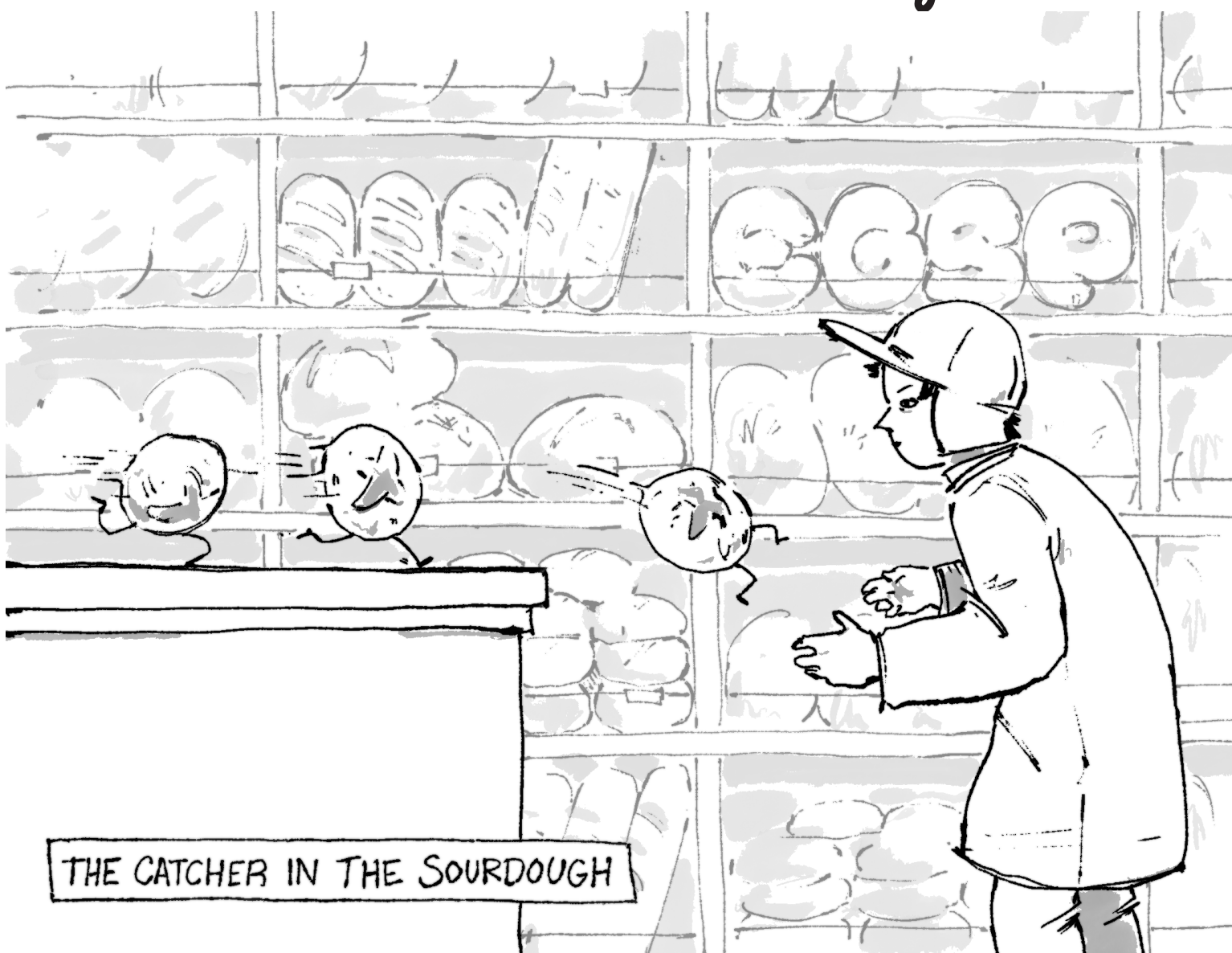
In the end, the spent home of a poor,
lowly worm—
Waits for someone to walk by, guide the
pest's return
'Neath the beckoning blades, finally free
from rain.

**EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29
(EDENBRIDGEHAYES@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) THINKS SESTINA
POEMS ARE REALLY
COOL.**

**GRAPHIC BY
SOPHIA RASCOFF
'27**



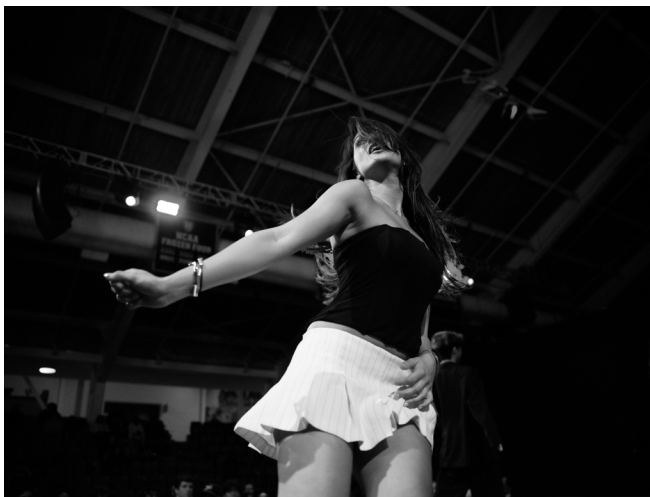
The Catcher in the Sourdough



BY ELLIE GUO '29 AND SAM PARK '29

Shots from Eleganza 2026

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27



Uneven Playing Field: The Gender Wage Gap in Sports

Why are women in sports still being paid less?

BY ADIN HOOTNICK '29

In Jan. 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Cantwell-Capito Act into law, guaranteeing equal pay for women on Team USA ahead of the 2024 Summer Olympics. It was hailed as a landmark victory and a turning point for gendered wage disparities among athletes. But progress in one area does not reflect the whole picture: for instance, at the professional level, Women's National Basketball Association players still earn a fraction of NBA salaries, and female collegiate programs continue to receive less funding and fewer resources at nearly every level. One piece of legislation cannot fix what decades of systematic inequality have created.

The gender pay gap in sports is widely recognized, yet its scale remains striking. For the third year in a row, not a single female athlete appeared on the list of the world's 100 highest-paid athletes, determined by total earnings inclusive of salary and endorsements. A'ja Wilson (Las Vegas Aces) holds the richest contract in WNBA history for her 2026 season, starting at \$1.4 million annually, while Stephan Curry, the highest-paid NBA player for the 26-27 season, earns a base salary of \$59.6 million. The gap does not remain confined to the top; Caitlin Clark, who transformed women's basketball by shattering scoring records and filling arenas, signed a four-year rookie contract worth just \$338,056, a fraction of the \$55.1 million contract signed by Victor Wembanyama, the NBA's top draft pick the year prior. The gap is even starker when measured against those who barely played: Ben Simmons, who appeared in just 90 games over three seasons with the Brooklyn Nets, was paid \$123.8 million, roughly 367 times what Clark earned across her entire rookie contract.

The most common defense of this disparity is a market one: women's sports leagues generate less profit, so women are consequently paid less. It is a one-dimensional argument, and an increasingly dishonest one. The WNBA generated an estimated \$300 million in revenue in 2025. The NBA, by comparison, projected over \$14 billion that same season. Yes, that gap is real. But it does not come

close to explaining the disparity in pay. The market argument obscures a more fundamental problem: it is not just that women's leagues earn less, but that their athletes receive a far smaller share of what their leagues do earn. WNBA players take home roughly 10% of league revenue in salaries, while NBA players receive around 50% through their collective bargaining agreement. This gap is not a product of scale, but rather one of structure that exists independent of how much profit any given league generates.

Nearly a billion viewers tuned into the 2023 Women's World Cup, and almost 19 million watched the 2024 NCAA Women's Basketball Championship, making it the most-watched basketball game since 2019 for men's, women's, collegiate, or professional sports. These are not the viewership numbers of sports that "nobody watches." They reflect a thriving, billion-dollar industry whose athletes are somehow paid as if it weren't.

The soccer world offers perhaps the clearest illustration of this inequality. When the U.S. men's team was eliminated in the 2014 World Cup, they went home with \$8 million. The following year, the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team won the entire tournament and earned only \$2 million. The USWNT eventually fought back through years of litigation and ultimately settled for \$24 million in 2022. That the most decorated women's soccer program in the world had to sue its own federation just to be taken seriously is a problem far deeper than the \$6 million difference in prize money.

The financial gap was hardly the only insult; the women played on artificial turf while the men played on grass imported from Canada. FIFA could not be bothered to give the women the same playing field, literally. Moreover, days before the Women's World Cup kicked off, the FIFA website was still promoting the men's tournament, which began four years later. By 2019, the frustration had spilled onto the field itself; when the USWNT won the World Cup in France, the crowd's chants shifted from "U-S-A" to "equal pay."

None of this happened by accident. Leagues that invest in broadcasting deals, marketing campaigns, and prime-time scheduling build audiences—that is a fact, and how the sports industry has always worked. For decades, women's leagues have received a fraction of that investment and were then held up as proof that fans simply did not care about women's sports. But when the infrastructure is finally put into place, the audiences show up. Even before the WNBA's

new media deal fully took effect, the 2025 regular season (the last under the old structure) became the most-watched in league history. If that kind of growth was possible under a deal worth a sixth of its new replacement, the question was never whether fans were interested. It was whether the league was being given a fair chance to reach them.

This gap does not start in the professional leagues, and oftentimes begins the moment a female athlete steps foot onto a college campus. The NCAA's own 2021 gender equity review found stark disparities in resources provided to men's and women's programs: unequal weight room facilities, fewer meals, smaller travel budgets, and less marketing support, even at the same institution.

Title IX, passed in 1972, prohibits sex-based discrimination in any federally funded education program, including athletics. But compliance has been inconsistently enforced and narrowly interpreted for decades; schools can technically meet Title IX thresholds while simultaneously providing women's programs with demonstrably inferior facilities, coaching staff, and budgets.

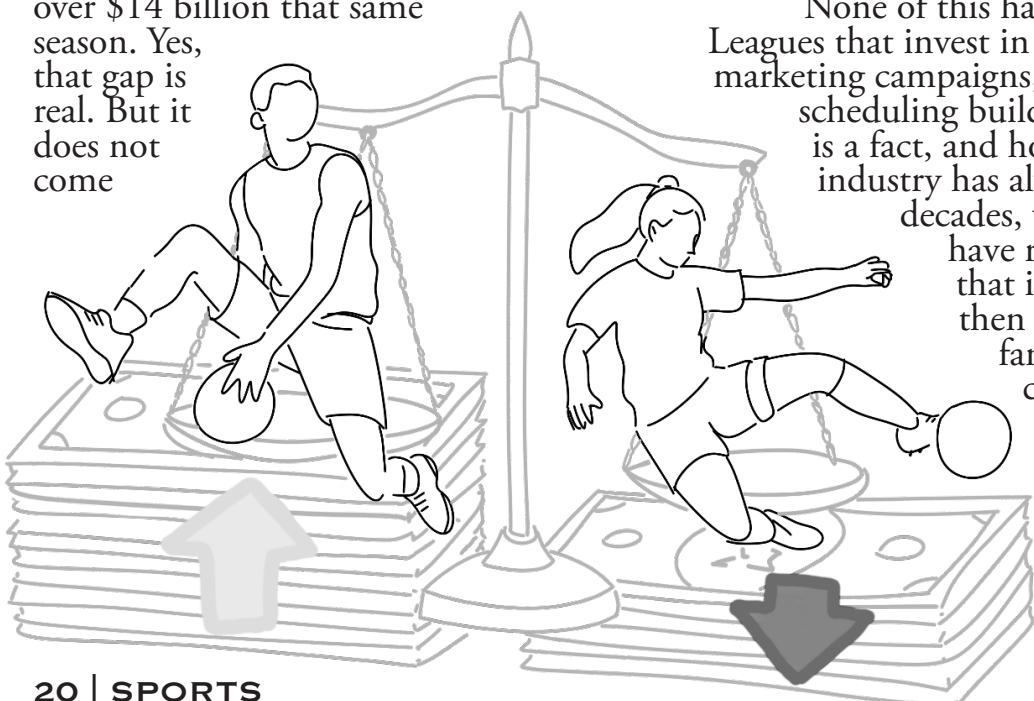
The women's game has not been underperforming; it has been underserved. There is a crucial difference between a product that fails on its own merits and one that was deliberately starved of the resources it needed to thrive. For far too long, those in power have been able to blur that distinction for women's sports.

The Cantwell-Capito Act was meaningful, and the USWNT's hard-fought equal-pay settlement was meaningful. But these are narrow victories in a much wider war that has yet to fully begin. Federal legislation cannot mandate that professional leagues restructure their salary caps or force governing bodies to equalize prize money. Most of all, it cannot undo generations of institutional neglect and sexism.

Female athletes have done everything asked of them, and then some. They have broken records, sold out arenas, and created an entire industry worth billions of dollars. These athletes are not asking for a handout or special privilege, but to be paid for the same commitment, sacrifice, and excellence that their male counterparts are rewarded handsomely for. The difference between their paychecks and the men's is not a market outcome; it is a deliberate choice. At some point, the institutional powers that protect and reinforce this sexism will have to start choosing differently.

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ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN
SPORTS AND BEYOND.

GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28



Two Titles and Counting

Inside Harvard Women's Water Polo's back-to-back championship run.

BY ROHAN TYAGI '29

When Ella Schneider '26 scored in the fourth sudden-death period to give Harvard an 8-7 win over Princeton in the 2026 CWPA Championship, the Crimson became the first program in school history to win back-to-back conference titles. The game had taken four quarters, two overtime periods, and four sudden-death frames to decide. Under head coach Ted Minnis for the past 16 years, this has been the type of match-up that the Harvard team consistently excels at.

Senior utility player Heidi Heffelfinger '26 had a front-row seat all four years to the development of our repeat champion program and finished her collegiate tenure at the center of it. In the semifinal against Brown, Heffelfinger tied the game at eight with the clock nearly expiring in the first overtime period, sparking a second overtime run that gave Harvard an 11-8 victory. She tallied two goals and an assist in her final game at the NCAA Tournament, a 15-5 quarterfinal loss to UCLA. The season ended at 26-4, a second consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance, and a program that looks nothing like what it was a few years ago.

For Heffelfinger, the answer to the team's success is simple. "I honestly think it's all about team chemistry, mindset, and hard work, just a combination of those," she said to the "Harvard Independent." "We definitely set a goal for ourselves that we wanted to win conference again at the beginning of this season, and just reminding ourselves that all the little things like showing up to practice and working hard every day would sort of culminate in us being able to find success at conference."

Describing the team's culture, goalkeeper Orli Cooper '28 put it simply. "The first words that come to mind when I think of our team culture are support and commitment," she added. "We push each other to be better every day, but always with love and support."

That culture is just as important to the team's newest additions. "Our team describes itself as a family, and I truly felt that every day," center Petra Klemm '29 said. "No matter how hard practices were, we always supported each other."

That bond between teammates has been built with time and care. The team spends multiple hours a day together during a season that stretches from January through late April. "When you're in season, you're practicing so much that you're spending multiple hours every day together," Heffelfinger continued. "So it's easy to build that team chemistry when you're spending so much time together."

Minnis' team-building capabilities have shown results in both the program's wins and the players it develops. Minnis himself was named the James Herscot '58 Coach of Excellence following the 2025 season. That season saw Harvard win its first conference title, defeat 16 ranked opponents, and make its first NCAA Tournament appearance in program history. The 2026 squad returned four All-Americans from that group. Cooper,

who broke the program's single-season saves record in 2025, was named tournament MVP after making 18 saves in the championship game against Princeton, 12 of them in the fourth quarter or later. Niki Piovan '28, who had posted 58 goals and 48 assists in her freshman year to receive CWPA Rookie of the Year honors, came back as one of the conference's most dangerous offensive players. Maya O'Dea '27 and Emma Gilbert '27 earned All-CWPA First Team recognition for the second consecutive season.

But all of that returning talent had to be integrated with a new freshman class, and for Heffelfinger, doing so was incredibly important to the team's achievements. "We have a great class of freshmen," she affirmed. "Just making sure you're incorporating them into the team and making sure you're learning their styles and helping them just sort of get well-adjusted into how we play and how we do things."

Klemm agreed wholeheartedly. "The team's culture impacted me a lot this year," she said. "Coming in as a first year, the team helped me adapt to life in college and gave me a community that supported me through everything."

The team's confidence found an early anchor in a result that had eluded Harvard throughout the current team's career. The Crimson faced Indiana at the Princeton Invitational in January and won, a program they had not beaten since 2017. While the win was not consequential on its own, the timing of the victory mattered for morale.

"It was our first or second tournament where, at the beginning of the season, we got to play Indiana, and we beat them, which was definitely a great feeling," Heffelfinger said. "It sort of gave us this motivation that we're working hard in practice, but then getting to see that we can be a good team felt like a big moment for me."

The Crimson took that confidence in stride as it went 5-1 in CWPA play during the regular season, finishing atop the standings over Princeton and Michigan on goal differential before heading to Ann Arbor for the tournament. The semifinal against Brown resulted in two overtime periods and some of the best clutch play of Heffelfinger's career. The championship ended with four sudden-death frames before Schneider's goal completed the match.

Off the pool deck, the team still manages the academic expectations of being Harvard students. Harvard's academic calendar makes time management demanding for every student, and student-athletes operate under even tighter constraints. Yet, Heffelfinger described the in-season schedule as an opportunity for growth rather than persistent pressure.

"For me, it's a lot easier to balance things in season, which seems counterintuitive," she said. "You're so locked in and so focused that you have this more rigid schedule you're following. You have classes, you have practice, and you go home, and you grind out your homework. You're a little less distracted."

Under Minnis, the team culture prioritizes the "student" in student-athlete. When players need to leave practice early for a test, they can do so without question. The group dynamic also includes studying together after dinner and advising other teammates on course loads. Connection and accountability have also shaped the legacy that this year's seniors leave behind.

For the class of 2026, the season ends with many victories. Seniors Heffelfinger, Schneider, and Sutchie Ofori-Nyako '26 are leaving behind a program that has just made the NCAA tournament for two consecutive seasons, set records for wins, and created a culture of trust by dedicating thousands of hours in and out of the pool.

"Getting to send the seniors out with two rings means so much for our family, and it's something we'll carry into next year," Klemm remarked.

Heffelfinger added to this sentiment: "Getting to end on a high note definitely feels good. And just knowing that we're leaving the team in good hands. I think they're ready to crush it again next year."

**ROHAN TYAGI '29
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WATCHING THE CRIMSON'S
NEXT HOME GAME
POOLSIDE.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA
RYMAN '28**



The Buffalo Sabres will be your 2026 Stanley Cup Champions

The curse is over!

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

We are a little over one week into the most wonderful time of the year, the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs. In just the first half of the first round, we've been treated to hat tricks, double overtime, fights, wild comebacks, and just all-around incredible hockey. I can only imagine what the next few weeks will bring. So, I thought I'd go through each series and give my predictions for how these 16 teams will fare on the road to the Cup!

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Carolina Hurricanes vs. Ottawa Senators (CAR 4-0 OTT)

Well, to the surprise of absolutely no one, the Carolina Hurricanes annihilated the Ottawa Senators in this first-round matchup. The Senators did not have a lead once in all four games due to their pitiful offensive production. That's not to say the Hurricanes played well; they just didn't need to try all that hard. The biggest question from this series is what will become of Senators' captain Brady Tkachuk, as trade rumors swirl about his potential early exit from the team. Tkachuk went pointless in these four playoff games, and in light of discussions surrounding his value, I'm unconvinced he's the offensive weapon many fans and general managers believe him to be.

Montreal Canadiens vs. Tampa Bay Lightning (MTL 3-2 TBL)

The work that Canadiens General Manager Kent Hughes and President of Hockey Operations Jeff Gorton have done over the last several years is beyond comparison in the NHL. The Canadiens have quietly become one of the most dangerous teams in the league, and they have shown up these playoffs with a chip on their shoulder, clearly out to prove themselves worthy of the title of "cup contender." If they beat Tampa, I'd say they've more than earned it. This has been by far the closest series of the first round, and it's been incredible to see this team of young stars come together and go toe-to-toe with one of the greatest dynasties in NHL history. This series is by no means over,

but I have Montreal winning in six games. As much respect as I have for what the Lightning have done over the last 5 years, I think the sun is starting to set on their empire.

Philadelphia Flyers vs. Pittsburgh Penguins (PHI 3-2 PIT)

Man, I was really excited for this series. For the first time since 2018, we had ourselves a Battle of Philadelphia! The up-and-coming pesky Flyers against a Penguins team made up almost entirely of older, legendary veterans. This is potentially Sidney Crosby's last playoff series, and this is what we get? The Flyers absolutely ran the Penguins' show over these five games, and it was a tough watch. The Flyers' young players, namely Matvei Michkov, Trevor Zegras, and 19-year-old rookie Porter Martone, are playing far above their weight class, but it's the Flyers' defense, led by Jamie Drysdale and Rasmus Ristolainen, that's been particularly impressive. The Flyers rank second league-wide in terms of shots allowed and scoring chances allowed per game, and boast one of the lowest goals-against-average in these playoffs. Those are the kinds of underlying metrics that enable a team to go far in these series, and I'm thoroughly impressed with what we've seen from Philadelphia. I believe they'll take the series with a win next game.

Buffalo Sabres vs. Boston Bruins (BUF 3-2 BOS)

HALLELUJAH! After 14 years and the second-longest playoff drought in professional sports, the Buffalo Sabres have returned to chase the Stanley Cup with thunder and fury. No one, absolutely no one, believed this team would be a playoff contender, let alone cup contender. I'm pretty sure I predicted them finishing last in their division, and they came in first. This is not a Cinderella run, nor is it a team randomly outperforming for one season. This team is good. Really good. I don't know if there is a place more invested in its sports team than Buffalo right now. There are people in that town who have waited their entire lives for this moment, and the Sabres know it.

They know what they're playing for, and I don't see them bowing out anytime soon. The Bruins have played a solid few games, and I think they'll get one more on the Sabres, but Buffalo is taking this series in six or seven games. Beyond that, the sky is the limit for this team. I think they're going all the way.

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Colorado Avalanche vs. Los Angeles Kings (COL 4-0 LAK)

Game 4 was up on my phone as I wrote this article, and for the fifth time in five years, the Los Angeles Kings have been eliminated in the first round of the playoffs. Colorado had been one of the best teams in the league all season (trading off with the Sabres), so I'm not surprised in the slightest that they bested the Kings—but a sweep? Really? The Kings added star winger Artemi Panarin at the deadline, believing they were poised for a deep playoff run, and it calls into question how well the higher-ups in the organization understand the team they have in front of them. Five consecutive first-round exits with largely the same core of players feels like the definition of insanity, and serious changes are needed if the Kings want a chance at a cup anytime soon. They will have some freedom to make moves in the offseason given Anze Kopitar has already announced his retirement. No one wanted this conclusion for arguably the greatest King ever, but Colorado is 100% going to the Finals, so I can't really say I expected too much more out of this series.



Utah Mammoth vs. Vegas Golden Knights (UTA 2-2 VGK)

These next three series are what I like to call drunk hockey, because no one on or off the ice has any real idea what's going on. Every game feels like it's a coin toss between which team is going to beat the wheels off of the other. We are witnessing a rivalry emerge between Utah and Vegas in real time. Mammoth forward Dylan Guenther, who has always been quite good, has found a whole new gear to his game, and at only 23, he is on track to become one of the leading stars in the NHL. For Vegas, their usual stars (Ivan Barbashev, Jack Eichel, Mark Stone) have been phenomenal, but a special shoutout needs to be given to Nic Dowd, who has scored multiple goals despite having only five in 75 games this season. The playoffs bring out the best and worst in a team, and we've seen unlikely heroes rise to the challenge. I want to say Utah will take this one in seven games, purely for the fun of seeing a new team make a deep playoff run.

Minnesota Wild vs. Dallas Stars (MIN 3-2 DAL)

Talk about a coin flip series. Blowout by Minnesota game one, blowout by Dallas game two, double overtime Dallas win game three, and overtime Minnesota win in game four: this is some outstanding back-and-forth hockey. Both teams' stars are playing at the top of their game, with three notable exceptions. Quinn Hughes, while phenomenal, was goalless through five games. I know it's not necessarily the job of the defense to score goals, and he is playing great defense, but he's built a career out of being a prolific offensive defenseman, and it's time for him to start putting the puck in the net. On the other hand, it is absolutely Mikko Rantanen's job to score goals, and he only has one so far this series. This is the same player who practically single-handedly carried the Stars to the Western Conference final last year, with multiple hat tricks across those games. Finally, Jake Oettinger needs to step it up. A .902 save percentage would be fine for an average goaltender, but Oettinger is an Olympian. He has been so highly touted by

this organization that they fired longtime coach Pete DeBoer when he called out Oettinger's poor playoff performance at the end of last season. More pertinently, his position as a staple of USA Olympic Hockey will be challenged, as there are too many great young goaltenders (namely Dustin Wolf) waiting in the wings. Oettinger did not play a single game at the 2026 Olympics in Milan, and after these first four games, one wonders if there are doubts about his ability to perform in high-stakes situations. Ultimately, I give it to Minnesota in seven games.

Anaheim Ducks vs. Edmonton Oilers (ANA 3-2 EDM)

What on earth is happening in this series? For the non-hockey fans reading this article, the Edmonton Oilers have been to the Stanley Cup finals the last two years in a row, losing both times to the Florida Panthers. With the Panthers missing the playoffs this year, the path should have been clear for Connor McDavid to win his first cup, and for a Canadian team to bring home the trophy after a 33-year drought. Evidently, the mighty ducks of Anaheim had other ideas. This team, which out of nowhere won the admittedly weak Pacific Division, has played out of their minds. Anaheim goaltender Lukáš Dostál is proving he will soon be a tier one goaltender, while young star forwards Cutter Gauthier and Leo Carlsson have both excelled. Anaheim's defensive core is among the most impressive in the playoffs, with Jackson LaCombe proving to everyone (me) who doubted his inclusion in the 2026 USA Olympic roster why he was chosen. A special shoutout to Ian Moore '25, who is now a defensive staple in his first semi-full NHL season. Moore is playing on a defensive group that has held Connor McDavid, the best player on earth, scoreless in back-to-back playoff games for just the fifth time in his career. I know in my mind that Edmonton is probably going to win this series, but for the fun of it, give me Anaheim in six.

FINAL PREDICTIONS

Which you have been clearly dying to know!
Stanley Cup Winner: Buffalo

over Colorado in seven games. Regular season hockey and playoff hockey are two entirely different sports, but it's hard not to have faith in the team that won the Atlantic Division and had the second-most points in the East behind the Carolina Hurricanes, who won the Metropolitan Division. Unfortunately for the 'Canes, the Atlantic was the toughest division all year. Buffalo has been tested over and over again and have proven themselves capable of shining bright against the best teams in the league. I think Colorado is going to steamroll through the West (as they did all season) but I do give the edge to the Sabres.

Stanley Cup MVP: Tage Thompson. If Buffalo does win the Stanley Cup, it will be on the shoulders of their star forward. Thompson is playing at a point-per-game so far in this first round after he got his first taste of Olympic hockey this year. It's safe to say his compete level is at an all-time high, and I think he'll go nuclear if Buffalo has a chance at the Cup.

**JORDAN WASSERBERGER
'27 (JWASSERBERGER@
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IS GOING TO BUFFALO
FOR EVERY HOME GAME IF
THEY MAKE THE FINALS.**
**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA
'27**

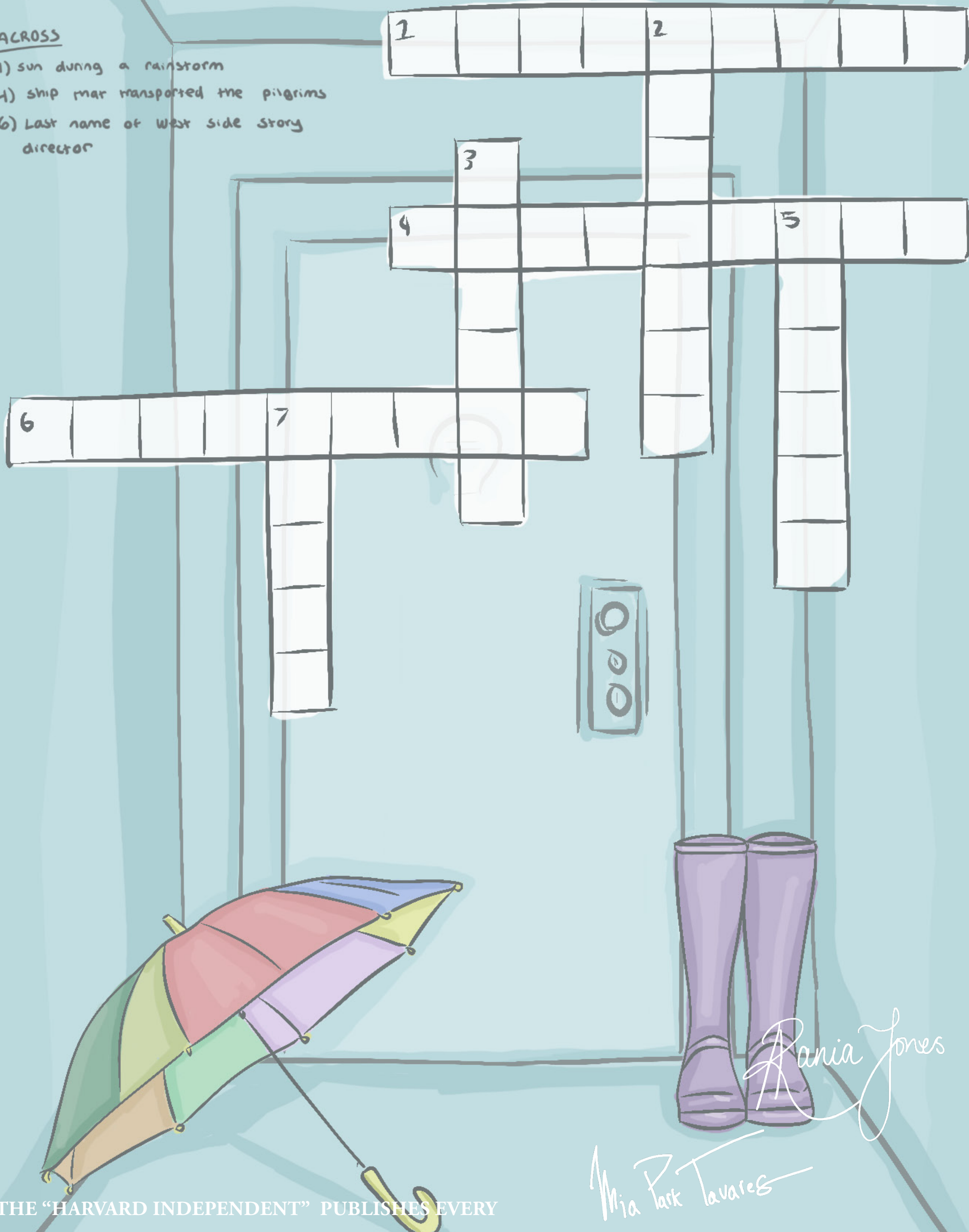
OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE
WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES
OF THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT."

DOWN

- 2) Actor that dressed in drag and performed to Rihanna's "Umbrella"
- 3) Japanese word for cherry tree
- 5) Prequel of a story featuring a certain Wonderful Wizard
- 7) Comes at the end of the tunnel

ACROSS

- 1) sun during a rainstorm
- 4) ship that transported the pilgrims
- 6) Last name of West Side Story director



Rania Jones

Mia Park Tavares