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HARVARD

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# INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

## The Seed Issue



Re-Centering Academics at Harvard  
Update on Grading and Workload

HARVARD COLLEGE

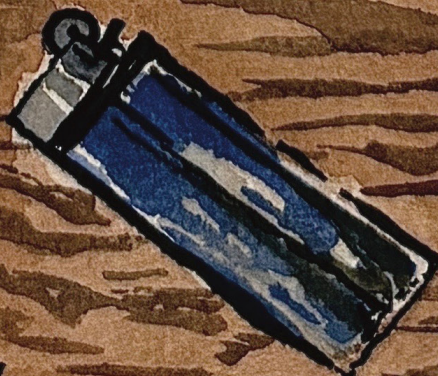


October 2025

Claybaugh, Director of Undergraduate Education  
on Behalf of the Office of Undergraduate Education

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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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# “Canna-Curious”: Legalization and Medical Marijuana

Insights into the possibilities of medicinal cannabis with Dr. Peter Grinspoon.

BY SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28

Despite Massachusetts legalizing marijuana more than a decade ago, it remains prohibited on Harvard's campus, highlighting a disconnect between state law and university policy as national attitudes become increasingly positive. An addiction specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital and an Instructor in Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Peter Grinspoon has used medical cannabis in treating patients for approximately 25 years.

Grinspoon is the son of Dr. Lester Grinspoon '55, Harvard psychiatry professor and advocate for marijuana legalization. Grinspoon's interest in studying the effects of marijuana comes not only from his father's academic legacy but is also deeply rooted in personal experience; when Grinspoon was eight years old, his older brother passed away from childhood leukemia, but was illegally using medical cannabis to relieve some of his symptoms. “I grew up with the idea that cannabis is a helpful medicine, not the satanic weed,” Grinspoon said in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.”

Medical cannabis was first legalized in California in 1996; many states followed suit in the subsequent years, including Massachusetts in 2012. Now, 47 states allow cannabis use for medical purposes, excluding Idaho, Kansas, and Nebraska. Despite most states adopting policies that allow for medical usage, under U.S. federal law, cannabis is classified as a Schedule I drug—along with heroin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and others that are classified as having a high potential for abuse. While legal in Massachusetts, marijuana and cannabis are federally illegal, a legacy of President Nixon's “War on Drugs.”

“Right now, it's state by state. There's a lot of variability in the quality of the regulation and the labeling—it just creates a lot of chaos and confusion,” Grinspoon said. “It's just incoherent because it's legal in Massachusetts and it's legal in Vermont, but it's not legal to drive over the border from Massachusetts to Vermont because the borders are federal.”

In 2023, the Department of Health and Human Services proposed that marijuana be lowered from a Schedule I classification to a Schedule III classification by the Drug Enforcement Administration. If approved by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the change would reclassify cannabis and acknowledge medical use in the United States.

“Legalization helps make people feel more comfortable asking about [cannabis]. It helps lessen the stigma, and it also provides a sort of ratification for patients who are already using it,” Grinspoon said. The medical properties of cannabis have been used for centuries, with use becoming popularized in the U.S. and England in the 1800s. The shift in perception coincided with changes in drug legislation and was later accelerated by the “War on Drugs.”

For Grinspoon, federal legalization opens doors for greater research on its medicinal properties and social destigmatization: “We can educate people about the harms, and that would open the way for neutral research ... does it harm? Does it help? What are the harms? What are the benefits? What doses?

What are the most effective things?” Grinspoon stated, citing Canada's recent legalization of cannabis as a model for what future legislation could look like in the United States. “I think federal legalization really opened the floodgates to better communication, better regulation, and better research.”

While recreational and medical marijuana are growing in popularity, they still have addictive qualities, most notably the psychoactive ingredient: THC. “It can be addictive, and the addiction is serious. It needs to be treated with compassion and empathy ... that said, it's not as addictive as alcohol or tobacco,” Grinspoon addressed. Marijuana use can affect adolescent brain development before full maturity around 25 years of age. The legal recreational age of both alcohol and cannabis is 21 and unlikely to change. In some states, including Massachusetts, medical cannabis is available with a doctor's recommendation at 18. “I usually pick 18, because most of the potential damage is in kids that are 14, 15, 16. Kids are more susceptible to [the effects of cannabis] than adults,” Grinspoon said.

Grinspoon attests that some of the misconceptions and anxiety surrounding cannabis use and legalization stem from inflated data around addiction. There are 11 criteria for substance use disorders, two of which have to be met—including tolerance and withdrawal—to be diagnosed by an addiction psychiatrist with a use disorder. “With cannabis, every patient has tolerance and withdrawal. That's true for opiates or benzodiazepines, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), for that matter,” Grinspoon pointed out.

Certain drugs used as pain relievers are excluded from this criterion, yet medical cannabis is commonly used in chronic pain treatments. As a result, estimates that approximately 30% of cannabis users are likely to become addicted are inflated. “Everybody uses opiates for pain. Everybody gets tolerance and withdrawal. So there's an opiate exclusion in the definition of addiction for opiates, which is, if you just have tolerance and withdrawal, you're not addicted, because just having tolerance and withdrawal doesn't make you addicted,” Grinspoon said. Because cannabis does not have the same exclusion as opioids, it can overstate true addiction statistics, an oversight which Grinspoon attributes to a lingering drug war mentality.

One of the first steps in destigmatization is education, especially in how to get started using cannabis responsibly. Grinspoon calls these patients “canna-curious.”

“Start low and go slow,” Grinspoon emphasized. “Take a very small dose of an edible or tincture under the tongue. Some of the topicals are really helpful if you have arthritis ... Don't take the 20 mg edible your kid gives you because that's what they take recreationally.” He strongly recommends against smoking marijuana because of its harmful effects on the lungs.

According to Grinspoon, discussions about the limits and uses of medical cannabis start in hospitals and medical offices, which in turn influence research and public education. “The only problem is, doctors are often significantly undereducated about anything helpful having to do with cannabis; most

doctors can't really advise their patients sensibly how to use it ... The solution to this, of course, is to educate doctors and patients,” Grinspoon said.

“It also helps the patients who are kind of curious, because instead of hiding and getting their information from dubious sources, now they feel more comfortable saying ‘Hey, doctor, hey nurse practitioner, what do you think about medical cannabis?’”

As Grinspoon continues his research and treatments with cannabis, the conversation around proper usage, destigmatization, and legalization continues to expand. This dialogue extends across generations; college student usage is notably on the rise, but Grinspoon claims the most rapidly growing demographic of cannabis users is people over 65.

In Massachusetts, over 37% of residents have reported using cannabis in the last year, and nearly half the population has used marijuana at some point in their lives. The number of cannabis users continues to grow, and so does the research on its potential health benefits.

“I think we're going to be using it earlier and more consistently in our treatment algorithms. I don't think it's going to be a last resort. I think it's going to move up as more physicians appreciate what many patients have already figured out; that cannabis is generally well tolerated and generally quite effective for many conditions,” Grinspoon concluded.

Grinspoon's latest book, “Aging Well with Cannabis,” further explores the harms and benefits of medical cannabis use.

**SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28  
(SOPHIAGONZALEZ@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS  
CANNA-CURIOUS FOR THE  
POSSIBILITIES OF FUTURE  
MEDICINE.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28**



# Holding Time in Harvard Square

Inside Leavitt & Peirce—a shop that prioritizes tobacco, tradition, and human connection even as Cambridge resists smoking.

BY KATHERINE CHUNG '29

For over a century, Leavitt & Peirce has served Harvard Square patrons on Massachusetts Avenue. Above its entrance, three simple words announce what it sells: gifts, tobacco, games. But inside, there is nothing simple about it. The store is densely packed, stocked with everything from flavored tobacco and pipes to chess sets, Go boards, knives, lighters, Lamy pens, specialty playing cards, and more. Black-and-white tiles line the floor, and the air carries an earthy scent.

Behind the counter, owner Paul Macdonald helps customers as they drift in and out. “Everything we carry here has to fit. If you look around, there’s so many different categories, but it fits,” Macdonald said in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.” “People walk in this store, and they go, ‘Wow, it’s like walking back in time.’”

Leavitt & Peirce was founded in 1883 by Fred Leavitt and Wallace Peirce. “They ran it up until 1920, ’21, ’22, where they sold it to a couple of Harvard grads who thought it would be fun to own a tobacco shop, and then they realized it’s a lot of work,” Macdonald said. “They ran the store for about 30 years until a Boston tobacco shop, Ehrlich’s, bought Leavitt & Peirce. They did not change the name out of respect for the history of the store,” Macdonald continued. “The Ehrlich brothers were Harvard-educated, class of ’26, ’28, so they secretly loved this store more than their Boston store.”

Macdonald turned to his connection with the store. “My father came in the early 1970s to run the business ... The stores, I guess, weren’t doing well,” he said.

At 19, Macdonald began working at the Boston store. “In 1983, my father wanted me to come over and manage [the Cambridge] store, so I had to cross the great divide that was the Charles River ... it was a culture

shock.”

Although Leavitt & Peirce remained a constant for many years, Harvard Square around it underwent significant changes. In the early 2010s, reports noted a shift from a neighborhood-oriented commercial center to a space increasingly shaped by tourism and dining. By 2012, the Square saw an influx of chains and restaurants like Shake Shack, Mike’s Pastry, and Tasty Burger. Local businesses, including the Reading International-owned businesses and Janus Cinema, closed their doors, unable to keep up with the increasing rent. Furthermore, a 2020 report conveyed that rising property values allowed landlords to leave storefronts vacant for long periods of time, holding out for higher-paying tenants such as large chains or banks, contributing to a cycle of empty spaces and escalating rents.

“Harvard Square, today, it doesn’t have the energy, it doesn’t have the funkiness,” Macdonald said. “What’s happened to Harvard

Square over the decades is less and less retail shops like us, more and more restaurants. It’s more about eating and drinking than shopping.”

Reflecting on what the Square once felt like, Macdonald pointed to a time when the space was defined less by turnover and convenience, and more by community. “It was just much more foot traffic. We’d have the professors coming in with their pipe tobacco ... You’d have hippies still hanging around in Harvard Square coming in for their own tobacco,” he said. “The pit was a gathering place for all kinds of twisted milk and tents ... there’d be music there on the weekends ... [Harvard Square] was a place where people could feel free.”

In addition to tobacco, Leavitt & Peirce sells games and knick-knacks. “We always specialized in chess. It’s always been a part of the store. I’m sure we’ve diversified over the last few decades just because tobacco was less and less.”



Along with the changes over the years, the rise of cannabis, vaping, and a wide range of chemical-based products has transformed smoking culture. “In the 90s, it was a big cigar thing. It was like a cigar craze, all these young guys coming in,” Macdonald said. “Pipes and pipe smoking—that’s another story. Just for a time, many pipe smokers left. You need a certain temperament, relaxed. ‘I don’t mind cleaning it and scraping it and filling it, and packing it. If it goes out, I’ll relight it,” Macdonald said. “People today—it’s instant gratification. ‘I have to take care of it? I have to learn how to keep it packed?’”

Unlike larger, slower-burning cigars, cigarettes are compact and can be smoked quickly—convenient for those who want quick drags. “Cigarettes are more getting the nicotine. So it’s more of an addiction,” Macdonald added. “You don’t inhale cigars. It’s all about taste, like pipe tobacco.”

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, about 23.6 million Americans met the criteria for nicotine dependence in 2025. “The way we sell [tobacco], we sell it as an indulgence, not an addiction. If someone wants a cigar, it’s because they feel like it, it’s not like they have to have it.” Macdonald explained. “People want to know where the tobacco is from. Is it spicy? Is it creamy?”

Tobacco has long been embedded in social life and remains one of the most widely used substances. Cannabis, by contrast, is increasingly legalized at the state level and often viewed as “safer,” yet it still occupies a more ambiguous cultural and legal space. Its use has grown steadily in recent years, particularly among older adults. Following Massachusetts’ marijuana legalization in 2016, a wave of upscale smoke shops, like Blue Moon Smoke Shop, emerged in Cambridge, reflecting a shift toward a more modern, cannabis-oriented smoking culture.

According to Macdonald, Leavitt & Peirce would not consider selling cannabis or adapting to current trends. “It just isn’t in our DNA. You would see the picture of Leavitt and Pierce doing cartwheels on the wall ... if we did that,” he said.

The resistance to change, however, exists alongside the realities of running a retail business today, especially in Cambridge. “It’s very hard for a retail store to survive,” Macdonald admitted. “And so we depend more on tourists than we ever did, especially when the school’s out. We need the tourists, and there’ll always be tourists coming to Harvard.”

Still, what sets Leavitt & Peirce apart is not just what it sells, but how it operates. For regulars, the experience is deeply personal. “We know people’s names. We know what they want,” Macdonald said. “Today, you go to the supermarket. There’s one cash register with a checkout person, and there’s five self-serve. You’ll never see that here. It’s one-on-one, always.”

The same philosophy extends to everyone who walks through the door, regardless of status. “We have had the Kennedys. We have had Nobel Prize-winning professors,” Macdonald noted. “We treat everybody like rock stars and royalty.” According to Macdonald, at Leavitt & Peirce, status does not determine service: “a Nobel Prize professor could be third in line, and it could be a homeless person waiting to get a pack of cigarette papers for 75 cents. He’s gonna be taken care of first.”

Some Harvard student organizations have had private arrangements with Leavitt over the years—incentivized by the careful preservation of the business’s products. The store’s cigars are protected in the humidor room, a humidity-controlled space used to store cigars and keep them fresh. Inside, rows of small lockers, each labeled for its owner—some still active, others long gone. “They have keys,” Macdonald said. “Some of these clubs—I don’t even know if they’re in existence anymore.”

“These lockers go back 50 years, 60 years, probably.” Even today, traces of the relationship persist in smaller ways. The Harvard Lampoon, for instance, recently commissioned its own custom blend. “The Lampoon just had a cigar made for their club,” Macdonald said. “One of the companies we deal with said the Lampoon was having a special

blended cigar. I guess they had a big fancy dinner.”

Beyond the clubs, the store has long been intertwined with Harvard athletics. “We’ve always had a tight connection with the athletic department,” Macdonald said.

After Harvard-Yale football games, the store would receive the game balls, which are still displayed throughout the space. Hockey sticks from Harvard’s last NCAA championship in 1989 also hang on the wall.

Alongside these artifacts, the store also holds onto more personal connections with the school. Crew coach Harry Parker once stopped by daily. “The crew coach would post the schedule ... in our window every morning,” Macdonald said. “Every morning, he’d come and post a schedule. And then I didn’t see him for a few weeks ... in the early ‘90s. And I ran into him on the sidewalk here, and I said, Are you all right, Coach Parker? He says, yes, there’s this thing called email.” The store now honors Harry Parker with a schedule posted in the right-side window.

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**GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA  
CHAO HWANG ’28**

# FORUM

## Weed Cell Blocks

Justice remains unserved for thousands in prison for cannabis “crimes.”

BY PHILIPPOS ALEBACHEW '29

**O**n Dec. 18, 2025, Donald Trump signed an executive order entitled “Increasing Medical Marijuana and Cannabidiol Research.”

“The Attorney General shall take all necessary steps to complete the rulemaking process related to rescheduling marijuana to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) in the most expeditious manner in accordance with Federal law,” Trump wrote.

While this is a step in the right direction, it does not magically repair the communities gutted by mass incarceration, or free the people still sitting in prison for something that is now legal in half the country. The deeply rooted racist history of the criminalization of marijuana has forever scarred the minority communities that these policies were created to target. While there have been a fair number of strides made regarding decriminalization, further reform cannot come soon enough. The echoes of “War on Drugs” era policies are still felt by the thousands of men and women who continue to live behind bars because of this substance, and the injustice will persist as long as our government allows it.

The aforementioned order aims to expedite the process of rescheduling marijuana from a Schedule I drug to a Schedule III drug. This transition was initiated by Joe Biden’s administration in October 2022, following executive requests to Attorney General Merrick Garland and Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra to “launch a scientific review of how marijuana is scheduled under federal law.” HHS’ findings prompted Garland to begin the process of redetermining cannabis.

The CSA created five classifications, or “schedules,” for distinguishing the danger and potential for abuse of certain substances as well as the criminal penalty attached to each. The DEA defines Schedule I substances as those that have “no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse”—substances such as ecstasy, LSD, and marijuana. Schedule III is characterized by “drugs with a moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence,” such as ketamine or anabolic steroids. Prison term length and fine amounts for offenses related to Schedule III drugs are about half that of Schedule I.

Rescheduling measures come in response to years of pleas from individuals and advocacy groups alike. However, under this rescheduling, marijuana would still be illegal under federal law. People found possessing, distributing, or manufacturing the substance would still face federal prosecution, just with lighter penalties and formal recognition of its medical use. While it remains to be seen whether action will be taken at a federal level, ample progress has been made in state jurisdictions. As of 2026, 40 states have legalized the use of cannabis in some way. While these reforms may appear to simply reflect modern science and public opinion—which they do—they also represent the first baby steps toward righting past wrongs.

The federal government’s first instance of regulating the substance came with the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, a policy placing high tariffs on the substance in response to droves of Mexican immigrants arriving in the United States in the preceding decades—immigrants who had brought their recreational practices with them. However, the actual criminalization of marijuana didn’t come until decades later with the aforementioned CSA.

The CSA was passed in 1970, and with it came marijuana’s classification as a Schedule

I substance. The following year, Nixon declared drug abuse “public enemy number one,” and so began the “War on Drugs.” Federal drug control budgets ballooned, the Drug Enforcement Administration was created in 1973, and local police departments across the country were incentivized through federal funding to prioritize drug arrests above all else.

The effects on Black and brown communities were immediate and devastating. Studies have consistently shown that Black and white Americans use marijuana at roughly the same rates, yet Black Americans are arrested at nearly four times the rate for possession. Stop-and-frisk policing and mandatory minimum sentencing became policy, and minor infractions were often blown up into years-long prison sentences. Families were broken apart, and an entire generation of mostly Black and Latino men was funneled into a criminal justice system that offered little path out.

The Watergate Scandal and Nixon’s resignation may have technically ended this ‘war,’ but the seeds had already been planted. Future presidential administrations, namely Ronald Reagan’s, and subsequent Congresses would uphold and even expand upon these policies. Drugs were ravaging so many disadvantaged communities during this age, but the aim of policy was never to actually address those issues. The Nixon administration had an enemy, and former Nixon Domestic Policy Chief John Ehrlichman laid out the true purpose of these laws in his interview with Harper’s magazine:

“We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities,” Ehrlichman said. “We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”

The truth shall set you free.

According to the CDC, excessive alcohol consumption kills around 178,000 Americans per year. For cigarettes, that number is 480,000. But cannabis, the drug that is classified alongside heroin on the federal level, has killed a total of zero people. Every year, there are more people killed by being crushed by vending machines than there are linked to marijuana use. There is no reasonable scientific or moral argument for maintaining marijuana’s Schedule I status—only a political one.

If it were cannabis plants that grazed Europe’s fertile lands centuries ago instead of honey for mead or barley for beer, it is hard to believe it would have ever been criminalized the way it has been. But because this vice came from “outsiders” and was enjoyed by those not allowed to participate in society, it was dangerous.

Now, generations of Black and brown communities continue to bear the weight of a policy designed to break them. Just like the systems of slavery and Jim Crow before it, mass incarceration has become this nation’s ubiquitous system of racial control. The American Civil Liberties Union found that in 2018 alone, law enforcement made nearly 700,000 marijuana-related arrests—more than for all violent crimes combined. While the arrest data is public, the number of those actually

serving time for cannabis is unclear.

The Last Prisoner Project cross-referenced two Bureau of Justice Statistics reports using data from 2004 and 2018 and arrived at an estimate of around 32,000 people currently held in state and federal facilities for marijuana offenses. That figure, however, is almost certainly imprecise, as the underlying data excludes countless categories of people, such as those held in county jails, juvenile facilities, immigration detention, jurisdictions that don’t report to national organizations, and a host of other scenarios. What that means in practice is that the true scale of marijuana incarceration is larger than what the numbers show, and the people hidden in those gaps are disproportionately Black and brown.

While it’s easy to get caught up in the data, we can’t forget that each statistic is a person. People like Vincent Winslow, who will die behind bars because he sold an undercover officer \$10 worth of marijuana, or Parker Coleman Jr., who is serving a 60-year sentence for charges related to conspiracy to distribute marijuana. There is simply no scientific or medical justification for a substance that has never killed anyone to carry penalties that are destroying people’s lives.

The only way justice will be served is if cannabis is completely decriminalized under the law and everyone currently serving time for cannabis related charges is pardoned. The rescheduling of marijuana is a step in the right direction, but the scars running through minority communities from the cycle of mass incarceration won’t go away in one generation. Not one more person should sit in a cage for a plant that has never killed a single soul.

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DOESN'T THINK PEOPLE  
SHOULD GO TO JAIL FOR  
WEED.**

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



# The Holy Trinity of Highs, Ranked

From unpredictable edibles to social joints or smooth-hitting bongos, a connoisseur presents a hierarchy of weed's different forms.

BY INDICA JONES '28

"Edible, joint, or bong?" Asking this question is sure to spark fierce debate between anyone and everyone partaking in April 20 festivities, from people lighting up for the first time to veteran stoners. These three forms of weed are backed by a loyal network of advocates. But is there an objective answer to the age-old question of which sits at the top of the smoker hierarchy? Probably not: each form has associated strengths and deficiencies. How one chooses to weigh these factors is usually a matter of personal preference. That said, I will attempt to convince you of the superiority of my preferences.

### #3: Edible

At the bottom of the list lies the edible, a simple, if controversial, choice. The edible is a stand-in for any ingested form of weed, such as baked goods or gummies. The edible's ease of consumption makes it a popular choice for non-smokers, and its discreet appearance makes it convenient in situations where discretion is necessary. Its simplicity has rendered it an increasingly popular form of consumption, particularly for first-time users.

However, it ranks last on my list for good reason. Even when baked into sweets such as brownies, edibles taste unpleasant at best, often nauseating. This is particularly true of gummies: despite their vibrant colors and fun flavors, no amount of dye or sweetener can change the fact that you are eating weed, a substance that just tastes nasty. Could this be because the last few edibles I've taken were from my friend, who failed to inform me that they were months past expiration until after I had taken them? Perhaps. But the point still stands.

More crucially, my dislike of the edible is centered around the fact that its effects are unpredictable. Because it depends on how quickly your body metabolizes the edible, it can take anywhere from half an hour to over an hour and a half to feel its effects. Different circumstances call for different highs, and the delayed onset of the edible makes it difficult to control just how high I'm getting. I've definitely never made a fool out of myself with the "this edible ain't shit" phenomenon: questioning the efficacy of the edible I'd consumed one minute, only to find myself soaring the next...



### #2: Bong

Sitting in the middle of the list is the bong. Bongos rely on the fundamental principle of using a vacuum to draw smoke through cooling water and into your lungs for a smooth hit. Not to be confused with hookahs, bongos come in a variety of shapes and sizes, all of which have a story behind them. As an experienced bong user, I've taken hits from a range of bongos—from those that could be mistaken for chemistry lab flasks to a gravity bong my boarding school roommates and I constructed out of a plastic water bottle and a strip of aluminum foil. I'm no engineer, but that was probably the best-designed, homemade bong the world has ever seen.

The main appeal of bongos is that the water cools and filters much of the impurities in the smoke, which makes hits go down smoothly. Another key advantage of the bong is the aesthetic appeal—it allows for creativity and customization of its appearance.

Unfortunately, this point about reusability relates to my hesitation in awarding the bong the top spot. While bongos stay in commission for longer, throughout their lifespans, they inevitably get filthy, even with regular cleaning. Putting your lips to a cloudy, ash-ridden bong is humbling for even the most strong-hearted potheads and does require a certain tolerance to enjoy.

### #1: Joint

The joint confidently tops my list as the best form of weed. Joints are relatively new, introduced centuries after the earliest observed bongos and ingestible cannabis.

Whether you are a proficient roller or rely on your local dispensary's pre-rolls, joints offer a sleek and portable middle ground between edibles and bongos. Recent innovations in weed production have even resulted in unique strain combinations that truly make you wonder how they were manifested. The "Rainbow MAC"—which is obviously an abbreviation of Rainbow Miracle Alien Cookies—I shared with a friend last week, comes to mind.

I concede that the joint's measly filter does lead to harsher hits than a bong. But hey, a burning throat is nothing I can't handle. Also, unlike the edible, joints take effect quickly, and you can easily control the extent of your high—I know exactly how much I need to smoke to achieve different highs and can regulate this on a hit-by-hit basis.

What cements the joint's place at the top is the social dynamic of a well-curated rotation. While the bong theoretically allows you to pass it around, the rhythmic "puff-puff-pass to the left" is so defining and central to cyphing, and it outclasses any social connection that can be formed over other forms of weed. Several people have gone from being total strangers to my friends in one night, sharing a fabled bond over being in the same rotation. Each passing of the joint symbolizes a sense of intimacy, or an invitation to connect. For this reason, the joint proudly earns the top spot of my ranking, a position I imagine it will occupy forever.

Ultimately, no matter how you get high, your method can say a lot about who you are. Edibles reward patience, bongos offer a smooth but adventurous experience, and the humble joint promises connection and friendship. This April 20, I know where I'll be: joint in hand, surrounded by friends, watching the sun set over the Charles. Hopefully, your celebration will be equally memorable, as long as it doesn't end with "this edible ain't shi—."

**INDICA JONES '28 CAN BE FOUND LIGHTING A JOINT BY THE CHARLES.**

**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE AFIHENE '27**

21+

# WESTERN FRONT

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GRAPHIC BY SAM PARK '29

# A New, Green Era

It's time we question the double standard between alcohol and weed.

BY LUKA HERNANDEZ PALMER

**D**on Draper drank at his desk. Jay Gatsby glamorized the Roaring 20s—and his odd love life—with extravagant cocktails and parties. James Bond downed enough vodka martinis to need a new liver. Hollywood has always known how to make a vice look aspirational, and for alcohol, it went all out. With bottles popping to celebrate or escape, alcohol slipped its way into the routine of every romanticized lifestyle on the big screen. Cannabis—also known as weed, pot, gas, or za, arrived at the party a little late, having done nothing wrong other than being a bit “loud” in an olfactory sense.

Behind the smell, cannabis holds promising medicinal uses, an overdose body count of zero, and a lack of chemically addictive properties. Yet the U.S. federal government, in its infinite wisdom, classifies it as a Schedule I substance, having “no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.” It shares this title with heroin. Meanwhile, alcohol kills roughly 95,000 Americans each year and is chemically addictive. You can pick some up at any gas station in most states.

So how exactly did we get here? If you couldn't tell already, the answer to this question is remarkably untethered from science. It's instead about politics and a century-long anti-drug campaign from which alcohol was spared—while cannabis, on the other hand, was front and center. This normalization of alcohol over weed is something we should stop uncritically inheriting. It's time to challenge the narrative.

Take a moment to think about how deeply embedded alcohol is in modern-day culture. We pop open bottles of champagne to celebrate birthdays and watch football games with a Bud Light in hand. The wealthy show off their sophisticated wine collections and aged whiskey. If you go back far enough, our relationship with alcohol only deepens. Wine

symbolizes the blood of Christ in Christian communion and blesses the Jewish Sabbath—the ancient Greeks even built a God around it. If you can believe it, beer might actually be one of the oldest prepared drinks in human history. It seems like the ancient Mesopotamians knew how to live it up. Alcohol is rare in that it's something that transcends the rigid structure of our society that often draws out differences. Both the billionaire and blue-collar worker crack open an ice-cold beer after a hard day's work. It's simply something people do.

Weed was handed a different set of cards, and it shows. If you smoke weed, people don't see it as something casual. You're probably a stoner, a slacker, and have no direction in life. This stereotype has been challenged, with very few studies showing the possibility of a causal relationship between cannabis use and decreased motivation; most indicate that low motivation is a feature of addiction rather than the cannabis itself. However, society didn't arrive at this false narrative on its own—it was strategically fed to us.

It first began with Harry J. Anslinger, America's very first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. At the beginning of his tenure, Anslinger believed weed consumption was unproblematic, even regarding the idea that it drove people to violence as an “absurd fallacy.” His rhetoric quickly changed, and it's evident as to why: Anslinger saw an opportunity to weaponize cannabis against the marginalized. His most notable remarks include that most consumers were of African American, Mexican, or Filipino descent, and that “Satanic” jazz and swing music were a result of their use. It's clear what kind of person Anslinger was, and I therefore rest my case regarding him.

And so began the Reefer Madness campaign. What used to be called cannabis was now “marijuana,” meant to further its relation to Mexican immigrants,

and the public officially deemed it a national threat. The plant was officially criminalized by the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 after the film *Reefer Madness* put a cherry on top of Anslinger's propaganda. The movie featured innocent teenagers taking part in murder and suicide after sparking up a single joint. While today's critics consider it one of the worst movies ever made, it worked remarkably well as propaganda at the time.

But wait—just four years before this criminalization, the United States watched Prohibition spectacularly collapse. For thirteen years, the government tried to strip alcohol from American life, but failed because society wouldn't allow it. The speakeasies and bootleggers made it clear that alcohol was too deeply woven into daily life to be pulled out. The government learned its lesson and has left alcohol untouched since then. But cannabis, now criminalized, had a long journey ahead of it.

Nixon doubled down in 1971 with the “War on Drugs,” which his own Domestic Affairs Advisor later confirmed was to vilify Black Americans, hippies, the anti-war left—essentially anyone who fit into their idea of the “dangerous” counterculture on the rise. Reagan's “Just Say No” campaign followed, which was so stupid it made “*Reefer Madness*” look nuanced in comparison; the slogan originated from his clearly prodigious wife, Nancy Reagan, during a conversation she had with an elementary schoolgirl. Bush and Clinton then put it all into law, starting one of the country's most prominent periods of mass incarceration. This enforcement, as it had in the past, fell along racial lines: Black Americans are now nearly four times more likely to be arrested for a cannabis offense than their white peers, despite comparable usage rates, due to the legacy of Nixon's campaign.

Take a look at what happened here. Cannabis was never demonized because science demanded it, but because Anslinger needed a tool for racial control, and Nixon needed a weapon against political enemies. The scheduling of cannabis as a substance with “no accepted medical use” was unscientific and rooted in a racist agenda. That should bother us.

The early 2000s saw the light at the end of the tunnel as various states legalized medical use. In 2012, two states, Colorado and Washington, legalized recreational use. Fast-forward to today: recreational use is legal in 24 states, medical use in 40. Public support of legalization sits at around 60% nationally.

Beyond the laws, American culture surrounding cannabis has seen a huge shift in the right direction. The counterculture stereotype assigned to weed in the 30s slowly started being replaced by a sense of normalcy. We’ve all scrolled on TikTok or Reels and seen @natashahasthemunchies down 60mg before walking into an Indian restaurant or @bigjohngolfs “fog it up” (all

heart) before running a half-marathon. Sure, their daily, or perhaps hourly, consumption may be slightly excessive, but what’s important here is that people aren’t labeling them as “hippie stoners” as they would have decades ago. Perhaps the most important note is that cannabis use among adults aged 65 and over has almost doubled in recent years; those who once only knew “Reefer Madness” as the truth and taught their children to “Just Say No” have quietly started reconsidering.

Look at any college campus, and you can also see the shift. Cannabis use among college students has increased substantially in recent years, while alcohol consumption has diminished. If you ask me, this makes sense. Black out on a Friday night at a frat, spend hours in the bathroom, and wake up at 2 p.m. the next day—well, your Saturday is ruined. Good luck getting work done with your stomach on edge, head pounding, and hangxiety eating you alive. Let’s imagine things had gone differently: you and some friends smoked a joint, DoorDashed Taco Bell, and drifted to sleep at a reasonable time. Saturday is a new day, unscathed by the decisions made yesterday.

The more you think about it, the stranger it becomes that, out of the two, alcohol is considered the one that fits into a productive and successful life. Even moderate drinking can lead to shrinkage in brain regions responsible for cognition and learning. On the other hand, adult cannabis use may not be linked with cognitive decline. None of this is to say that weed is harmless and without risks. The legalization of recreational cannabis has various implications, especially taking into consideration the effects on the developing brain. In fact, it appears that necessary research might be falling behind the commercialization in recent years. These are the conversations worth having. However, the health risks, which are still not fully understood, have never been the real reason behind the tough battle

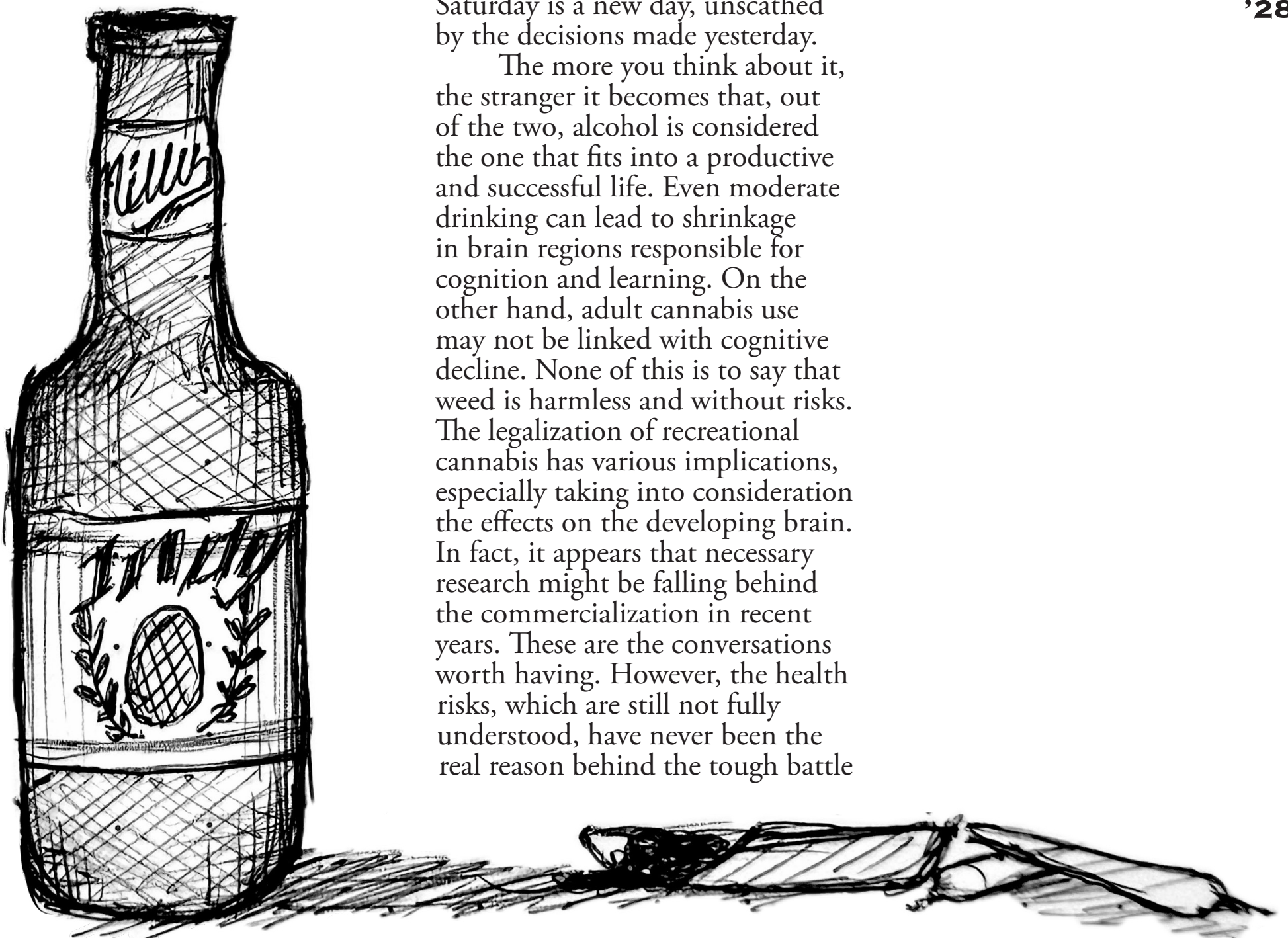
towards legalization. The driving force had a name: Harry Anslinger, Richard Nixon, John Ehrlichman, George Bush, Bill Clinton.

We’ve collectively decided that alcohol, despite the risks, is worth keeping in our grocery stores and daily life. It’s about time we apply that same standard to cannabis. Not because it’s perfect, but because the propaganda against it was wrongfully justified.

Draper had his Old Fashioned, Gatsby had his champagne, and Bond had his shaken, not stirred, martini. They all dodged the awful rhetoric. Rightfully so, cannabis might just be getting its turn in the rotation.

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**GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28**



# The “Fent” Cart

A recap of my worst weed run-in.

BY M.J. SPARKS

I’d be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy a good edible every once in a while. After all, according to the weed wizard Snoop Dogg himself, “It’s actually growing from the ground straight to you, so it’s just like eating a vegetable.” But despite my best efforts to always have a safe sesh, I have inevitably had some horrifying trips—this was probably the worst.

Who said nerds couldn’t have fun? Conferences were always something to look forward to in high school. Hotel rooms, skipping school, and a few days with little supervision. Naturally, my friends decided to spice up the weekend by christening a brand new cart.

I refrained from indulging the first night. But my friend (let’s call her “Em”) took a hit—and a relatively small one, might I add. The cart, however, took her out. She threw up in the suite sink (ew), and the entire room smelled like chips and vomit (double ew). At least my other friend (say, “Bee”) had a Victoria’s Secret body spray to mask the stench. Em proceeded to shower for at least two hours.

This piqued Bee’s and my concerns, which only mounted when we were awoken at 3:30 a.m. to a call from the front desk, informing us there was a huge water leak in the room below. They thought we left the water running. I assured them I didn’t know anything and went to bed—let’s ignore Em’s extensive shower. Not a great start to the weekend.

One would think that I, now a Harvard undergraduate, would have the foresight not to hit the cart after seeing what it did to my friend. I wish that were true.

The next night, Bee and I decided it was our turn to get high. She tested it first, but noticed no vapor coming from the cart. After repeatedly testing it, we almost called it quits. But upon further inspection, she realized that the mouthpiece was simply dislodged. After snapping it back into place, we were well on our way to a hazy heaven.

She took a hit ... maybe for half a second—nowhere near a blinker. I did the same.

What happened next I can only describe as the worst roller coaster ride of my entire life—one that I wished to jump out of, but was forcefully strapped in as the weed surged through my system. Throughout the night, everything oscillated between slight normalcy and insanity.

The high began slowly, and I initially reached a great place. Everything was funny; with my close friends beside me, random impressions and half-assed jokes became the most hilarious thing in the world.

But then things took a turn. My friend “Kay” started freaking out, saying that Bee and I were acting really weird. Bee was pretty used to getting high; while it was only my second or third time, it was unusual for it to hit her this fast. Then, Kay’s face contorted into a melting, disfigured version of the Greek comedy and tragedy masks. Startled by the creepy vision, I woozily flopped down on the hotel bed. But the high rushed over me, and I started to get the munchies. Ravenous, my hands scoured for the nearest available food option: a bag of Cape Cod sea salt potato

chips. Despite the worst of that night, I can confidently say that’s the best any food has ever tasted.

At some point—minutes or maybe hours later—our hotel room somehow ended up as the communal gathering place. Surrounded by unfamiliar faces from other schools while climbing “higher” on the cannabinoid coaster, the hallucinations started. I turned to my friend, desperately trying to convince her that my experiences were real.

“Dude. THE FLOOR IS WET. You HAVE to come feel it.”

My pleadings were accompanied by me crouching on the floor (practically on all fours), and pressing my palms against the worn wool. She was unpersuaded. In my defense, the cold hotel carpet creeping through my socks likely would have felt this way regardless of the marijuana.

To make matters worse, the girls from the other school caught on to our antics and decided they would prank us. They came up to Bee and me, and told us that the room below us could “smell it,” insisting that the vapor from the cart was permeating through air vents and disturbing the other hotel guests—hopefully not the same ones we drowned earlier. Someone of sound mind would have understood these statements to be untrue. But let’s be honest, there was no way I thought anything that night was straightforward. The Victoria’s Secret body spray had returned.

Before I could confirm with the others that the smell had dissipated, suddenly our room was empty, albeit just Bee and me. Without Kay, I started losing my grip on time. Bee was out of commission (no wonder trip sitters are a thing). Panicking, I called Kay. Poor guy—he couldn’t escape us.

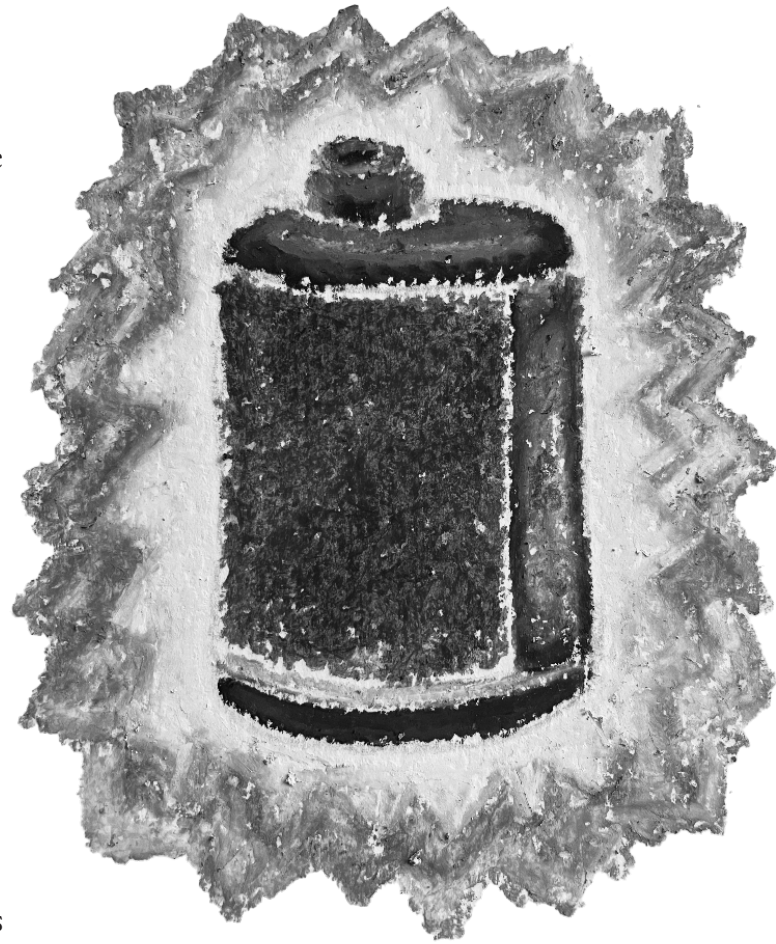
I don’t know how long I stayed on the phone with him, but I distinctly remember him assuring me that time was moving the right way. “It’s 10:52 p.m., and that makes sense because it was 10:51 p.m. a minute ago, and a minute ago was 60 seconds ago, and it feels like sixty seconds have passed, so it makes sense that it’s 10:52 p.m. now.” I felt slightly better and hung up the phone.

Exhaling, I turned and nudged Bee; it was definitely time to get ready for bed. All of a sudden, the hotel door swung open. Em and our other roommate burst into the room.

“We just got caught.”

For a second, the “we” really scared me. But it was my roommates who were on the chopping block for sneaking into a guy’s room. A teacher from the other school spotted them sneaking out and took it upon herself to call our teacher. Snitch. Regardless, our teacher was coming to our hotel room to talk to my roommates while I was high out of my fucking mind. Two of us were already in trouble, and we were on our way to making it four.

I locked in and turned to Bee. “We need to go to sleep NOW,” I said. We quickly changed into our pajamas, brushed our teeth, washed our faces, and went to lie down in the bed. Thank GOD for the Embassy Suites with a door that closes between the living room and bedroom.



As I heard echoes of our teacher reprimanding Em and my other roommate, I was still going through it—though the tense conversation provided an oddly soothing lullaby. I honestly felt like I was about to die: lying down caused my body to feel like it was endlessly falling into a black hole. On top of that, I was overcome by the weed shakes. My entire body vibrated, almost like I was having a seizure. Bee, sleeping in the same bed, started to worry if I was really okay. Neither of us were in a state to get help. I weakly reassured her and hoped that succumbing to sleep would put an end to my misery.

I woke up in a haze and was definitely still high. However, as any true high-achieving teenager would do, I hauled ass out of bed and packed my things, preparing for our presentation that morning.

After such a treacherous experience, we decided Bee’s cart was laced. The “fent” cart claimed three victims that weekend. It would claim another at a party that night, even after endlessly telling our friend that it was not for the weak (nor the strong). The universe ultimately intervened, and like an apparition, it disappeared after that party. We’ve never been able to find the cart since.

I’ve since learned from my mistakes and have come a long way since my high school antics. While I still partake, I’ll always remember my humble weed-using roots and hope a fent cart doesn’t come back to haunt me in the future.

**M.J. SPARKS REPRESSED THIS STORY FROM MEMORY AND HAD TO SCROLL THROUGH OLD TEXTS TO PIECE IT TOGETHER.**

**GRAPHIC BY SARAHLUNA SASSINE '29**

# Bad Trip

On getting high and clearing the smoke.

BY SIR LANCELOT

The Knights of the Round Table have always known two versions of the dragon.

They gathered anyway. Same rooms, different buildings, the same low music, cold coming through the window that someone cracked for airflow.

This is what the Round Table looks like in practice: six people distributed across every available surface, coats still half on, nobody having planned this, everyone pulled there by the same wordless gravity. The legend left this part out. You needed somewhere to be that wasn't asking anything of you. This was it.

Every high is, at its core, a negotiation with the self. Not an escape from it. The self is still there—it is always there—and the dragon is always there with it, but the tight choreography loosens, and you meet something that was waiting. Whether that meeting goes well depends on what you find.

The first dragon arrives slowly, softening the edges of things, loosening the grip you didn't know you had. Time stops being a resource and becomes something like the weather, something that passes over you rather than something you spend. The room expands. The music makes sense in a way it didn't thirty minutes ago. Someone says something, and everyone laughs, and nobody remembers what it was, and that is fine, that is perfect, that is the whole point. You are still yourself, but the tight choreography of it has gone slack. You sit in the slack. It is enough.

The second dragon arrives without warning.

One moment you are in a room, and the next you are watching yourself be in that room. This is not the same thing. The walls do not move; they assert themselves. The music, which was perfect, is now just sound. Someone is talking, and the words are reaching you from a distance, through water, and you are somewhere else entirely. You check the clock. 10:47. You think about something you cannot name. Time, maybe, or the future, or a conversation from three weeks ago, you have already analyzed into nothingness. You check the clock again. 10:48. The room is the room. You cannot make it stop.

This is the bad trip. Not horror. Just the wrong version of the same door. The question is why clarity feels like an emergency. At Harvard, it always does.

It begins in September. The leaves are changing, and the Yard is beautiful in the way it is beautiful every fall—reliably, as if on schedule. Everyone arrives with a new version of themselves assembled over the summer. Everyone is reinventing, calibrating, running the numbers on who to be, and the leaves keep falling, and nobody is looking at them because everyone is too busy looking at each other, measuring, adjusting. Weed is everywhere by October. Not despite all of this. Because of it.

It continues in the classroom. The seminar where you raise your hand and say something you do not entirely believe because the room has a shape and you have learned its shape. The section where twelve people perform engagement with a text nobody reads, and the teaching fellow nods and writes something on the board that everyone subsequently copies. You develop a fluency in this. You learn which ideas land, which references signal the right things, and how to sound like someone who has thought carefully about something you encountered forty minutes ago. The institution calls this education.

You call it Thursday. By Friday, you are looking for the dragon. Not because you want to get high, exactly. Because you want to stop performing for a few hours, and this is the fastest way you know.

By the time you have been here long enough, the performance feels like the self. The LinkedIn bio becomes the autobiography. The five-year plan becomes the desire. You stop being able to locate where the institution ends, and you begin. This is, I suspect, the intended outcome. An institution that has successfully colonized your interiority does not need to enforce its values externally. You carry them. You become the enforcement. So you look for the gaps. Everybody does, in their own way. This is yours.

So you find a room. Not a sanctioned one—not the wellness center or the meditation app or the therapist with the two-week waitlist. Just a room, a few people, nobody performing anything. A couch, a broken lamp, a window cracked for airflow. The question of who you are becoming is briefly, mercifully, not on the table.

The choreography loosens, and underneath it, there is something quieter and older and less impressed with itself. You

remember that you have a body, that the body is sitting in a specific room on a specific night, that the room is warm, and the lamp is broken, and the people around you are real in a way that your five-year plan is not. This is not insight, exactly. It is just a heightened presence. But presence, at this institution, at this hour, feels almost transgressive.

Until it isn't. The clock still says 10:48.

The snow came late this year and stayed too long. By March, the Yard was still gray, stubborn, like something that had decided not to leave. The semester had opened up in a way that felt less like freedom than like a sentence—too much time, not enough urgency, the calendar full of obligation dressed as opportunity. An endless performance of an ending, with everyone manufacturing the appropriate emotions on cue, making sure the last chapter looked like a last chapter.

The dragon arrived, as it does, and split the room.

Half of the table met the first dragon. Time softened. Someone fell asleep on the end of the couch, and it ends gradually, the way things do when nothing is forcing them to continue. The lamp in the corner had been broken all year, and nobody had it fixed. Sir Gawain said he would fix it in October. The room is dim; it is perfect.

The other half met the second dragon—I went somewhere else.

The heart goes first. Not pain, just speed, a sudden awareness of the muscle doing its work, insistent, impossible to ignore. You breathe. You find a corner of the room to fix your eyes on, until the heart slows, the walls recede, and the music becomes music again. It takes as long as it takes. Nobody notices, or if they do, they say nothing, which is its own kind of mercy.

But it leaves something behind. Not trauma. Just the knowledge that the door swings both ways and you cannot always choose which way it opens. The thing that loosens the grip can, on the wrong night, lock you inside it.

The Knights know this. We do not talk about it. We come back anyway.

Sir Galahad would say: smoke grass, joust fast. Sir Gawain would agree. Sir Percival would already be asleep on the couch. The quest continues. The dragon is still there on the other side of the semester, wearing the face of whatever comes next, and you can meet it sharp or soft, and most nights, soft is better.

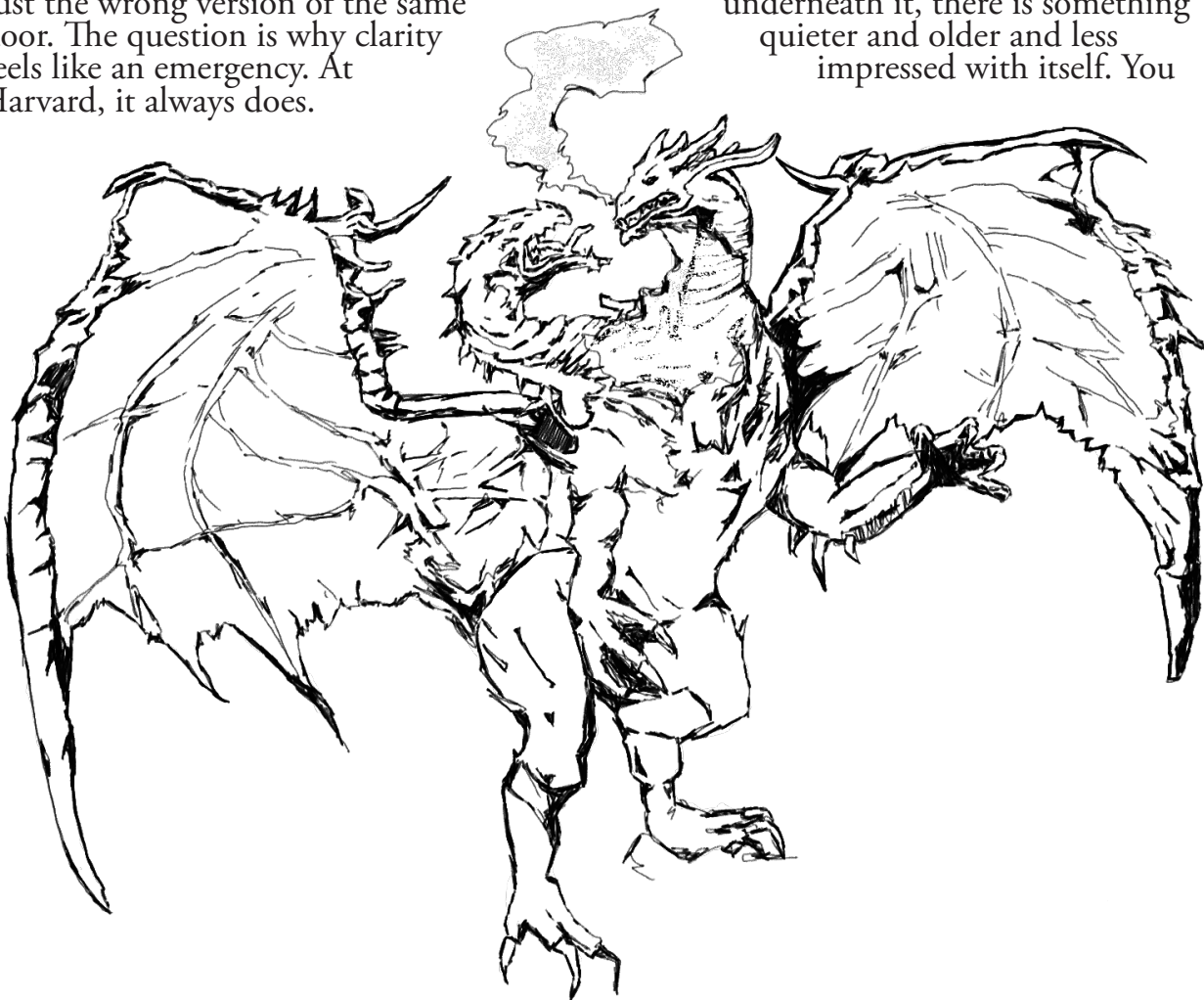
Most nights.

Outside, the sun is finally coming back. The snow is soft at the edges. Someone is making a list. Someone is performing an ending.

My hands are cold. The room is the room. The dragon is waiting.

**SIR LANCELOT RIDES OUT IN MAY, BECAUSE YOU DON'T SLAY SOME DRAGONS—YOU JUST STOP LIVING INSIDE THEM.**

**GRAPHIC BY SAGE WILEY '29**



favorite form of weed?

- 40.8% joint
- 21.1% edible
- 17.1% pen
- 10.5% bong



50.5% have used weed in the past 30 days

49% of responders say that they find someone less attractive if they are a smoker, while 28.8% say that they find smokers more attractive.



29.2% can roll a joint, 31.3% can pack a bowl

46% of responders have greened out at least once

36.1% prefer Sativa, 20.8% prefer Indica, and 43.1% prefer hybrid.



19.6% would consider themselves a stoner

Most frequently Robert Pattinson

most first of

harvard's favorite place to get high is by the Charles (mentioned in 41.85 percent of answers).

69.9% think regular weed usage is harmful to your health, but 34% use it anyways.

50% think that sex is better when high.

28.8% have never tried weed

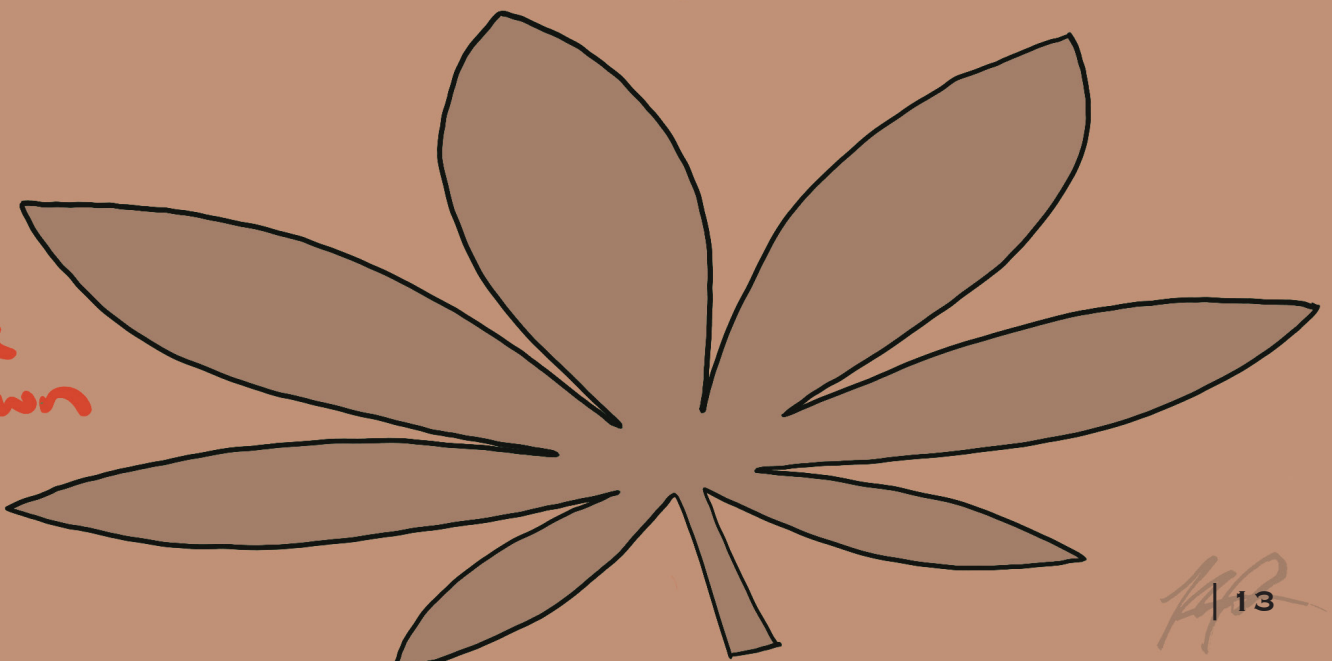
who have tried weed did so between the ages 5 and 18

# harvard weed survey

1 occurring in Harvard students: dream blunt rotations were the Obamas, and Dean Khurana, with a special shoutout to Snoop Dog and Martha Stewart.  
ex-dear, RIP  
favorite nicknames for weed include zaza, za, kush, and devil's lettuce.

2.7% have grown their own weed

the most common means of weed consumption by responders is edibles



# Exploring American Hometowns: NYC Fog

Hometown High.

BY MARA JUANA

Growing up is a funny thing—you begin to feel your frontal lobe developing, raising your fear factor, and improving your logical decision-making abilities. Looking back, some of the things I did during my freshman year of high school in the Big Apple are honestly shocking.

Coming of age in New York City allowed for an early independence unique to the big city.

It was the fall of my freshman year of high school. I had just transferred from my tiny, traditional all-girls middle school and had met my now best friend of five years—we'll call her "Lily"—who came from a very different middle school environment. She would regale me with the tales of her peers doing drugs in the park after school, along with her own recreational weed use. Naturally, I had to be looped in on what cannabis was all about.

**8:00 p.m.**

Lily and I are on "Sarah's" roof. The sun is setting over her view of the skyline; the Empire State Building and Hudson Yards skyscrapers are glowing in the dusk light. Lily pulls out a punch bar—weed-infused chocolate—and breaks it up into small pieces. "Start with this—you'll barely feel anything."

**8:30 p.m.**

Our half-hour timer goes off: "I'm not feeling anything, I want to take another square," I say—ROOKIE MISTAKE. But Lily doesn't know any better either, so we take more.

**10:16 p.m.**

Having accepted that this experiment was a dud, we resigned ourselves to wandering Madison Square Park in search of entertainment. All of a sudden, I look at my phone. What time is it? 10:16 p.m. Seems about right—until I look up and feel a little strange.

**10:17 p.m.**

We continue walking, and all of a sudden, I am hit with a surge of panic. WHAT TIME IS IT?? It feels like hours have gone by—10:17 p.m. Then, I am going to pee myself. My friends look at me strangely as my 14-year-old brain is hit by probably 15mg of a punch bar like a ton of bricks. Now in the center of Madison Square Park, I look around and realize that the world is a vinyl disc, and I am at its center. The next (and last) thing I remember is violently slurping a Shake Shack malt milkshake on the dirt ground.

This began a two-year course of intermittent (and irresponsible) marijuana consumption. As a strict non-consumer now, looking back, I can't help but wonder: a) how I had so much access; b) whether I actually enjoyed the feeling; considering that now it fosters nothing but terror; and c) how I never got caught.

Recreational marijuana use was legalized in New York City in March of 2021. My endeavors had begun the previous fall, so who knows who 14-year-old Lily's plug was for that treacherous punch bar. I vividly recall, post-legalization, the emergence of weed stores on every corner of my neighborhood. It was at this point that I finally realized the "skunk" I was always smelling as my dad and I drove up Riverside was, in fact, the scent of a fresh joint. Most of these shops were unlicensed, and it was not uncommon for these smoke shops to be raided by the police, and often, they would only serve you a preroll if you were a regular. In those days, though, unlicensed selling was so rampant that they wouldn't even bother to card their obviously baby-faced customers.

We were experiencing the city's streets through red eyes and a green haze.

What was first Lily's punch bar and then flower stolen from a sibling to smoke out of an apple bong became the regular purchase of pre-rolls, sticky with kief, or Cali-Honey edibles that would send me into multi-day hazes. As we got older and weed became more common amongst classmates, things started to get a little weird. I would tag along with my true stoner friends to dealers in Union Square or walk the streets of Brooklyn straight to the plug's abode. In 10th grade, a classmate of mine got expelled for dealing on the admissions floor of my Upper East Side Ivy-prep—a bit out of hand, to say the least.

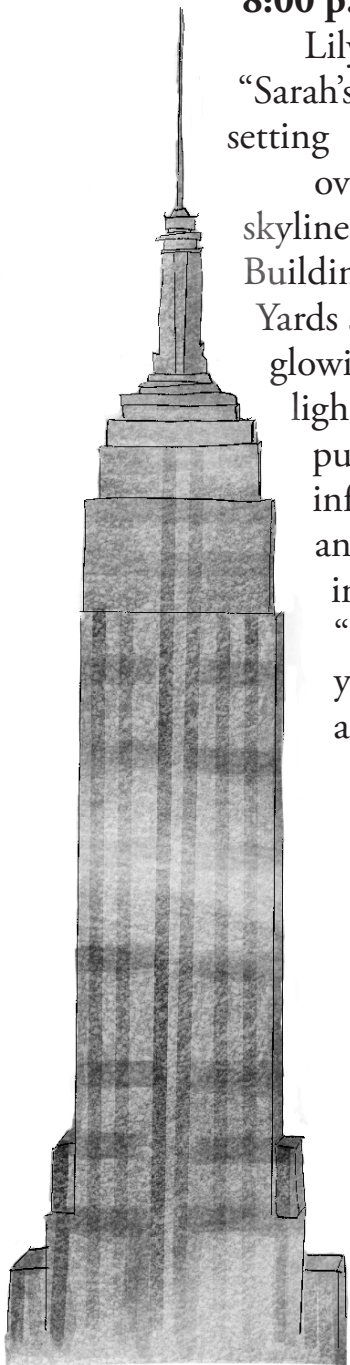
My paranoia increased with my consumption habits. I remember many failed attempts to quell my spiraling mind and what felt like a physically spinning body. I would count the minutes, close my eyes, or turn on an episode of the comforting "Great British Baking Show," only to be confronted by a cross-dressed, American-West version of Paul Hollywood. These "fixes" would tend to exacerbate what can only be compared to hallucinatory experiences. I was spooked by a leaf blowing on the street—mistaken for a rat—or a shoe left out on my cousin's floor—mistaken for a dog (neither of us had a dog).

Now, given this tendency, I wonder how it took me all of five years to realize that I truly hate the feeling of being high (except for on the rare occasion when one hit of a penjamin before bed still makes food taste like rainbows before sending me into a deep, floating slumber). The last time was my first time getting high again at college after a hiatus. Sprawled on the floor of the Weld common bathroom in a ball gown at four in the morning, I realized it was probably time to wave the white flag.

While the smoke shops remain on most street corners, if you see me stopping in, it's probably to pick up a Crave 5% and call it a day.

**MARA JUANA ASKS THAT YOU KEEP YOUR EDIBLES FAR OUT OF HER REACH.**

**GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '29**



# “Rubber Soul” Reconsidered

How The Beatles’ album became synonymous with marijuana and where its reputation falls short.

BY AUDREY ADAM ’27

**A**fter performing at Forest Hills Tennis Stadium, The Beatles sought some relaxation in the Delmonico Hotel in Manhattan. Bob Dylan entered the suite, one of the group’s lifelong music idols, bearing gifts—a bag of marijuana buds—as he believed the four to be avid smokers. In “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” by The Beatles, Dylan had misheard the lyric “I can’t hide” as “I get high,” and thus was shocked to find that The Beatles seldom used cannabis. “Those aren’t the words,” assistant Peter Brown recalls John Lennon responding, flushed with embarrassment.

Dylan rolled The Beatles their first joint, handing it to Lennon, who then passed it to Ringo Starr, his “royal taster.” Unaware of smoking etiquette, Starr proceeded to smoke the whole joint himself, prompting Dylan’s road manager Victor Maymudes to roll individual joints for everyone else. “We got high and laughed our asses off,” Starr told Conan O’Brien in 2012 in retrospect.

The evening at Delmonico sparked a major shift in The Beatles’ creativity that would produce some of the band’s most celebrated music of the time period. Marijuana shaped the band’s musical choices; “Rubber Soul” signified this transition, and the “pot album” label, despite its accuracy, does not tell the full story.

Before Dylan’s influence, The Beatles’ drugs of choice were uppers. “Till then, we’d been hard Scotch and Coke men,” Paul McCartney once said. After their evening in Delmonico, the band was infatuated with “having a larf,” as they called it. “We were smoking marijuana for breakfast. We were well into marijuana, and nobody could communicate with us; we were just glazed eyes, giggling all the time,” Lennon later said.

“‘Rubber Soul’ was the pot album, and ‘Revolver’ was acid,” Lennon added in a 1970 interview. But this quote is often taken out of context. “We weren’t all stoned making ‘Rubber Soul’ because in those days we couldn’t work on pot,” Lennon clarified.

As Lennon suggested, cannabis did not shape the actual recording process of the album; rather, it was the source behind its mellow introspection and creative risks. “Grass was really influential in a lot of our changes, especially with the writers,” Starr said. “We get to ‘Rubber Soul’ and begin stretching the writing and the playing a lot more.”

“Rubber Soul” marks the time when The Beatles became full-fledged potheads. The 1965 album, however, contains only a few references to the band’s love of the plant. “The Word” is the album’s most explicit ode to weed. The track is less of a love ballad and instead views the word “love” as a symbol for a new

kind of living—one described as “It’s so fine, it’s sunshine.”

“You read the words, it’s all about getting smart. It’s the marijuana period. It’s love. It’s a love-and-peace thing. The word is ‘love,’ right?” Lennon said in his 1980 “Playboy” interview. McCartney mentioned in his book, “Many Years from Now,” that the band celebrated finishing the song with the inspiration itself—having a larf. “We smoked a bit of pot, then we wrote out a multicolored lyric sheet, the first time we’d ever done that.”

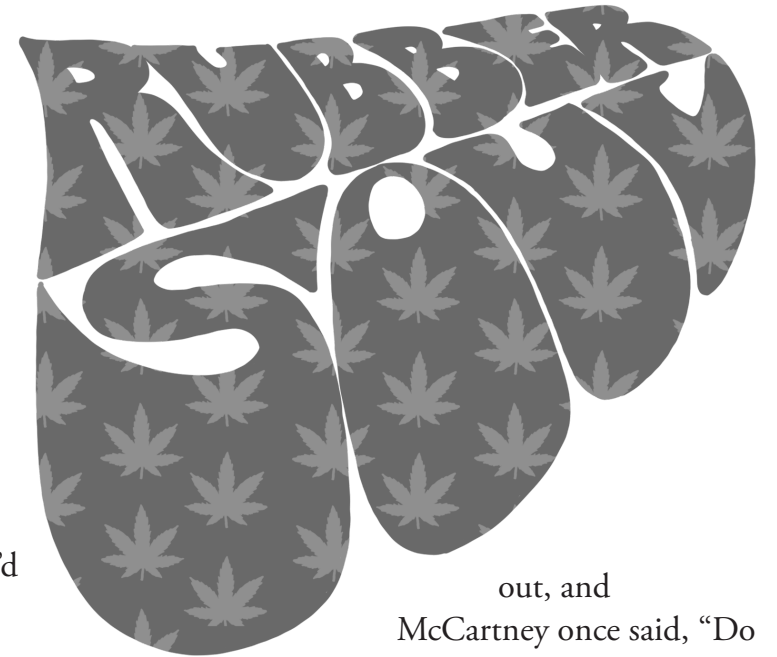
“Girl,” which features sharp inhalations during the chorus, is often speculated by fans to be a subtle reference to inhaling from a joint. The song’s production makes the breathing more audible and clear, strengthening this theory.

While other songs in the album don’t contain deliberate references to the drug, they nonetheless pushed music boundaries that previous albums didn’t dare to. “Norwegian Wood” introduced a new instrument, featuring a sitar played by George Harrison, and “Nowhere Man” was the first Beatles song entirely unrelated to romance.

“Rubber Soul” is dreamy, free-spirited, and often considered to mark The Beatles’ transition from “Liverpool boys” to their own men. George Martin, the band’s producer, called it “the first album to present a new, growing Beatles to the world ... for the first time we began to think of albums as art on their own.”

While “Rubber Soul” is known as the “pot album,” this label is slightly incomplete. Other factors were just as influential as the drug, infusing the band’s work with more than just THC. For instance, Dylan encouraged Lennon to take a more introspective approach when writing “Rubber Soul’s” tracks. The Byrds’ use of a twelve-string Rickenbacker guitar inspired Harrison’s contributions to “If I Needed Someone” and “Norwegian Wood.” Weed served as a sounding board, a way to create the reflective headspace the band needed to synthesize other influences into their album.

The band members refer to subsequent albums as a progression into different, harder drugs. If “Rubber Soul” is pot, “Revolver” is acid, and “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” is pure psychedelia. But accounts prove that drug usage heavily overlapped. In his book “Riding So High: The Beatles and Drugs,” Joe Goodden provides a full-length study of the band’s substance usage. “The drug use is often segregated into discrete periods of their career, but really there was a lot of crossover,” he said in an interview with “AllMusicBooks.” Lennon and Harrison had been given LSD-spiked coffee the same year that “Rubber Soul” came



out, and McCartney once said, “Do you know what caused Pepper? In one word: drugs. Pot.”

McCartney confirmed that “Got to Get You into My Life” is entirely about pot and appears on “Revolver.” “Magical Mystery Tour,” released in 1967, gives a slight nod to cannabis with its repetition of the phrase, “roll up.” “Fixing a Hole” from “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” was believed to be about heroin per the title, but McCartney describes it as an “ode to pot” in his biography.

The Beatles would go on to advocate for marijuana legalization, signing a full-page ad in “The Times” declaring cannabis law to be “immoral in principle and unworkable in practice.” McCartney himself provided the £1,800 of funding. Within a week of its publication, the advertisement brought the debate to the House of Commons, helping spark a process that led to reduced possession sentences for Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones.

“Rubber Soul” marks The Beatles’ transformation from musical stars to artists with strong cultural influence. The “pot album” label does not come from hotboxing a studio and blowing clouds between verses. “Rubber Soul” instead marks the time when The Beatles gained the courage to unleash their creativity and ideas, both within and beyond the album.

**AUDREY ADAM’S ’27  
(AUDREYADAM@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) GUITAR  
GENTLY WEEPS.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA  
RYMAN ’29**

# Jazz Joints

On the music that the Prohibition couldn't tap out.

BY ROHAN TYAGI '29

**C**On Feb. 10, 1938, Sidney Bechet walked into a Decca Records studio in New York and cut a track called “Viper Mad.” The song, which Bechet composed with musician Rousseau Simmons, was an ode to smoking marijuana. O’Neill Spencer sang the lyrics over Bechet’s clarinet: “wrap your chops round this stick of tea / blow this gage and get high with me.” Just one year earlier, the U.S. federal government had banned the very substance the song was about.

The relationship between cannabis and jazz wasn’t initially one of social opposition. The jazz music scene began in New Orleans, in the brothels and dance halls of Storyville, a red-light district that hosted performances on a daily basis. The district’s liberal attitudes gave musicians space to experiment and refine new styles, helping popularize jazz in the area by the early 1900s. Marijuana was introduced to the New Orleans jazz scene in the 1920s primarily through Caribbean sailors and immigrants entering the port city, where it was adopted by jazz musicians as a “medicinal” alternative to alcohol. Working long shifts late into the night, marijuana sustained their energy in a way alcohol couldn’t, and provoked a kind of imaginative, experimental improvisation that captivated audiences. Weed and jazz spread together up the Mississippi through the Great Migration, landing in Chicago and then Harlem, where both took on an entirely new feel.

Jazz players who used cannabis were called “vipers,” named for the hissing sound produced when taking a big draw. By 1930, there were around 500 tolerated “tea pads,” or marijuana bars, in New York alone, offering joints for around 20 cents. These social institutions helped legitimize marijuana use. In the jazz world, the viper was not a criminal; he was simply a musician who used marijuana.

The most famous viper was Louis Armstrong. Armstrong first tried cannabis in the 1920s and used the substance throughout his career, before performances and recordings. He called it “the gage” and spoke about it openly near the end of his life, telling biographer Max Jones that marijuana was “a cheap drunk and with much better thoughts than one that’s full of liquor.” Armstrong was so associated with the substance that his 1928 song was simply titled “Muggles”—a common slang word for weed. The title required no further explanation for the musicians and fans who bought it.

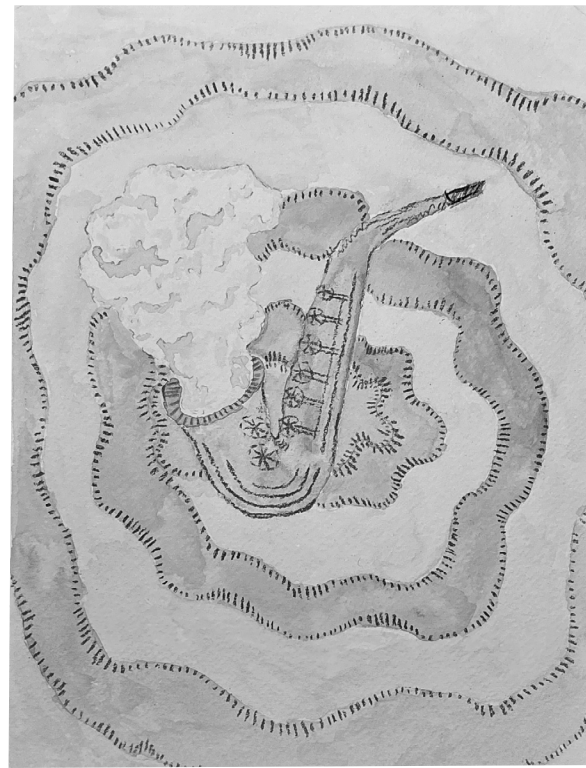
Supplying Armstrong, and much of Harlem, was a Jewish clarinetist from

Chicago named Milton Mezzrow. Mezzrow became the principal supplier of Mexican marijuana to Harlem in the 1930s. His 1946 autobiography, “Really the Blues,” chronicles his life as a musician, marijuana smoker, and dealer. Mezzrow established himself at the corner of 131st Street and Seventh Avenue and claimed that overnight, he became the most popular man in Harlem. Whether or not that was hyperbole, his name entered the local vernacular. “Mezz” became a synonym for marijuana, and “mezzrole” described the type of joint he rolled. Fats Waller immortalized the man in the 1933 song “If You’re a Viper,” with lyrics referencing a joint five feet long—a “mighty Mezz.”

For the vipers, the effects of marijuana also mattered musically. Dr. James Munch, a pharmacologist associated with federal narcotics enforcement in the 1930s and 1940s, captured the effect years later. He stated that “for musicians, marijuana lengthens the sense of time, and therefore they could get more grace beats into their music than they could if they simply followed the written copy.” The aesthetic project of jazz, its willingness to slip around the beat, its improvisational interplay between players, was shaped in part by a shared perceptual state. Billie Holiday and Lester Young, both experienced vipers, were known for their “telepathic” performances at Café Society. Holiday used to take taxi rides between sets to smoke, because marijuana wasn’t permitted inside the club.

In the 1930s, viper songs celebrating the use of marijuana became hugely popular within the jazz world, including “Muggles” by Louis Armstrong, “Sweet Marijuana Brown” by Benny Goodman, “Viper Mad” by Sidney Bechet, “That Funny Reefer Man” by Cab Calloway, “Viper’s Drag” by Fats Waller, and “Gimme a Pigfoot” by Bessie Smith. These songs were recorded by Columbia, Victor, and Brunswick, the major commercial labels of the era. The music industry knew exactly what these songs were about and pressed them onto vinyl by the thousands.

However, discussions of marijuana in the mainstream did not last long after the arrival of Harry Anslinger. Appointed in 1930 as the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Anslinger built his career on a campaign that weaponized cannabis to target Black and immigrant communities. He went so far as to argue that jazz musicians were creating “Satanic” music under the influence of pot. His obsession eventually led to a prolonged witch hunt against Billie Holiday, causing her to



lose her license to perform in New York cabarets and leaving her dogged by law enforcement until her death. Anslinger’s actual recorded statements are staggering in their candor. In documents collected under his name, he wrote that jazz and swing were the product of marijuana use and that the drug was dangerous primarily because of its supposed effect on the social order. His attitude was most plainly expressed when he remarked, “Reefer makes darkies think they’re as good as white men.”

Legislatively, Anslinger succeeded. His propaganda campaigns culminated in the passage of the Marihuana Tax Act in 1937, which effectively criminalized cannabis at the federal level. The Viper Songs kept getting pressed for a few more years. “Viper Mad” came out in February 1938, weeks after the Act took effect, but the open reefer culture of the jazz age was over. In 1940, Mezzrow was arrested while trying to enter a club at the New York World’s Fair with sixty joints and the intent to distribute.

What Anslinger was never able to do, though, was separate jazz from its roots. The improvisation, the polyrhythm, all of it had already been shaped by a decade of communal smoking in tea pads and backstage dressing rooms. You can criminalize a plant, but you cannot unpress a shellac record, and by 1938, the vipers had already given the world everything it needed.

**ROHAN TYAGI '29  
(ROHANTYAGI@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE  
LISTENING TO “VIPER MAD” BY  
SIDNEY “POPS” BECHET THIS  
4/20.**

**GRAPHIC BY JAMES FOSS '29**

# Where Nothing Quite Resolves

On Lana Del Rey and the art of not going anywhere.

BY KATHERINE LAM '29

Listen to Lana Del Rey when I want to feel sad. Not a heartbreak type of sad. Not the devastating type of sad. It's the specific sadness of a Sunday afternoon with no plans, no texts or emails to respond to, and no reason to get out of bed. That kind of sad.

For years, she ranked among my top five artists on Spotify. This surprised me at first, because I was never really into the whole old Hollywood, vintage aesthetic before listening to Lana. But when her 2019 album "Norman Fucking Rockwell!" came out, I ended up listening to "Venice Bitch" alone at 2 a.m. during the early days of the COVID-19 lockdown. As she serenaded me, I realized how much music I was missing out on. For the next 10 minutes, I laid on my bed after eight hours of online classes, blankly staring at the ceiling, letting Lana's words wash over me.

I'm not the only one who feels this way. Lana has a quiet following at Harvard—the same kind of people who listen to her discography solo late at night, usually exhausted. When you're in the middle of midterm or finals, hearing someone sing about wanting to get high by the beach just feels real. She puts words to the feeling that no one really talks about. Not the weed part, but rather the fact that we all relate to needing a break.

In case you missed my hint above, here's the thing: Lana's music isn't really about weed and getting high. It's about what weed represented for her: looseness, the willingness to leave a song imperfect or unfinished. She makes music for people who are tired of being constantly on the go; her music is about letting things be.

There's a verse in "Brooklyn Baby" where Lana runs through a

list of things: "boyfriend in a band," "feathers in [her] hair," a rare "jazz collection," and getting "high on hydroponic weed." She puts on a persona as a cool Brooklyn girl in the song. The weed reference gets the same weight as everything else. It's just another item on the list to check off; she is not trying to make a statement. Weed is not the point of the verse; it's just there. And that sense of casualness is worth pointing out: she's playing this character who would mention hydroponic weed like it's nothing. This says something about how Lana sees the role of drugs in her music, not as rebellion or confession, but just part of the whole picture.

And then we have the nine-minute, 37-second-long "Venice Bitch." That's rare in today's pop music. When Lana played it for her managers, they urged her to make a three-minute normal pop song. She refused. "Well, end of summer, some people just wanna drive around for ten minutes, get lost in some electric guitar," she told them.

The song includes a long middle section that can barely be considered a melody. It's a few notes on the guitar that keep playing over and over, combined with lazy drum beats, and Lana's voice somewhere in the background. Around five minutes into the song, most of the instrumental accompaniment drops away, leaving just Lana's bare voice and a melody that sounds almost distorted.

This song may not be everybody's favorite, but that's the point. Lana doesn't try to fit into pop culture trends. Most pop

songs avoid silence; they fill every second with something new to avoid emptiness. Lana doesn't. She lets her music drag, repeating a line over and over until it stops meaning anything and starts being a feeling.

Take "West Coast" as another example—one of my favorites; it just never gets old. The chorus slows down as the song progresses, and the vocals are hazy and breathy throughout. When she first presented this song to her label, Interscope Records, they were not happy about it. "None of these songs are good for radio, and now you're slowing them down when they should be speeded [sic] up," they said, according to an interview Lana had with "The Guardian."

Yet, Lana refused to do so. She explained that she felt "murky" with her life when writing "West Coast," and that sense of being disconnected was exactly what she wanted people to feel when listening to the song. I see that as a subtle influence of weed. Not through the lyrics, but the willingness to let the song feel however it wants to feel, even when the company paying you disagrees.



I don't smoke, and I don't plan to. That's not really a moral thing; I was just never really interested in trying. But I understand why Lana does. I know nothing about the feeling myself, but I can hear what it does for her music. The looseness and dreaminess in her music didn't come from nowhere. Weed didn't write her songs; it just helped her stop picking them apart.

Imperfection is what makes art art. Art in any form is and should be imperfect, but there will always be that voice in your head telling you, "That doesn't follow the rules or the norms of society right now; do it again until you perfect it, until it fits the expectations of others." Lana's music makes me feel like she's telling that voice to back down, you know, just for a little bit. Her song "Mariners Apartment Complex" reminds me of that when she sings, "You're lost at sea, then I'll command your boat to me." Combined with her signature low, undecorated voice, I hear this as her message to her fans: acknowledging how overwhelming and chaotic the world can be at times, but that we don't have to

be in control every second of our lives.

That sort of stillness is rare in songs today. Most songs want to take you to a specific point by the end of the track, whether by provoking emotion through a chorus, a key change, a climax, etc. Most of Lana's popular songs don't really go anywhere, and that's exactly what makes her so special. Her songs are quite calming; they create a space and invite us to sit in it. Lana makes music for those who are exhausted by hustling back and forth every day, who want to close their eyes and just feel something without needing to explain why. Her songs are like a break from everything that's happening.

Perhaps the most direct Lana gets about weed is through "High by the Beach." But the song isn't really about getting high. It's about escaping a toxic relationship and the paparazzi to protect her personal peace. The chorus says "get high by the beach," but the outro says "anyone can start again, not through love but through revenge." The weed is just in the background. The real message is that Lana is looking for independence and doesn't want to

be bothered by the noises that are coming from all directions. The music video for this song ended with her blowing up a paparazzi helicopter. This scene is not only about her trying to break free, but it's also about her saying that she has had enough.

When you listen to Lana late at night and feel something that you cannot really explain, that's her music doing exactly what it's meant to. She's not trying to make everything okay or take you to some place; she just lets her music flow. No climax, no neat outros. Just being present amidst a feeling. That's not a form of laziness from the composer; it's just letting things be.

**KATHERINE LAM '29  
(KATHERINE\_LAM@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) HAS LANA  
DEL REY ON HER TOP FIVE  
SPOTIFY ARTISTS EVERY  
YEAR.**

**GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29**



*"Sorry guys, I forgot to charge mine."*

## Smoke Sesh

**WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY  
ELLIE GUO '29 AND  
SAM PARK '29**

# SPORTS

## Fogging it Up with All-Time Athletes

A dream blunt rotation of great athletes from the past.

BY KUSH VONNEGUT

Every stoner understands the vitality of the blunt rotation—or the “roto” to some—for the enjoyment of a sesh. You need someone who can roll, someone who can crack jokes, and overall chemistry between the members present. Ideally, everyone is vibing off the za. Though the stereotypical '70s pothead might not elicit the image of a world-class athlete, many of the all-time greats enjoy a solid marijuana drag. Here are our picks for the dream blunt rotation featuring some of history's greatest athletes across all major sports.

### Marshawn “Beast Mode” Lynch

Marshawn Lynch gets the blunt first. Marshawn was an unstoppable National Football League running back who played for the Seattle Seahawks in his prime years. The man was impossible to tackle and iconic for his brutally honest statements. On Super Bowl XLIX media day, Marshawn gave every reporter the same answer: “I’m just here so I won’t get fined.” His unabashed, straight-to-the-point attitude would prevent any nonsense at the smoke sesh. It is also likely he would bring some high-quality weed, not that the first person in the rotation has to also be the provider. In 2021, Marshawn launched his cannabis brand, “Dodi Blunts,” which he named after Bay Area slang for high-quality weed. If he leads the sesh, his brand has the opportunity for free press.

### Bill Walton

Some readers will be unfamiliar with the former Portland Trail Blazers big man, but this guy can blaze—not just because he was a Trail Blazer. As a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, Walton was a diehard Grateful Dead fan, a telltale sign of a stoner. Off the court, Walton had principles. He strongly criticized the Vietnam War and was even arrested at an anti-war demonstration in college. Walton was open about his cannabis use: he smoked marijuana to manage pain from injuries throughout his career. With this in mind, we cannot deny that Walton knows how to have a good time. He would be the hippie stoner of the sesh; he just needs to keep the political talk to a minimum.

### Calvin “Megatron” Johnson

This Detroit Lions wide receiver was unstoppable on the field. When he first got to the league in the late 2000s, drug use was normalized in the team culture. “I used Percocet and stuff like that. And I did not like the way that made me feel. I had my preferred choice of medicine. Cannabis,” Megatron described in an interview with “Sports Illustrated.” In retirement, Megatron has worked to destigmatize marijuana use: “It’s time also we recognize the potential of vital medicines, plant medicines, to aid and improve the mental health and quality of life for so many.”

His philosophy understands weed to be a natural medicine, devoid of the destructive properties of drugs like opioids. He even partnered with Harvard

University to research the beneficial properties of cannabis on CTE, which tragically affects many NFL players. Megatron is knowledgeable, educated, and committed to changing how we think about marijuana. Once everyone is fried, I could see Megatron as the group philosopher, delivering a monologue about the soothing effects of cannabis and the idyllic nature of the plant. His name is just a bonus.

### Josh Gordon

Josh Gordon gets the blunt next, considering he might very well be the biggest stoner on this list. Gordon played for the Cleveland Browns from 2012 to 2018. “I’d leave the hotel early in the morning, go home, eat breakfast, do my little ritual, whatever it may be, some weed, some alcohol, and then go to the game,” he told “GQ” in a 2017 interview. He smoked so much weed that his NFL playing time was sparse. Gordon tested positive for marijuana use four separate times, forcing him to miss time equivalent to multiple seasons due to suspension. During his time as a collegiate player for Baylor, Gordon admitted to making “upward of \$10,000 per month” selling weed. When he wasn’t breaking ankles on the field, he was making a bag from trapping. With that kind of commitment, Josh Gordon is a must-have for the smoke sesh, especially if it is a wake-and-bake.

### Nate Diaz

Testing positive for marijuana was once grounds for suspension and fines in the Ultimate Fighting Championship, but no longer. During the UFC 263 press conference in June of that year, Nate Diaz was asked a question. Rather than responding, he calmly lit up a blunt right there on stage. Nate has been acquainted with marijuana for a long time. In an early home video, Nate’s brother, Nick—another great UFC fighter—is showing off his nunchuck skills after taking a fat bong rip. All signs indicate that the Diaz brothers know how to fog it up. But between the two, Nate Diaz is an easy choice for this list because of his total disregard for how others perceive him. Known for his carefree attitude, Diaz is down for whatever the moment calls for, and wants to have a good time more than anything, suggesting that he will have a natural chemistry with the other members of this rotation.

### Brittney Griner

Finally, the “blizz” goes to Brittney Griner. In her prime, she played for the Phoenix Mercury and won the Women’s National Basketball Association championship in 2014 during her second season with the team. Like many other athletes on this list, Griner is a great trash talker and can hold her own in the case of some weed-induced friendly banter. On Feb. 17, 2022, Griner was detained at an airport outside Moscow upon arrival when customs officials discovered THC oil cartridges in her luggage. “I never meant to break any laws here. I made an honest mistake, and I hope that, in your ruling, it doesn’t

end my life here,” she stated to the Russian court. The “cart,” as it is called by stoners, is a sign of a true stoner. Although she claimed it was accidental, I would say that bringing a cart to Russia is a bold move. Griner definitely has some crazy stories about this experience, taking the sesh to another level. She’s nonchalant and calm, with a candid sense of humor that would fit right in with the rest of the athletes at the sesh.

### David “Big Papi” Ortiz

David Ortiz played for the Boston Red Sox from 2003 to 2016. On the field, the Dominican Red Sox legend was especially good at one thing: hitting dingers out of the park. But in his free time, Big Papi liked to spark up. “I embraced the flow of the flower,” Ortiz explained in a 2022 press release regarding the launch of his own company called “Papi Cannabis,” sold in dispensaries across Massachusetts. “Cannabis helped me relax, sleep better, manage stress, and heal physically after a lifetime of playing ball,” he added. Ortiz would be a good addition to the group for two reasons: first, he’s a Red Sox legend; second, his weed is reportedly fire, so he could join with Marshawn for the sesh providers.

### Michael Phelps

This American swimmer holds the record for Olympic gold medals, racking up 23 across four games. But beyond his athletic fame, Phelps is famously a marijuana user. After a 2009 photo surfaced of Phelps hitting a bong, he was the subject of intense scrutiny from the media. As a swimmer, Phelps naturally can take some massive rips. “That dude’s got, like, Aquaman’s lungs, bro. The weed inhale—he’s smoking a joint like in two puffs,” Wiz Khalifa jokingly added when recalling their smoke sesh together. Any rotation inevitably ends with the remaining joints as the group winds down. So Phelps is a must-have: he would face any leftover prerolls. Who wants to waste money and valuable weed?

**KUSH VONNEGUT HAS BEEN STONED SINCE 8:00 A.M.**

**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27**



# The National Collegiate Athletic Association's New Era of Cannabis

A discussion on the NCAA's reversal of marijuana consumption bans across all sports.

BY ROLLING STONER AND SOBER SPRINTER

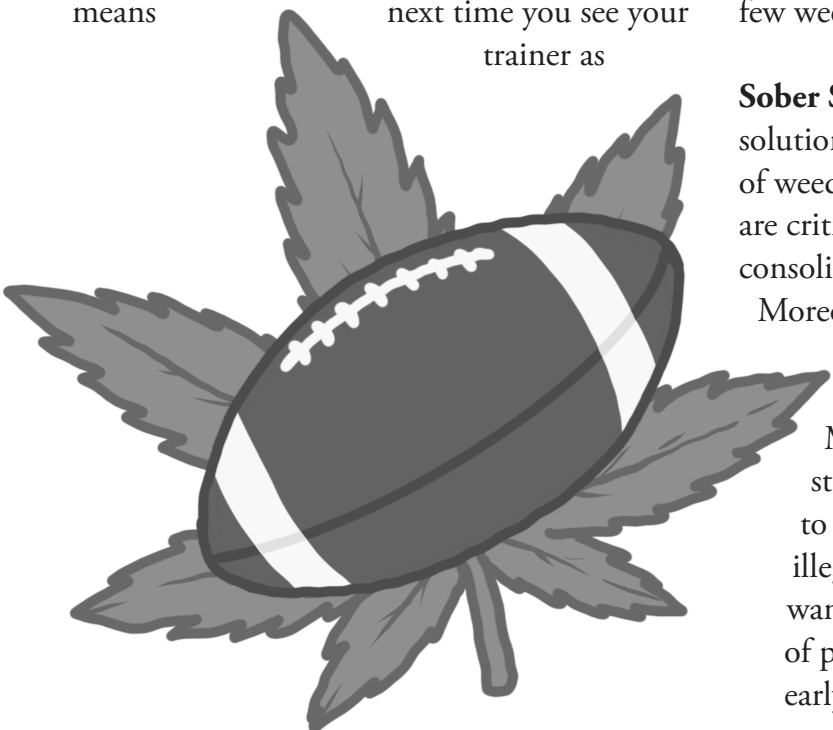
The National Collegiate Athletic Association has strict regulations that all athletes must follow to play in any division and across all sports. While confirming an equal playing field for all athletes, these regulations also ensure athlete health and safety. In 2024, the NCAA removed its ban on marijuana, permitting athletes to blaze after a big win, recover with a spliff, or enjoy some gummies just to take the edge off. But despite this policy change, many college teams still restrict the use of cannabinoids during their seasons to strike a professional and social balance.

Before the NCAA decriminalized weed, athletes faced severe penalties for positive tests, including game suspensions and loss of eligibility. But while weed is considered an addictive substance, it arguably does not have the same performance-enhancing effects that other substances do. So why were cannabinoids ever restricted? Its recent legalization has increased discourse on the positive and negative impacts of marijuana on competing collegiate athletes.

**Rolling Stoner:** The decision to remove the ban on weed was an important action that increases NCAA athletes' autonomy and freedom outside of their sport. While the choice to use marijuana may be perceived differently in certain environments, it is ultimately a personal decision that any athlete should be able to make. This autonomy is essential for improving determination and discipline.

Moreover, by legalizing cannabis, the NCAA is providing athletes with the chance to balance marijuana's healing properties with athletic integrity. Scientific research clarifies that weed has pain-relieving abilities, including reducing inflammation. Both CBD and THC, in certain forms, can be taken to target muscle repair and reduce cortisol levels. Surely, this means

next time you see your trainer as



an athlete or finish a gym workout, you should enjoy an ice bath-weed pen duo—right?

**Sober Sprinter:** Though there are positives regarding decreased weed regulations, there are plenty of negatives. Autonomy is not a strong enough reason for the NCAA to reverse its ban on weed. Despite the argument that marijuana improves athletic performance, its impacts on the body and brain, both mentally and physically, put collegiate competitors at a disadvantage. The NCAA's decision regarding a substance as addictive and popular as weed increases its use, which could negatively impact the professionalism of the Association.

Cannabis' potential to negatively alter performance is more prominent than most realize: THC can alter motor control and decision-making, as well as increase the risk of lung disease, if weed is consistently smoked. The last thing an NCAA athlete wants is to be exhausted after one rep during practice, killed off during the preseason fitness test, or outrun by the opposition. There are preferred holistic medicines that benefit athletes more than cannabis.

**Rolling Stoner:** Yet, athletes may find they have exhausted recovery method options and now are turning to weed as a physical condition and fitness enhancer. Athletes have the right to maximize their potential in any way they see fit. This isn't an argument over benefit and risk, but rather regulation and choice.

Furthermore, I argue in favor of the improved sleep patterns associated with weed. The collegiate athlete's schedule entails early mornings, long afternoons, late nights, and draining travel days. Sleep is already hard to prioritize, let alone good sleep. Research shows that cannabis enhances sleep quality, with high strains of THC and CBD promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety. Instead of popping melatonin before bed, athletes should just try a few weed gummies.

**Sober Sprinter:** Cannabis is a short-term solution to a long-term problem. Chronic use of weed damages REM sleep patterns, which are critical for emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and cognitive processing.

Moreover, relying on weed for improved sleep only increases the probability of personal dependence on the substance. Marijuana is known as a gateway drug—studies prove that early abuse contributes to heightened changes of later legal and illegal marijuana practices. So next time you want a better night's sleep after a double day of practice, stick with melatonin or just an early night.

**Rolling Stoner:** Being an NCAA athlete comes with pressures and intensity. The NCAA's unbanning of weed offers athletes an opportunity to choose if they want to indulge in substances that promote relaxation or happiness. Athletes in professional sports have reported that a joint brings them improved moods and a "runner's high" during or after practice. While many junkies may not recommend smoking weed before a game due to potential adverse effects on their mental and physical competition capabilities, why shouldn't athletes use marijuana as a cooldown? Giving athletes this autonomy makes their sporting decisions even more meaningful and empowering, allowing athletes to dictate their journey and experience.

**Sober Sprinter:** The athlete autonomy you base your argument on can be dangerous without proper education and awareness. The bottom line is that weed is an addictive drug, and the risk of addiction and health deterioration it poses does not fit the model of the NCAA and what it aspires to promote: professionalism and sporting excellence. While striking a balance between sports and social life is important—particularly for college students who are navigating their young adult lives—there are levels. Though the NCAA has decriminalized weed because of its lack of performance-enhancing qualities, the Association still prides itself on the health and well-being of its athletes. This, in grander terms, means athletes need to look after their bodies and compete fairly.

The line between competition and social life thins when cannabis is integrated into sports as a mechanism for performance and recovery. The NCAA's decision to legalize marijuana is thus debated: was it an act of harm reduction or a choice that may heighten substance abuse in a population that requires excellent physical condition? The opportunities that cannabis offers in sports medicine and recovery are still being researched and discovered, in the midst of collegiate athletes having full control of usage outcomes.

**WHILST SOBER SPRINTER ENJOYS A NATURAL RUNNER'S HIGH, THE ROLLING STONER MUCH PREFERENCES ... BEING HIGH.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28**

# Jogging Over Joints: The Superiority of the Runner's High

A comparison of two iconic highs.

BY MARY JANE MARATHONER

Everyone remembers their first time getting high. Mine was on a cloudy day in February of this year. Although the sun was hiding, and my hands were freezing in the cold, I was as happy as if it were a warm summer's day. Afterwards, I was off to dinner in the same high spirits—whistling and skipping down Mt. Auburn Street. This wonderful feeling was not entirely innocent, though. It was a forewarning of the start of an addiction—a need to recreate that high that plagues me to this day.

The high I'm talking about is a runner's high, obviously. While often discussed in athlete circles and popular culture alike, it's an elusive yet deeply satisfying feeling, defined by Johns Hopkins Medicine as a "short-lasting, deeply euphoric state following intense exercise." Most people believe that endorphins cause the runner's high, but this belief is only partially correct. Endorphins inhibit the body's pain receptors, allowing athletes to be temporarily free from the soreness associated with long-distance running, but endorphins cannot cause the euphoria of the runner's high. Heightened endocannabinoid levels in the bloodstream do that job, a substance your body produces that is similar to cannabis, so when people experience the runner's high, it truly is like consuming weed!

It is important to note that cannabis and endocannabinoids do not produce the same highs, and each comes with its own logistical hurdles and benefits. As someone who runs far more often than I light up, this article will focus more on the latter than the former.

To me, the runner's high is a far superior feeling than one gained from weed. It's like jumping into a cold lake after roasting under the sun on the beach. Or like summiting the world's tallest mountain, armed with the thought that you can accomplish anything. It's invigorating—blissful. Your problems diminish in size as the wind ripples through your ponytail, pushes beads of sweat into your hairline, and cools your flushed cheeks. You can accomplish anything. You're smiling. You're happy. You're high.

Weed highs are different, in my opinion. Instead of jumping into a cold lake, it's more like floating in the warm ocean while the waves rock you back and forth. It's calming. You are instead floating above the world's tallest mountain, damp from the moisture of neighboring clouds rather than sweat. You are relaxed. It still feels like bliss, but this time your problems seem to disappear from your mind: they can be attended to at another time. You're laughing. You're happy. You're high.

Since that first time experiencing the runner's high, I've been dying to recreate it. I've been running two to three times a week, doing everything from 2-mile jogs and hour-long sprint workouts to 16-mile runs—all to no avail.

This brings me to the first logistical difficulty of the runner's high: it's inconsistent.

Unlike joints, which dependably bring a high within minutes, running is more finicky. No sprint is guaranteed to yield the desired euphoria, which honestly is part of the appeal—followers return to try their luck again. Like patrons stuck in front of Vegas slot machines, runners keep running in hopes that their next run will bring them that coveted feeling.

Inconsistency is a double-edged sword. Low runner's high yield rates encourage consistent exercise, an objectively good thing for one's overall health. Most doctors would prefer that their patients

run every day instead of smoking every day, highlighting the obvious downside to smoking weed: it's bad for your overall health.

Though marijuana does circumvent one of the biggest logistical challenges of the runner's high: sweat. Smoking a joint might leave you smelling like a dispensary, but if done outside with good crosswinds, you can usually go about your day without worry. No such luck with running. After descending the euphoric mountaintop, runners have to shower. A sobering and time-consuming activity: with my shorter runs, sometimes showering and drying my hair takes longer than the run itself.

But the runner's high and the weed high do share one logistical challenge (or benefit, depending on your mindset): the munchies. Both activities notably leave their participants ravenous, and I've been known to schedule runs around the dining halls' hours to ensure a proper post-run meal. Being on top of the world requires fuel to get back down.

To use a fitting metaphor, smoking a joint and going for a run are like a sprint and a marathon, respectively, when it comes to getting high. One is reliably quick and easy to do. The other takes longer and requires more planning. Both eventually achieve the same goal of getting you to your final destination: a different state of mind.

With their shared characteristics, it seems natural to try to combine the two highs. The beauty of a market economy is the innovation it brings; one company has already figured out a way to do this. Offield, a Los Angeles-based wellness company, sells "High Performance Energy Gummies," THC edibles made to be consumed while exercising. If the stars align, these gummies could allow athletes to experience both highs at once. A truly transformative experience.

**MARY JANE MARATHONER  
WRITES SPORTS FOR THE  
"HARVARD INDEPENDENT."**

**GRAPHIC BY MIA  
STEWART '29**



# We'd Rather Be At

What to watch and what not to watch if you don't want to ruin your high.

BY LONELY STONER

Lonely Stoner is back, but this time without the clingy ex; all it took was one well-timed gummy to finally block their number and move on to bigger and better things. In a newfound, truly single era, I now have time to enjoy sporting events in their best form: with a blunt in hand. One benefit of being a Harvard undergraduate is having access to all University-affiliated games; I have made it my mission to attend as many as possible, while high, of course. This has truly been a mixed bag; some games are too overstimulating to enjoy while intoxicated, while others are exponentially more fun with some marijuana pulsing through your body. Here are my recommendations for anyone looking to plan the perfect Harvard sporting event experience.

## The Don'ts

My biggest problem when I get high is that my senses become completely overstimulated; I go non-verbal and fixate on whatever I'm watching. Below are the three sporting events I attended that I will not return to unless I am stone-cold sober.

## Football

I feel like this one is a given. Between the whistles, shouting coaches, and the sound of pads violently slamming into each other, this sport is the perfect storm to ruin a high. While there are plenty of high-quality snacking options at the stadium for your munchies (the fried Oreos are my favorite), my last football-and-cannabis experience left me wanting to leave. The stop-start nature

of football had me drifting from periods of hyperfixation on the action to staring up at the clouds in the sky. Another qualm I had was the length of the experience; the chances of your high wearing off watching a three-hour game are higher (ha, get it) than one would like.

## Ice Hockey

My experience here was only slightly worse than the football game, mainly because this game was way louder. Instead of players full-on tackling each other, the constant sounds of skates carving the ice, sticks hitting the puck, and players flying into the boards were overwhelming. Factor in the arena's chill and the blinding lights, and walking into Bright-Landry Hockey Center made me want to turn around immediately. However, the sensory issues were quelled by easy access to the concession stands. While the food options were limited, I gladly took that trade-off to the football stadium, whose architecture prevents you from watching the game while standing in line.

## Rugby

The Women's Rugby game surprised me with how passionate their fans were and how vibrant the overall vibe of the stadium atmosphere was; I now feel that this team is criminally underrated amongst the student body (congrats on winning Ivy 7s!). My biggest takeaway: watching this high is especially confusing. For this reason, I put it in the "don't watch" category. I personally was caught off guard when people started cheering or when players were suddenly lifted into the air to try and catch the ball. My only other problem was the lack of concessions compared to other games I had been to; I know this is not a universal thing for Harvard sports, but it really makes all the difference when I suddenly have an intense craving for Sour Patch Kids.

## The Do's

As previously mentioned, when I'm high, I don't want to be dealing with a wild mess of sounds or really aggressive screaming. In my experience with the games below, both of those aspects were absent, by and large.

## Baseball/Softball

I know that nine innings of baseball or seven of softball seem like more than enough time for a high to wear off, but other factors of the games made for a very enjoyable experience. First, the walkup songs offered a constant guessing game of what tune would be used for each player—unfortunately, I did not actually recognize any of the chosen songs until the at-bat was over, but this is

besides the point. While usually a drag, the high transformed the pace of the game into a scintillating series. There was no need to fixate on each pitch, thanks to the leisurely pace between them. Bonus points since one of the parents handed me a free burger as a thank-you for coming out to support; there is truly nothing better when high.

## Soccer

Everybody knows the general idea of soccer. If you're on offense, kick the ball into the goal. If you're on defense, don't let the ball get kicked into the goal. It's extremely basic. So, it's really easy to enjoy the game with a high: just focus on the ball. Compared to football or hockey games, the crowds and players were not nearly as loud. Easily accessible snacks were a nice addition, and I was happily munching on popcorn by the end of the second half. When all was said and done, did I know what the score was? No. But I had fun!

## Club Frisbee

When I think of frisbee, I picture tossing a disc around on a sunny day in a field of grass, talking about life. I don't picture the constant passes and lateral movements players use to move the frisbee. It was entertaining to become super hyper-focused on the specific movements and passion that emerges from each player, and then proceed to disassociate and remember that it is ... just frisbee.

## Quidditch

Personally, Quidditch was my favorite part of the Harry Potter series, so to stumble upon a full-blown tournament right on Harvard's campus while faded was a moment of euphoria. While some students may not know the difference between a Quaffle and the Golden Snitch, I was absolutely LOSING it to see the best fictional sport out there brought to life with PVC pipes and Hula-Hoops. Cheers to these hidden athletes! I will be going back to this if I can ever figure out when they play again.

And with that, my list is complete. I hope everyone takes the time, as the semester winds down, to venture across the river, blunt in hand, to experience the wonderful world of Harvard athletics.

**LONELY STONER'S PREFERRED FORM OF HIGH IS A 5MG TROPICAL FRUIT GEM.**

**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE AFIHENE '27**



# How Weed Can Change Sports Careers

Looking back at the story of NFL player Laremy Tunsil.

BY ANONYMOUS '29

I grew up as a fan of the Miami Dolphins. It was a hard team to cheer for. We haven't won a playoff game in my entire life and have rarely come close to making them at all. The thing about cheering for a team that's undergoing a perpetual "rebuild" is that all eyes and the hopes of the franchise rest on one event every year: the National Football League Draft.

But in all my memories of the Dolphins' draft day dreams and nightmares (mostly the latter), one draft feels particularly memorable:



the 2016 NFL draft scandal featuring Laremy Tunsil. Tunsil was a star in the making, and everyone knew it. Scouting reports claimed that he "came into Ole Miss as a five-star prospect and lived up to every bit of the hype." He was considered a sure-fire top-five pick and a prospect that had all the makings of a perennial NFL starter.

That was until a video from Tunsil's official Twitter account circulated just 20 minutes before the draft began. The video showed him smoking from a gas mask bong and went viral in a matter of minutes, quickly spreading to teams' war rooms. His agent was quick to say that his account had been hacked—Tunsil himself was not responsible for the posting—but the reputational damage was already done. The video spurred instant doubts about his off-the-field character and caused him to slide from a sought-after player to a pick that could fall out of the first round altogether.

It's important to note that the Tunsil draft-night video was accompanied by some other minor concerns, most notably his seven-game suspension in 2015 for receiving "impermissible financial benefits" as a student at Ole Miss. However, those doubts were not enough to hurt his draft stock until the video surfaced.

My Dolphins were at the peak of their mediocrity in 2016, having just gone 6-10 in the 2015 season, and thus earned the eighth pick in the 2016 draft. The Dolphins traded down from the eighth pick to the 13th in a deal with the Philadelphia Eagles. In that deal, the Dolphins acquired some players that wouldn't remain in Miami for very long, but that 13th pick would become by far the most important piece of the trade. The Dolphins decided to take a chance on Tunsil after seeing his draft-day slide, a move which ESPN described as "boom-or-bust."

Early reports were quick to scrutinize the Dolphins for picking a player that had clear "character concerns," in the words of ESPN. ESPN also warned that "Miami will offer a lot more temptations" for the young offensive tackle.

These claims had surface-level merits. Marijuana was on the NFL's list of banned substances at the time, and use would remain a suspendable offense in the NFL until 2020. However, the implications on Tunsil's character were far-fetched.

After all, Tunsil was not an unusual case in the NFL. An ESPN poll from later in 2016 indicated that over 70% of NFL players wanted weed to be legal in all 50 states. Weed use seemed to be an open secret in the league, too, with two-thirds of the 226 NFL players surveyed claiming that the NFL's mandated drug-testing was easy to cheat. So why, then, at a time when legalization was spreading nationwide, and NFL teams knew that their players were using marijuana, did Tunsil's reputation take such a significant hit?

I have come to a couple of conclusions. First, the shock factor of seeing a top prospect using a banned substance was enough to scare teams. It's well-documented how any character concerns can damage an athlete's rank. When one team starts passing on a player, the rest of the league follows suit, worrying that the teams that passed on a top prospect have uncovered even more negative information.

The movie "Draft Day" demonstrates this phenomenon perfectly.

But the more important explanation about Tunsil's story has to do with how the league regulates its players. Discipline and hard work are critical in football, but the idea that Tunsil could not use a recreational drug during the off-season at his

own home is fundamentally flawed. This scandal came at a time when most of the country still saw weed as a controversial issue, much more so than it is today. Despite Tunsil's apologies, the league thought that his weed use meant that he was not willing to conform to what his future teams would expect of him.

After the Dolphins picked Tunsil, he played three strong seasons in Miami before being part of a blockbuster trade with the Houston Texans, which earned the Dolphins three high picks in exchange, setting them up for a series of picks that would net them star receivers Tyreek Hill and Jaylen Waddle. Tunsil has been a consistent NFL starter for the last 10 years and has made five Pro Bowl appearances as a Texan, before leaving Houston to join the Washington Commanders last year.

Though this journey is of interest, most importantly, Tunsil was never suspended during his NFL career. The character concerns that drove down his draft stock were ultimately overblown, and his weed use was never a problem in the league again.

His story tells us a lot about how the NFL—and perhaps large sporting franchises in general—can panic when they think a player won't follow their unreasonable restrictions and, arguably more importantly, how rapidly opinions about weed use have shifted in America. If the Tunsil scandal happened now, it wouldn't be anywhere near front-page news. Most teams would probably pay little attention to the video entirely.

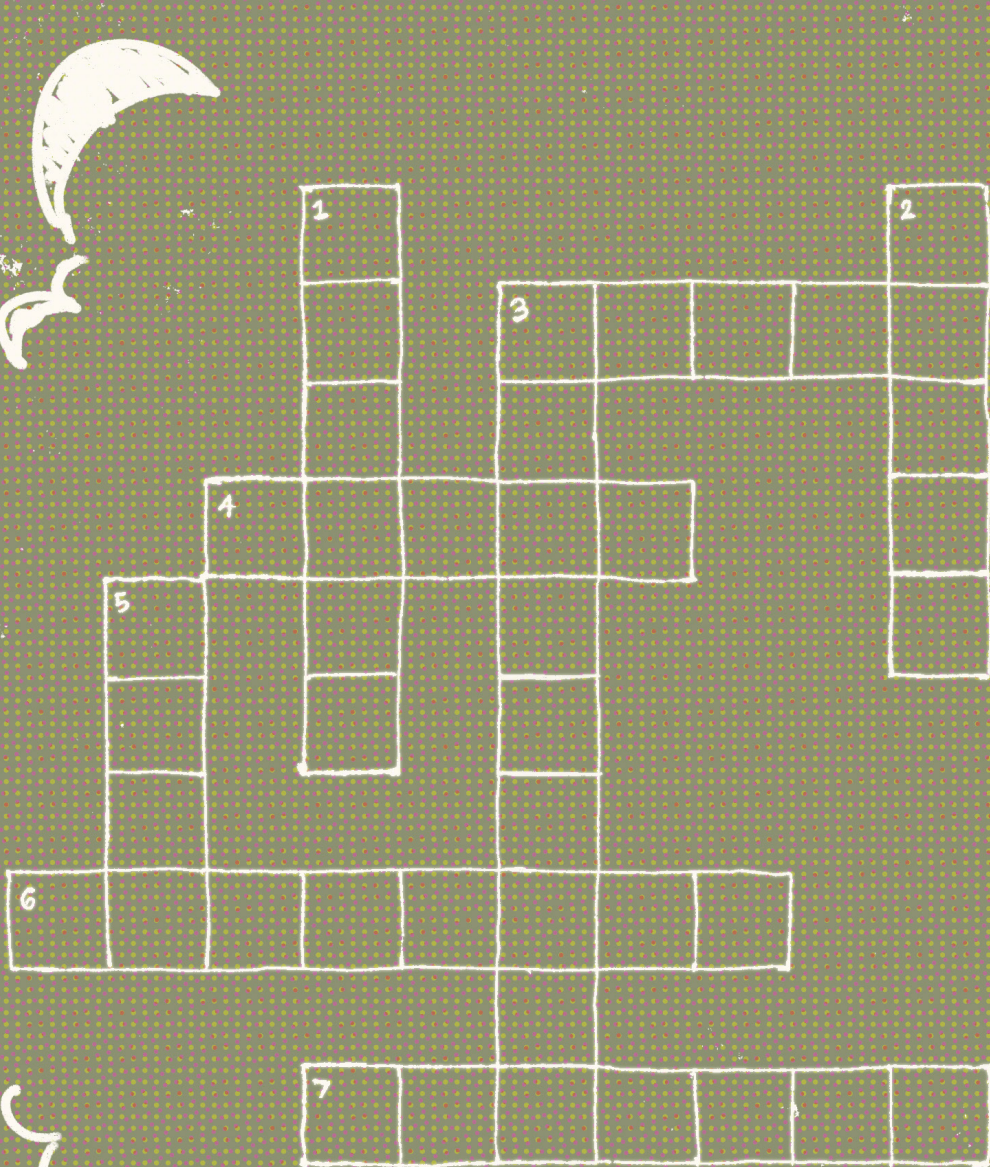
Tunsil's story also says a lot about resilience. His career seemed to have a terrible start, with media outlets across the country doubting who Tunsil was as a person, rather than a football player. He proved the media wrong and has so far netted over \$140 million during his NFL career.

**THIS ARTICLE  
WAS PUBLISHED  
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OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE  
WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES  
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**ACROSS**

- 3. Where one may panic at?
- 4. Brutally honest.
- 6. May contain ham, cheese, and lettuce
- 7. Viral eye condition that often affects children

**DOWN**

- 1. Fruit \_\_\_\_\_, candy sheet manufactured by General Mills
- 2. Point where two bones are fitted together
- 3. Make a wish?
- 5. Slang for cannabis in 2020

*Mia Park Tavares*

*Rania Jones*

