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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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NEWS

Harvard Expands Campus Security Amid Growing Safety Concerns

New cameras and extended building access restrictions reflect worries about student safety on campus.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

Harvard is expanding campus security measures ahead of the 2026–27 academic year, including plans to install additional security cameras outside academic buildings and throughout the River and Quad residential areas. The University has not announced when installation will begin, though administrators have described the expansion as part of a broader effort to modernize campus security and improve responses to criminal incidents.

The changes follow a year of heightened concern regarding student safety after the fatal shooting at Brown University and several violent incidents in Cambridge and the surrounding area. They also come as Harvard continues to face broader institutional challenges, including scrutiny over professors' connections to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein and a legal dispute with the federal government over withheld funding.

The shooting occurred on Dec. 13, 2025, while students at both Brown and Harvard were undergoing their final examination period as the fall semester ended. A gunman opened fire inside the University's Barus and Holley Building, killing two Brown undergraduate students and injuring several others. Federal investigations later identified Claudio Manuel Neves Valente as the shooter and reported that he had planned the attack for an extended period, though authorities were unable to determine why he targeted Brown students specifically.

Although Harvard did not immediately comment on the shooting, the University sent a campus-wide email on Wednesday, Dec. 17, announcing additional security measures. It stated that beginning the following morning, access to all Faculty of Arts and Sciences buildings would require a Harvard ID card, in accordance with the University's standard winter recess procedures. Security guards were also stationed at the main entrances of buildings where final exams were taking place, while Harvard University Police Department officers maintained an increased presence across campus. "While there is no information indicating a credible threat to our campus, HUPD and Securitas will also continue to closely monitor campus buildings out of an abundance of caution," the communication stated.

In December 2025, two days after the same gunman carried out the mass shooting at Brown University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Nuno F. G. Loureiro was fatally shot at his home in Brookline, a town just miles away from Cambridge. Authorities later determined that the gunman had returned to Massachusetts following the Brown attack, heightening concerns in the Harvard community about his proximity to campus even as the University said it had no

information indicating a credible threat.

The ID card access requirement introduced during winter recess was later extended through the end of the spring semester. Under the policy, students, faculty, and staff were required to swipe their Harvard IDs to enter all Faculty of Arts and Sciences buildings, including the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences facilities in Allston, Massachusetts. Although restricted access during winter recess was standard practice, maintaining the requirement throughout the spring semester marked a broader change to normal campus operations. Enforcement, however, was reportedly inconsistent during the policy's early months, with some major Faculty of Arts and Sciences buildings remaining accessible without an ID swipe. Sever Hall and Boylston Hall, for example, both classroom buildings with heavy daily traffic, are not equipped with scanning infrastructure on their front doors.

The University later strengthened enforcement after community concerns emerged that the announced restrictions had not been fully implemented. Administrators assured affiliates that the extension was not prompted by a specific threat but was part of a broader effort to strengthen campus security amid several violent incidents in Cambridge and the surrounding area.

The City of Cambridge recorded an increase in robberies and aggravated assaults in March 2026, although overall reported crime remained below the level recorded during the same period in 2025. In May, an armed man fired an assault-style weapon at passing vehicles on Memorial Drive near River Street, only a few blocks from Mather House. He injured two people before being taken into custody. Cambridge also recorded a fatal shooting near Broadway and Norfolk Street on July 4, 2026, marking the city's second reported homicide of the year.

As Harvard has responded to concerns about physical security on and around campus, the University has also confronted how to maintain campus order without unduly restricting protests or free expression.

Harvard has also strengthened its procedures for responding to campus demonstrations. In April 2025, the University authorized the president to convene a faculty panel of the University Committee on Rights and Responsibilities to investigate alleged violations of Harvard's protest and Campus Use policies in cases involving students from multiple schools. Unlike previous

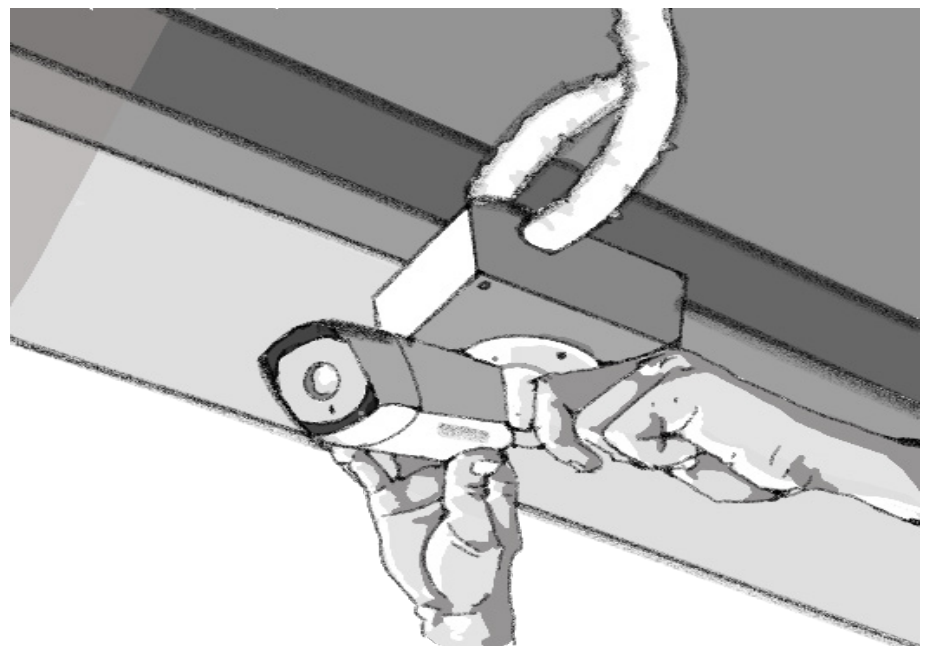
years, the committee was granted the ability to determine facts and impose disciplinary measures. Although framed as an effort to protect free expression, the measures also reflect Harvard's broader attempt to maintain campus order and prevent demonstrations from interfering with students' ability to learn in a safe environment.

According to a report by the "Harvard Crimson," a college administrator also informed students that the cameras could potentially be used to enforce Harvard's Campus Use policies, which regulate protests and demonstrations, though a University spokesperson declined to confirm whether they would serve that purpose.

Harvard's security efforts are expected to continue during the coming academic year. After introducing active shooter preparedness sessions for undergraduates in Houses and first-year dormitories during the spring, HUPD and Harvard College plan to continue the sessions into the fall and expand them across the residential system, with the goal of reaching every undergraduate residential space within two years. The training outlines how students should respond during an active shooter emergency, including when to run, hide, or, as a last resort, fight.

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GRAPHIC BY SAGE WILEY '29



The Future of Mail-in Ballots

Harvard Professors react to *Watson v. the Republican National Committee*.

BY ELLE DU PONT '29

The U.S. Supreme Court's term ended on June 30 with the release of seven high-profile decisions. One of the most controversial decisions was *Watson v. Republican National Committee*, which allowed Mississippi to continue counting absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day but received up to five days later. The Supreme Court voted 5-4 on the decision, with Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Jackson voting in the affirmative.

Professors at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Harvard Law School reflected on how the decision reveals recent trends in the federal government's attempts to control state decision-making and prevent mail-in voting. Many students who go to a college outside of their home state use mail-in ballots for federal, state, and local elections, whether in their home communities or elsewhere. At Harvard in particular, over 82% of students come from outside Massachusetts.

"Rules around mail-in ballots have become increasingly relevant given that the number of Americans who vote by mail has risen consistently since 1996."

Rules around mail-in ballots have become increasingly relevant given that the number of Americans who vote by mail has risen consistently since 1996, with the exception of the pandemic-driven spike in 2020. Beyond absentee ballots, mail-in ballots have become more common for people who don't trust polling facilities, worry they will face protesters or federal officials trying to sway their decision, and more.

"If you have concerns about election integrity, and in particular, if you are someone who's concerned that federal officials might show up at polling places, or that there aren't going to be enough polling places and so there are going to be overflow lines [...] for any number of reasons, vote by mail solves a number of potential problems," Matthew Baum, the inaugural Marvin Kalb Professor of Global Communications at the Harvard Kennedy School, said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent."

In *Watson v. RNC*, the RNC and Mississippi Republican Party filed a lawsuit against Michael Watson, the Mississippi Secretary of State, to join him and election commissioners from counting mail-in ballots received after Election Day. In this suit, the RNC followed President Donald Trump's

recent attempts to prevent mail-in ballots from being received after Election Day, such as Executive Order 14248, which multiple federal courts stopped with permanent injunctions.

This original suit was filed in January 2024 and rejected by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, before being reversed and vacated in part by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in October. Mississippi then petitioned for the case to be taken by the Supreme Court, which the Supreme Court granted in November 2025.

"Many of those in support of the Supreme Court's decision argue that concerns over election integrity are over-emphasized."

"The question [of *Watson v. RNC*] was whether that [counting mail-in ballots received after Election Day] was inconsistent with the Constitution," Ruth Greenwood, Assistant Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Election Law Clinic at Harvard, explained to the "Harvard Independent." "The argument by the opponents of this was that it would be a problem in terms of election integrity, that people would have a problem in believing that the elections had gone the way they had gone if you add ballots counted that came in after Election Day."

Many of those in support of the Supreme Court's decision argue that concerns over election integrity are over-emphasized. President Trump's Department of Homeland Security recently drafted a press release, which "Politico" viewed and reported on July 16, on multiple election fraud cases, including thousands of non-citizens on the voter rolls in California, New Jersey, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill responded to the alleged fraud on X, acknowledging that a software error caused around 6,600 non-citizens to be registered as voters; fewer than 400 actually voted.

"As the Trump Administration tries to weaponize elections for political gain, I am ensuring we protect our elections," she wrote.

However, Greenwood emphasized that mail-in voting is more about practical considerations about the Post Office than allowing additional votes. "It's not requiring any state to count ballots that come in after Election Day. But if a state decides that because we all know that the Postal Service can take some time, and there are various people that need to use postal services, then it's fine for them to count ballots that come in after Election Day," she said.

Despite almost one-third of Americans

voting by mail in the 2024 election, the scope of the case was limited to Mississippi, so the immediate impact on the electoral system would have been limited. "For [the Supreme Court] to have found the other way, it wouldn't have thrown complete chaos into the elections," Greenwood continued.

The direct consequences were not the main concern for many voter access advocates, though. The issue remains who controls elections—the states or the federal government. "It would have been a very disturbing sign if the Supreme Court was willing to start getting in and telling states how they should run elections," Greenwood explained.

Greenwood also pointed out the recent Supreme Court decision *Louisiana v. Callais* in April 2026 regarding racial gerrymandering, in which the Court ruled against the 1982 amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The amendment specified that racial gerrymandering could be overturned if it had a discriminatory effect, not just intent. With its recent decision, the Supreme Court now requires proof of intent before it can address gerrymandering.

Baum believed the crux of the issue was still the state-versus-federal debate. "The principle of state control over elections, I think, was indirectly at issue here because this was basically the Trump administration trying to effectively regulate what states can do in terms of counting ballots and what the Postal Service can do in terms of delivering ballots," he said. He found that attempt to increase federal control concerning.

"The principle of state control over elections, I think, was indirectly at issue here because this was basically the Trump administration trying to effectively regulate what states can do in terms of counting ballots and what the Postal Service can do in terms of delivering ballots,"

- Matthew Baum, inaugural Marvin Kalb Professor of Global Communications at the Harvard Kennedy School

In Article I, Section 4, Clause 1, also known as the "Elections Clause," the U.S. Constitution allows for states to run elections. The Supreme Court has often interpreted this broadly, allowing states to handle everything from voting locations to voter fraud protection, as specified in *Smiley v. Holm* in 1932.

“[The decision] is important because if they had gone the other way, I don’t think people would have been able to trust mail-in voting,” Baum said. Currently, 51% of Americans have a great deal or a fair amount of trust in the mail-in voting system, with 21% planning to vote by mail in the 2026 midterms.

“[The decision] is important because if they had gone the other way, I don’t think people would have been able to trust mail-in voting.”

This decision also remains especially relevant for college students, many of whom use mail-in voting because they are no longer living near their home voting precinct. Sophia Gocan ’29, a California resident, plans to vote by mail this upcoming year in both the presidential and gubernatorial elections as she trusts California’s mail-in ballot system and finds voting a high priority. “The gubernatorial election is especially important for me to vote while being away for college since I will likely go back to California post-grad, so it will have an effect on me, as well as the presidential [election].”

Baum acknowledged the partisan aspect of the issue as well. “I think you would have had to try if you were, let’s say, the opposition in this case, the Democrats, to launch a pretty aggressive campaign to get people to not vote by mail because it would suddenly be really vulnerable,” he added. This campaign may also have involved encouraging people to vote early. There are still other ways that the Trump administration can attempt to stop mail-in voting, but Baum noted at least this particular avenue has been shut down.

For college students and others preparing to vote by mail, this court ruling can prevent concern about when to send in their ballot. If the ruling had gone the other way, many would need to prepare and mail ballots much earlier to avoid them being delayed and therefore invalidated.

“I’ve had students who have not received their absentee ballot, and by the time they realize by the Friday before the election that that’s happened, the only option is to fly at great expense back to vote in person, or to be disenfranchised.”

- Ruth Greenwood, Assistant Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Election Law Clinic at Harvard

Baum remains worried about what mail-in voting will look like in the future. “My expectation is that they will continue to roll out policies designed to make voting by mail more difficult, less frequent, etc.,” he said. “I don’t think they’re done by any means attempting to intervene in this process.” This means students deciding to vote by mail should still get their ballots ready early, as the Trump administration may develop different ways to prevent mail-in ballots from reaching their designated state.

“[I’m worried about voting by mail] mainly due to the fact I have no clue how the mail-in process works—especially because I don’t have my mail-in address until the end of August,” Gocan explained.

“I’ve had students who have not received their absentee ballot, and by the time they realize by the Friday before the election that that’s happened, the only option is to fly at great expense back to vote in person, or to be disenfranchised,” Greenwood said, emphasizing the importance of preparing early if you plan to mail your ballot.

ELLE DU PONT ’29 (EDUPONT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.” YOU CAN REGISTER FOR AN ABSENTEE BALLOT BY APPLYING ONLINE OR DOWNLOADING THE APPLICATION ON YOUR HOME STATE’S WEBSITE.

GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG ’28



FORUM

The Dirty Word... Liberalism

That's right—I said it; have at me if you must.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

Last semester, I authored an opinion editorial titled “A Commentary on Conservatism,” in which I, borrowing the words of Sir Roger Scruton, described the ideology as a “philosophy of love.” This is a sentiment I still hold to be true. The title of a “philosophy of love” doesn't solely belong to conservatism but is a moniker which I think applies equally to its ideological adversary, liberalism.

If we take conservatism, in simple terms, to be a love of what was and a reverence for tradition, then we must be able to understand liberalism as a love of what could be and a reverence for the ideals of man. However, as history has shown, we have failed to live up to the lofty ideals the philosophy demands.

“The term ‘liberal,’ especially in today’s intensely polarized political climate, has become weaponized as an insult.”

Take, for example, the preamble of the Declaration of Independence—an inherently liberal document rooted in Enlightenment-era ideals. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” There is a painful hypocrisy within these stated goals, given that 48 of the 56 signatories of the Declaration of Independence directly profited from slavery. Nevertheless, it is the document's ideals that we should look to rather than their application, or lack thereof.

The term “liberal,” especially in today's intensely polarized political climate, has become weaponized as an insult. Its original meaning has become lost behind clickbait headlines and partisan soundbites, reducing a centuries-old philosophy to nothing more than a political brand. However, if being a liberal means being “someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the

people,” as John F. Kennedy put it, then I am proud to say that I too am a liberal.

I don't think this is a partisan statement, and if it is, it just shows how far politics has divided us. Leading with care and compassion for others and striving for equality are not political issues but should be fundamental to the American way of life. Emma Lazarus's poem, “The New Colossus,” which is mounted on a plaque within the Statue of Liberty, speaks to the values that aren't just liberal but inherently American. “Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door,” it reads. These words point to the liberating vision of what America is supposed to be, yet the light of the “golden door” seems to be dimming more and more as the years go on.

Here lies the issue: we've enshrined beliefs and deified the American way of life but abandoned the principles in practice. The Statue of Liberty stands as a monument to the promise of America, yet we now debate which of the tired and poor are worthy of sharing in our prosperity. At our nation's founding, we declared all men equal, but two hundred and fifty years later, equality remains unrealized for many. We celebrate JFK's vision of a free and fair society, yet our institutions no longer know how to practice it and, in some cases, have entirely forgotten what the words “free and fair” mean.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,” says Psalm 121:1. On the 250th anniversary of this great nation, I have looked to the Hill, the institutions that we hold so dear, the documents upon which the country was built, and have seen no help coming. Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to his close friend Joseph Priestley, mourned that he would not live to see what the world, and by extension America, would be like in 1,000 years. With our current trajectories, I have some doubts that we will see a 500th anniversary, let alone a 1,000-year one. But all is not lost.

Americans have always found a way. I'm not talking about the people in politics, who more often than not parrot talking points aimed at separating us rather than bringing us together, but the average citizen who knows right from wrong and good from evil. The American who helps their neighbor not for personal gain but because it's the right thing to do, who gives back and seeks to leave a better community for the next generation to inherit. The American who cares about their fellow man not out of political calculation or ideological obligation but simply because they are American and that means something; it means caring for the stranger, the tired, and the poor; it means remembering that our ideals, however marred by our failures, still mean something to us 250 years later.

Perhaps I am blinded by a sense of patriotism and a belief in people over politics, but I would rather be wrong about humanity than

right about despondency. I love my country not for what it was but for what it has overcome and continues to strive to be. “To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried [...] the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss.” These are the words of Michael Oakeshott, a prominent British conservative philosopher, in his 1956 essay “On Being Conservative.” Though I understand and empathize with his statement, sometimes the tried is not true, and we must go further into the unknown in pursuit of the noble aims that our founding fathers set before us some 250 years ago. If a convenient society is built on drastically unequal grounds, then that convenience is an illusion that we have fed ourselves to justify abandoning our foundational principles.

One can exist as a conservative and a liberal at the same time because fairness and wisdom are not opposing forces. They work hand in hand, dancing around each other like awkward teenagers at the high school prom—sometimes

“One can exist as a conservative and a liberal at the same time because fairness and wisdom are not opposing forces.”

they step on each other's toes, but eventually they find rhythm. I believe in respect for the tried and tested, the institutions that have stood the test of time, and prefer the gradual to the revolutionary; however, I am also cognizant that tradition can lead, and has led, to the calcification of injustice. In short, the way things were, or are, does not have to be the way things must be.

I can dance with both philosophies because fairness is not utopia. Dignity, equality, the removal of barriers, and real opportunity for all are not radical dreams but the bare minimum. I want what's right, not perfect, so I'll dance with both even when my feet hurt because the alternative—giving up on fairness or wisdom—is not a concession I am prepared to make, and neither should you.

Happy Birthday, America, and may the next 250 years be better than the last.

NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WANTS TO WARN PREFROSH NOT TO LICK JOHN HARVARD'S LEFT FOOT.

GRAPHIC BY CAMERON BERNIER '29



Harvard vs. Oxford: Breaking Down the Differences

Reflections on a summer abroad.

BY NUALA MERNIN '29

After heaving my 50 lb suitcase onto a giant red coach, wrestling it down a cobblestone alley, and hauling it up five narrow, winding flights of stairs, I finally arrived at Exeter College, Oxford, where I would spend the next six weeks. The first thing I noticed was my view: a charming little window overlooking limestone shops and pubs named after miscellaneous animals—"The White Horse" sent loud conversations straight into my dorm. The second thing I noticed was the temperature: 90 degrees Fahrenheit and no air conditioning.

Compared to the freshly painted staircases of Harvard College's Weld Hall, the dimly lit halls of the Turl Street dorms are timeworn and lived-in. As I walked through the college gardens, years of history lingered overhead, and I felt as if a robed Renaissance-era humanist could emerge from a building at any second. I asked myself why time seemed so disjointed at Oxford, until I realized how quiet it was.

Although Oxford is by far the most famous university in England, the school's campus is—literally and figuratively—gated off from the rest of the country. For non-students, entry to just one of the university's 36 colleges costs nine pounds sterling, and access to the principal Bodleian Library requires special research applications and multiple rounds of identification. While this isolation does create a space for students to dedicate themselves to their studies without distraction, it also creates a wedge between academia and the world it's meant to serve.

Meanwhile, on any sunny afternoon in Cambridge, Massachusetts, tourists freely pour into Harvard Yard, photographing its historic grounds and filling its open spaces. At times, Harvard can feel more like a landmark than an academic institution.

These two ancient giants, pinnacles of Western academia, seem to take on completely different approaches to higher education.

Although my summer study program lasted only six weeks, I found that after just one week of lessons, I knew my professors' hobbies, teaching styles, hometowns, and political leanings. Working closely with professors isn't a choice at Oxford; the University's academics are centered around its famous tutorial system—every class includes one-hour sessions during which one to four students must discuss their work with their tutors. Instructors will "notice if your work isn't quite the same quality one week and they'll know that something is going on," a sophomore at Oxford, Clara Heck, said to the "Harvard Independent." "And I think actually it's sort of a two-way street [...] you make the effort to be prepared and go to the tutorial and have an interesting and intellectual conversation with your tutor," Heck explained. When students must present their work in an intimate environment every week, they can develop consistent motivation to keep up with work and build lasting relationships with tutors. They don't need to create time in their schedules—that's simply an integral part of an Oxford education.

At Harvard, students don't necessarily have the same means of connecting with their professors. New students have vastly different experiences with discussion-based learning. Some might have spent years in Socratic seminars, while others might not know that attending office hours could benefit them at all. During my freshman fall, I only went to office hours when I had a specific set of questions or wanted essay advice.

It was only toward the end of the semester that one of my professors informed me that I should just stop in to introduce myself and talk about the coursework more. By the end of my freshman spring, I'd become accustomed to dropping into office hours with even the smallest of clarifying questions. At Exeter College, where I talk to tutors about my essays, life goals, and favorite movies once a week in tutorials, I've never had to think about finding time to build relationships with faculty.

Moreover, though Harvard students have the freedom to decide which subjects they dedicate their extra time to, differences in background and experience can create disparities in academic advantage among the student body—with respect to faculty relationships and their larger course of study.

And therein lies another, and arguably the foremost, distinction between the oldest university in the United States and the oldest university in the English-speaking world: choice. Whether British or American, young adults must face a rapid cycle of escalating decisions that will shape the courses of their lives. Small or giant college? STEM or humanities? Dream job or stable income? But the timeline on which students at these two nations' respective elite schools make their choices is vastly different.

While Harvard students don't declare their concentrations until their sophomore fall, Oxford students must apply to pursue a specific course of study—and these academic paths are usually determined years before pursuing higher education. Heck says she chose to study French and German later than many of her peers. "I only decided quite close to the application deadline, which would have been Year 13." Most students in the United Kingdom commit to their specialized fields before they even become adults. Specializing so early may seem limiting to their career choices down the line. However, there are some benefits; for instance, subject-specific learning creates space for students to commit themselves to their interests without worrying about general education requirements—a point of recent contention at Harvard College.

Once students decide on a course, they must choose a College—one of Oxford's many small, gated campuses where they live, eat, and study for all four years. Each college has a distinct character: the iconic Christ Church is known for its formal academic dress, age-based divisions in the dining

hall, and political connections; Magdalen College, one of Oxford's most photographed locations, is famous for its cultivation of literature and the arts and white tie formals; Worcester College is known for its inclusivity, bringing students and fellows together to dine in the hall. Students choose for themselves both a community and an identity before taking their first college course.

"Ultimately, choosing the best-fitting country and institution for one's higher education—a decision typically made around age seventeen—means committing to a lifelong community."

Harvard tosses every freshman into randomized housing in Harvard Yard, where we have a chance to meet students across concentrations, backgrounds, and dorms. Even meals at Harvard involve more choice: where Annenberg Hall offers a large buffet and salad bar included in students' annual meal plan, Exeter College provides one pay-per-item menu at each meal. I personally have made some of my best friends by sitting down at random tables in Annenberg, open to 1,500 freshmen every day.

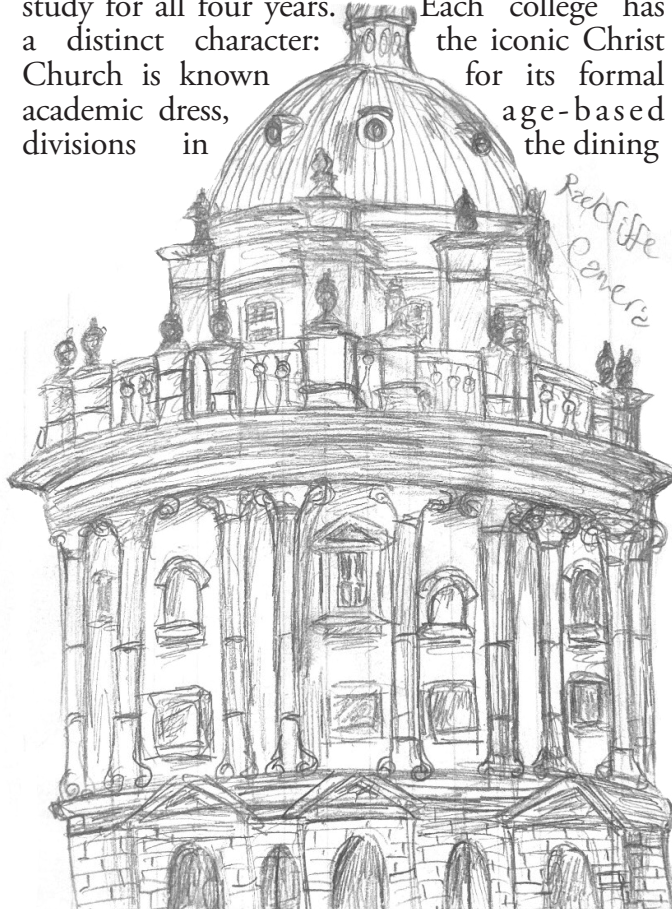
At Oxford, where every College has its own dining hall, friendships can be more limited. "Especially with my degree, I think it's quite restrictive," Dominic Monnet, an incoming senior and Ancient and Modern History scholar at Oxford, said. "I know there are some historians who have one friend outside of [their] College after two years."

Ultimately, choosing the best-fitting country and institution for one's higher education—a decision typically made around age seventeen—means committing to a lifelong community.

The singularities of Harvard seem distinctly American, as our school emphasizes individuality among its students and freedom of academic choice. On the other hand, Oxford's peculiarities appear fundamentally English, as the school upholds important traditions and prizes dedication to one's particular interests. Stepping out of one environment into the other has reminded me that a great education doesn't look any one way; though there's a lot of benefit to building a range of skills, college can also be a time to immerse oneself fully in one's interests without a second thought.

NUALA MERNIN '29 (NMERNIN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS BUSY WORKING ON HER ENGLISH ACCENT.

GRAPHIC BY NUALA MERNIN '29



New Faces in Familiar Places

Lessons from strangers during a summer in Washington, D.C.

BY MIRIAM TSEGAY '29

Con my usual afternoon Metro ride home, I settle in with a book, headphones on, and my bag beside me. On this particularly hot June day, an older white woman pauses beside my seat and asks if she can sit down. I move my bag without looking up, Malcolm Todd's newest album filling my ears as I return to my book. When we screech to a stop at the next station, she thanks me—but instead of turning away, she starts talking.

She tells me that she is coming from the Great American State Fair and urges me to pay it a visit. I humor her and say, "Yes," but know I will not. I find myself jumping to conclusions about her political beliefs and the kind of person she might be—an assumption that felt at odds with the gentle impression her pink hat and grandmotherly demeanor had given me. But despite my misgivings about her political leanings, we keep chatting, and, as I ask her what she does for a living, I learn that she is a retired school teacher. I put away my headphones and close my book, giving her my full attention. Before long, we're talking about our shared love of museums.

"I cannot help but think that these minute interactions serve as a reminder of the fact that the world is so much bigger than myself—filled with people who share my experiences, or do not, and live their own all-consuming, unique lives too."

She tells me that she used to love bringing her students into D.C. from her school in Arlington, pairing classroom lessons with visits to the wonderful museums lining the National Mall. I ask her if she regrets retirement. Would she go back, I wonder. Her laughter and vehement "no" surprise me, but as she explains how things have changed—less funding for field trips, more exams instead of experiential learning, and a lack of teaching autonomy—I understand her response more.

I suddenly long for my elementary school days filled with long recesses and joyous holiday parties—all the hazy notions of a 2010s childhood that seem to have been replaced by a cold indifference in

elementary school classrooms today. I say this, and she smiles, nostalgia clouding her eyes too.

My metro conversation lasted no more than eight minutes. Yet even for just a few stops along the Blue Line, it felt nice to hear a new voice (no shade to Malcolm) and replace the story I'd imagined with the one she chose to tell me. Maybe it is just the Midwesterner in me, always happy to strike up a conversation, but I cannot help but think that these minute interactions serve as a reminder of the fact that the world is so much bigger than myself—filled with people who share my experiences, or do not, and live their own all-consuming, unique lives too.

A few weeks later, I am pulling into the same Foggy Bottom metro station—sans fellow museum lover—after catching up with friends I had not seen in years. I bound up the steps of the station to exit and feel cool air hit my face, a beautiful respite from the suffocating heat that has engulfed the city.

Possessed by the cool temperature and a warm contentment in my evening, I start for the Lincoln Memorial. Just a short walk away from my summer dorm, I am there in no time. It is empty of the usual touristy crowds that swarm by day. Dancing along the marble perimeter, I think about everything and anything while the twinkling lights of Arlington stare back at me.

It is just past midnight, I realize. It is time to go—already far too late for me to be out. I turn to leave and spot two National Guard officers at the end of the column-lined corridor, dancing just as I had been. Feeling embarrassed and caught, I do not know what else to do but laugh. I ask them where they are from and plunge into another conversation.

"As I leave, smiling, they tell me they will be there. I tell them I will be back."

I learn that they are both from Mississippi and have been here for a few short months, staying until next year. One of the officers, shorter than the other with blond strands of hair peeking out of his cap, tells me he has always wanted to serve—reminiscing on a childhood spent "playing Army in the yard." He dreams of being stationed in Germany, and when I ask him why, his boyish grin spreads across his face as he tells me about his plans to crisscross Europe by train.



They tell me of the long hours they spend on the National Mall, keeping watch as a part of the night shift. They remind me of my dad, who worked nights while I was growing up so he could be with my brother and me during the day. I volunteer these memories, and the other guardsman, taller with darker skin and kind brown eyes, mentions his mother who raised him on her

a casual, “just two years”—explaining how he fills the free time that comes with the 24-hour shifts of being a firefighter. He continues to play, and somewhere between songs I learn that he used to DJ. When I mention that learning to DJ is on my college bucket list, his eyes light up, and he immediately pulls up old DJ sets on his phone.

conversations, and firehouse jam sessions. More than these people I’ve met in passing, I will miss the kind people that run the U.S. House of Representatives’ subway system and the IT guy that always comes by our office, the Girl Scouts from Oswego who took a tour of the Capitol with me and the sweet women working in the Rayburn House Office Building coffee shop—small



own. He pulls out his phone and shows me a picture of her, their resemblance obvious, telling me he would do anything for her.

As I leave, smiling, they tell me they will be there. I tell them I will be back.

Late into July, rain pours into the Tidal Basin a few miles away from where Lincoln sits. I watch from the dry safety of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, empty save for a few National Guardsmen. Feeling the sudden urge to step into the rain, I rush down the slick white steps, the cool drops soaking through my old soccer shorts as the sun pushes through the clouds. The rain continues to fall, and a double rainbow appears in the distance as I make my way back home.

“It is easy to forget that there is so much more to life than the endless avalanche of student-led events or the transactional exchanges that define so many comp coffee chats.”

Rounding the corner onto my street, I spot a firefighter playing a brilliant turquoise electric guitar outside his firehouse. When I catch his eye and smile, he calls across the street that he will be back tomorrow. Mid-sentence, though, he changes his mind and beckons me over for one last song. I hesitate before asking him if he can play any Fleetwood Mac, a summer favorite of mine.

As he plays the first few notes of “Dreams,” we get to talking. Originally from Pennsylvania, he has been a firefighter for 16 years. When I ask him how long he has been playing the guitar, he replies with

“One, two, three, four—two, two, three, four—three, two, three, four—four, two, three, four.” An impromptu lesson has begun—he explains to me that DJing is not that hard; an eight count is a DJ’s guide to switching between each new beat. All of this is possible through a DJ’s controller, with each side responsible for mixing a different song, in accordance with the two different songs playing in either ear of the headset. I am fascinated.

As the song from his set ends, he smiles a wistful grin, and not wanting to keep him from the dinner bell that has just rung, I start to say goodbye. But as I turn to go, he asks me if I would like to learn. Safe to say, I will be back at the firehouse next week to learn all there is to DJing—DJ controller, headphones, and all.

Summer in D.C. this year has been especially hot and muggy. After eight weeks running around the city and settling into the rush of Capitol Hill, I find myself sad to go. I will miss my routine: the hustle and bustle of my morning commute, the familiarity of my office, and my favorite sunset spot overlooking the Potomac.

“Even though it is so easy to tune out the rest of the world—headphones in, book out, eyes down—sometimes it is worth your while to look up and really see the people around you, even if it is just for a brief moment.”

I know I will look back and reminisce on the spontaneous interactions that have colored the everyday: the many chats by the monuments, quick metro ride

moments that seem almost insignificant yet quietly elevate each day.

Wrapped up in my college bubble every busy autumn and spring, it is easy to forget that there is so much more to life than the endless avalanche of student-led events or the transactional exchanges that define so many comp coffee chats. I know now, many conversations later, that there is so much to learn from the people around me. Perhaps back on campus, I will make the same effort to get to know both the familiar faces—like the late-night security guard at Lamont Library—and the new ones waiting for me in Mather House this fall.

This summer has left me with endless stories of my own, and just the same, I feel so lucky that so many people let me know a little bit more about their stories too. If anything, this summer in D.C. has been a reminder that even though it is so easy to tune out the rest of the world—headphones in, book out, eyes down—sometimes it is worth your while to look up and really see the people around you, even if it is just for a brief moment.

**MIRIAM TSEGAY ’29
(MIRIAMTSEGAY@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS REALLY
LOOKING FORWARD TO HER DJ
LESSONS AT THE FIREHOUSE.**

**GRAPHICS BY TRISCHELLE
AFIHENE ’27**

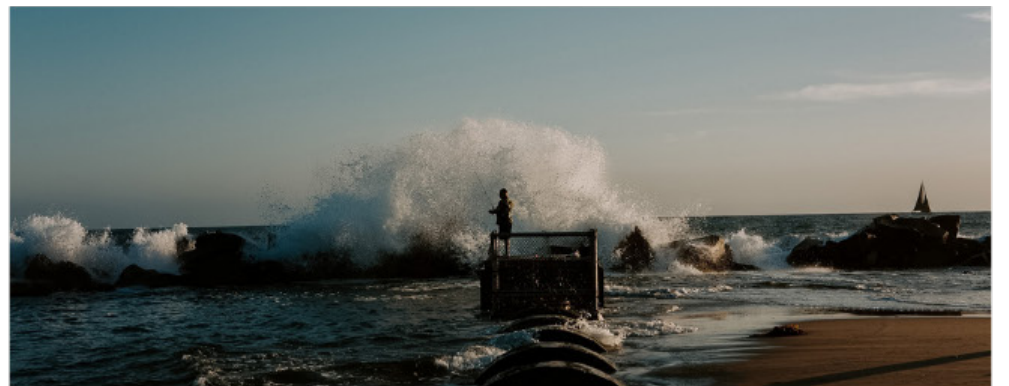




ARTS

Views from 12 Arrow Street - Summer Edition

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27



"Toy Story 5": I Haven't Watched It Yet

Disney's recent obsession with sequels and live-action remakes.

BY SAM PARK '29

Let us all resolve on this great day to go forward together and see "Toy Story 5" in theaters everywhere, June 19th," comedian Conan O'Brien '85 quipped as he concluded his commencement speech for the Harvard Class of 2026. O'Brien joins the cast of the movie as the voice of Smarty Pants, a potty-training toy.

The story follows familiar core characters Sheriff Woody and Buzz Lightyear, but hands the reins to Sheriff Jessie as the gang's new leader, as they band together against obsolescence amid the rise of tech toys in Bonnie's life. As the title of this article makes clear, I haven't watched it. However, from all the advertisements I've received on Instagram, I think I get the gist.

There's no need for me to explain the cultural phenomenon that was the original "Toy Story"—the first feature-length film created entirely out of CGI (computer-generated imagery). But when it comes to the sequels, everyone has their own opinion. Personally, I only vaguely remember "Toy Story 2" and "Toy Story 3." That one freakily detailed Woody repair scene and the bear with eyebrows are decently memorable, but I'd never considered watching the fourth movie because a plastic spork doesn't feel very compelling.

Still, I'll admit the new sequel piqued my interest—not because of its shift toward a woman-driven story, which is a discussion for another day, but because it mashed together the long-loved characters of my childhood with another relic that shaped it just as early.

The thing is, I remember having some sort of LeapFrog device—what Lilypad, the movie's main antagonist, seems to be modeled after—as a kid. Yet when I searched for the device of my childhood, every result looked so much more boring than I remember; not nearly as captivating as Lilypad.

"Toy Story 5" seems to try to appeal to as

wide a range of audiences as possible by taking a shoddy toy from the 2000s and giving it more advanced features so Gen Alpha iPad kids can relate. Not to mention how everyone is dying to see where Disney, as a media empire, lands on AI, as debate over AI in animation becomes the film world's latest obsession. The Big D's strategy here is clear: sell to everyone by manufacturing as many avenues for intrigue as possible. Even I almost fell into the trap, but then I bought a ticket for "Leviticus" instead, and now I have opinions about that instead of the film that I'm writing about. Take that, Big D.

"Toy Story 5" seems to try to appeal to as wide a range of audiences as possible by taking a shoddy toy from the 2000s and giving it more advanced features so Gen Alpha iPad kids can relate."

Most of us are familiar with the popular accusations of sequels being "cashgrabs." As for "Toy Story 5," voice actor Tim Allen, who plays Buzz Lightyear, pushed back on that view. "Had they not come up with a brilliant script, they wouldn't have done it, and they wouldn't have called me and Tom [Hanks]," Allen said. Even I can't deny that "Toy Story 5" creates a compelling case when talking about the new generation's relationship to technology, pointing specifically to the importance of balance.

Although technology has advanced education, making learning more accessible and efficient in many ways, overuse has become a huge problem. Many of us are familiar with the classic "iPad kid"—face two inches from the screen, grubby fingers tapping away at the Roblox controls while they watch YouTube Shorts.

But amid these declarations about modern technology, Disney released a real Lilypad tablet—albeit without all the cool stuff—through LeapFrog. I guess technology is okay, as long as you buy it from Disney. And even though addictive content and instant gratification are frowned upon in the movie, pouring millions of dollars into advertising on Instagram Reels and TikTok to

capitalize on those audiences is just peachy.

It seems that whether the storyline and messaging are compelling or not, the need to sell underlines it all. I personally find it hard to enjoy a film for its thematic merits when the company behind it has its own goals.

Compare the budgets—\$250 million for "Toy Story 5" and \$175 million for "Wish" (a 2023 Disney film with an original story)—with their box office returns: over \$950 million for "Toy Story 5" in under a month versus \$275 million (embarrassing) for "Wish." It's clear why sequels are so appealing. "Toy Story 5" had the highest budget of a Pixar film and the third-highest of all animated feature films, but as the box office numbers reveal, it was worth it. The guaranteed nostalgic audience and the continuous revival of old characters with increasingly stacked casts make good arguments against a riskier original project. And in the world we live in, a sure shot often seems like the only shot worth taking.

If we look at the Walt Disney Studios release schedule from 2026 to 2029, the majority are sequels and live-action remakes (or sequels of live-action remakes): "Ready or Not 2," "The Devil Wears Prada 2," "Ice Age: Boiling Point," "Star Wars: Starfighter," "The Simpsons Movie 2," "Frozen III," "Lilo & Stitch 2," and "The Incredibles 3." Are we hyped, or what?!

I don't know about you, but this opened my eyes to how many franchises Disney really owns. So I guess when you're in the theater and deciding between watching "Ice Age" and "Star Wars," it really doesn't matter.

At the end of the day, if all Disney and other major conglomerates want to do is multiply their hundreds of millions of dollars, it's easy to give in. Might as well run to the theater and tell our friends, family, and internet strangers to do the same.

But the only reason that huge companies like Disney funnel so much money into sequels and remakes is because we keep watching them. If we want to see more original ideas and creativity, it's our job as consumers to support smaller productions instead.

Take, for example, the adult cartoon comedy "Smiling Friends." In a world where it's so easy to churn out the same tired content, the creators recently announced that, despite the show's renewal and widespread success, even with a low budget, it would not continue after season three. Feeling burnt out, the creators did not want the quality of the show to decline just for the sake of guaranteed success. This presents a striking contrast to the constant scramble to be renewed, to create the next season, the next sequel, the next spinoff, in which integrity is often sacrificed.

Can we take a second to appreciate that? It's a breath of fresh air when a creator or a company doesn't reek of desperation.

This is all to say that I encourage you not to let nostalgia or FOMO control you, and instead critically assess whether the content you're paying for or spending your time on is worth it. There's no harm in enjoying sequels, in the same way that there's no harm in using the Google AI overview when you're trying to find out what the plot of "Toy Story 5" is without actually watching it.

SAM PARK '29 (SHPARK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FROWNS UPON MEGA-CORPORATIONS.

GRAPHIC BY SAM PARK '29



American Food: 250 Years in the Making

A celebration of our foods and their impact.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

This summer I finally bought a ticket to Europe—a childhood dream realized. After wandering into two cafés with spotty Wi-Fi, I ended up somewhere I never expected: a Starbucks in Dublin. There's something fitting about writing on American food from inside a Starbucks abroad. The logo is familiar; everything else isn't.

"I am proud of the food the United States has produced, from the fiery flavors of Louisiana Cajun and Creole cooking to the hearty pastas shaped by generations of Italian immigrants in cities across America."

American food occupies a strange place in the public imagination. Many dismiss it as low-quality, greasy, and fattening. The stereotype persists because it is easy to reduce America to the land of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King—brands whose food is eaten worldwide, with the majority of their locations sitting outside the U.S. It is harder to deep-dive into the contributions of different American regions and cultures to the national and global food scene. American cuisine has never belonged to a single tradition. Instead, its defining ingredient has always been fusion.

I am proud of the food the United States has produced, from the fiery flavors of Louisiana Cajun and Creole cooking to

remarkable cultural fusion and representation, yet 250 years ago, grabbing a California roll in Manhattan would have been impossible. So how did we get here?

American Food History

Long before the United States existed, Indigenous communities had already built sophisticated regional food traditions around corn, squash, potatoes, and other local foraged and farmed ingredients. European settlers arrived carrying their culinary habits, but survival required adaptation. Dishes such as corn cakes and succotash (a distinctly Indigenous-inspired dish with a host of 'New World' ingredients and vegetables) filled colonial kitchens, planting the seed for the start of America's cross-cultural culinary diaspora.

The fight for independence during the American Revolution pushed the United States towards a self-supplied farm economy. Post-war, at least 90% of Americans who lived on farms depended on the goods they produced and the leftovers of what could not be sold. Only easily transportable items such as sugar and grain supplemented poor-tasting dishes such as "calf head"—a recipe seen in Lydia Child's early-nineteenth-century domestic manual, "The American Frugal Housewife."

Simultaneously, the beginnings of soul food were taking shape. As West and Central Africans were forced across the Atlantic through the slave trade, they carried farming and cooking traditions from their homelands to the plantations of the South. Enslaved individuals were rationed the least desirable cuts of meat and ingredients, which they transformed by combining them with farmed, foraged, and hunted foods. Out of this necessity came dishes like chitterlings, fried chicken, and fried catfish, long before emancipation.

The cuisine would not receive its name

production expanded rapidly due to the rise in popularity of canning during the Civil War and the spread of railroad transportation. Some of America's favorite packaged foods trace their roots to this era: cornflakes, ketchup, Coca-Cola, Hershey's—and the list only grows from there on.

This wave of food innovation carried on up until the Great Depression, as new technologies in refrigeration and industrial agriculture brought a wider range of ingredients and foods into American homes. As transportation and production grew cheaper, diets shifted toward more processed foods.

Food preparation grew even easier with King Kullen's invention of the supermarket in 1930, which ushered in premade meals and a far wider variety of foods as competitors expanded the model nationwide.

American food continued to innovate long after this. Yet the true catalyst throughout this history has always been the American immigrant—a fact made clear by the sheer regional variation in cuisine around the country. Each region carries the flavors of the ethnic groups that settled there and made it their own.

"History explains where American food came from. Geography explains why it refused to stay the same."

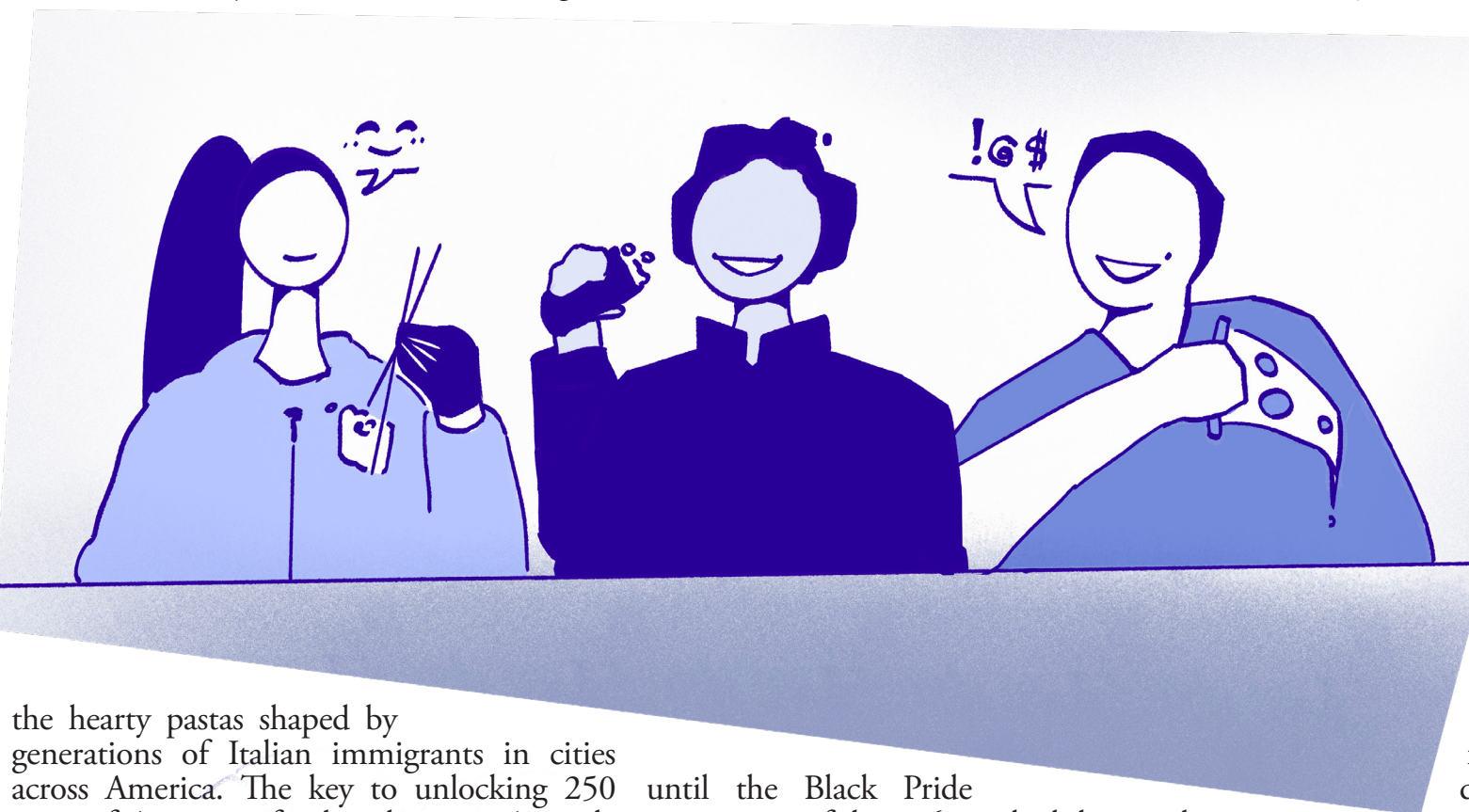
The Geography of American Food

History explains where American food came from. Geography explains why it refused to stay the same. I gave a high-level picture history of the American diet because I could

write thousands of articles about the roots of our cuisine. There are broader stories like how Japanese chefs combined distinctly American ingredients in the form of sushi to create the California roll. And smaller stories, such as the Cornish pasty, brought to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan by immigrant miners and refined into the perfect handheld lunch for a day underground.

To explain American food is to drive across the country with an empty stomach. Just follow the coast of the colonies down, and you'll find amazing culinary stories. Down the East

Coast, three different clam chowders developed: creamy New England, Providence's clear-broth-based recipe, and Manhattan's tomato-based version. This, alongside various other seafoods, forms the base of some of the East Coast's most famous cuisine.



the hearty pastas shaped by generations of Italian immigrants in cities across America. The key to unlocking 250 years of American food is diversity. A single walk through Harvard Square proves it—the sheer range of options on offer here would have been unthinkable elsewhere in the world just decades ago. We live in an era of

until the Black Pride movement of the 1960s, which honored it as "memory made edible."

This era of farmed production continued until the Gilded Age, when the Second American Industrial Revolution brought about a food revolution. While diets remained locally sourced, industrial food

Diving further into New York, we find endless food innovations. Most famous are hot dogs, spaghetti and meatballs, chicken and waffles, and so much more. The surge of immigration throughout the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries is largely responsible for the robust food scene New York offers. Migrants carved out their own enclaves, from Chinatown to Little Italy. New York's density packed these neighborhoods close together, fueling the cross-cultural collaboration that would define the city's food scene. To this day, the city is a microcosm of the trends we see around the country. The mix of cultures—European, Hispanic, Asian, and more—welcomes fusions of foods that are unmatched anywhere else around the world.

“The mix of cultures—European, Hispanic, Asian, and more—welcomes fusions of foods that are unmatched anywhere else around the world.”

Moving down into the southern seaboard, seafood continues to be a theme. In Maryland, crabs and other dishes are topped with one of the most iconic inventions: Old Bay. A distinct salty-spicy blend with hints of cinnamon and cloves that took the South by storm. After its creation in 1940 by a German-Jewish immigrant, many Southern cooks utilized the blend as a spice base for their food; it was an important catalyst for the development of mid-Atlantic seafood cuisine. Moving inland, we find two of America's most famous cuisines calling the Deep South home: soul food and Cajun tradition. In Louisiana alone, French, West African, Caribbean, Spanish, and Indigenous

traditions meet in ways that feel impossible until you taste them in po'boys, shrimp and grits, buttermilk biscuits, red beans and rice, pimento cheese, boiled peanuts, collard greens, fried chicken, shrimp etouffee—sorry, I was getting hungry. Further to the west, Texas is the American home of barbecue and Tex-Mex. Margaritas, smoked brisket, pecan pie—all claims to fame. The blending of Mexican and Anglo-American settlers brought together new flavors and delicious foods.

“Economic necessity amid the Great Depression shaped these immigrant traditions into something distinctly Midwestern. Hence, you end up with green bean casserole or pasta salad.”

America's heartland, the Midwest, should not be forgotten amid this food conversation. Every city here seems to have its own style of chili, hot dog, and pizza. But the region is also teeming with thousands of different casserole recipes, salads, and barbeque dishes. Thanks to the wave of Irish, German, Italian, and Black migrants who arrived in the early 1900s, many of the region's signature meals trace back to these very communities. Economic necessity amid the Great Depression shaped these immigrant traditions into something distinctly Midwestern. Hence, you end up with green bean casserole or pasta salad. Our journey finishes in California, where the '49ers pushed west as Chinese and Japanese immigrants crossed the Pacific

to settle on land already settled by many Indigenous and Hispanic communities. California became a culinary lab, bringing us food such as the California roll, ranch dressing, the cheeseburger, and hot fudge sundae. Although not the focus, it is self-described as the birthplace of fast food, with many of our most recognizable brands calling the state home—take that as you will.

“America contains too many cultures and regional traditions to fit under a single overarching name—too many cuisines and dishes, each one calling this country home.”

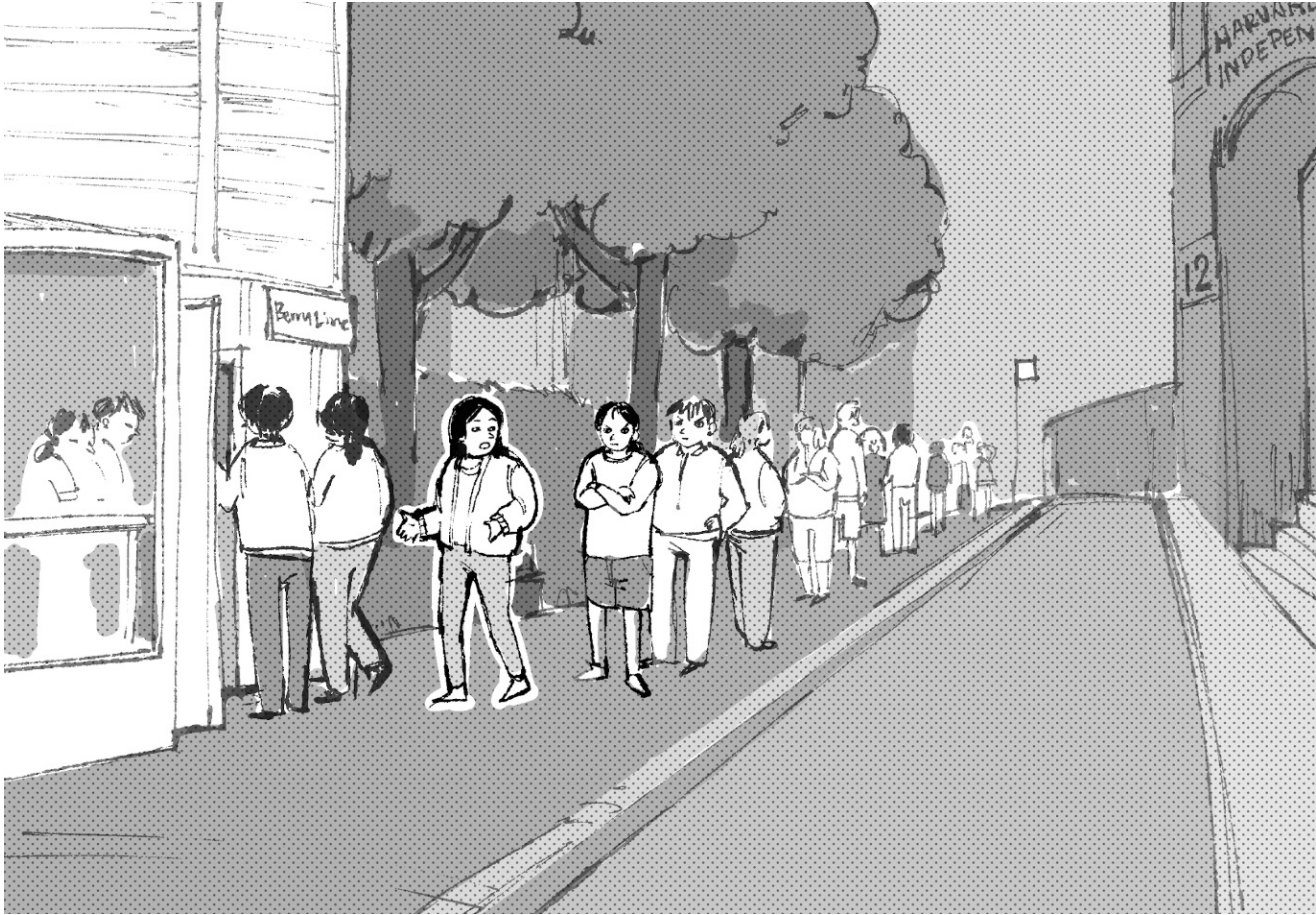
So you may ask: outside of our fast-food exports, why does American cuisine not earn the same recognition as the cuisines of other countries? The question assumes American cuisine is supposed to be singular; it never has been. America contains too many cultures and regional traditions to fit under a single overarching name—too many cuisines and dishes, each one calling this country home. In attempting to provide a brief overview, I missed countless examples—I am kicking myself for forgetting Buffalo wings and the Philly cheesesteak. If you can take away one thing from 250 years of American food, it's this: it is just like us, beautiful, complicated, and a fusion of what came before us.

KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A FOODIE.

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29

Pay it Forward

BY ELLIE GUO '29 & SAM PARK '29



“I know I just cut you in line, but I let an elderly person go in front of me at the grocery store yesterday.”

SPORTS

Boys Don't Cry

An argument for giving ourselves the grace to accept help.

BY TYLER DANG '28

Ask any Major League Baseball fan, and they will tell you that the Los Angeles Dodgers have an unfair advantage. With the highest payroll in the league and a roster stacked with talent, the team consistently makes headlines. One miscommunication, however, sparked questions about the team's chemistry.

In a June 24 game against the Minnesota Twins, Shohei Ohtani, widely regarded as one of the greatest players ever, took the mound. The Dodgers' regular catcher was out with an injury, so second-year catcher Dalton Rushing served as the backstop. In the second inning, the duo fell out of sync several times, leading opponents to score runs. After on- and off-field talks, it was clear that the young catcher was extremely frustrated with himself, and since Ohtani is so beloved, Rushing received the brunt of fans' disapproval online.

What stood out to me was Rushing's comments after the game. Cameras had clearly shown the 25-year-old receiving reinforcement and advice from manager Dave Roberts and veteran Freddie Freeman. "It's embarrassing that I need support like that [...] I'm a grown man," Rushing admitted.

Rushing's discomfort with receiving support exposes a deeper, more damaging expectation embedded in professional sports and society: that athletes must project invincibility, whatever adversity they face. This perspective is both unfair and dangerous to athletes and the wider population that idolizes them, as it dissuades them from expressing and dealing with their emotions.

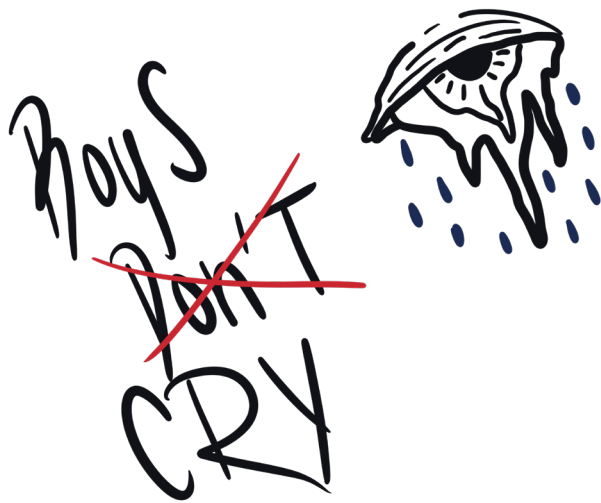
"The principles that machismo promotes in men seem to be the same ideals that all 'great' athletes are expected to embody: toughness, triumph over adversity, and unwavering self-assertiveness."

The Macho Expectation

The narrative of the "macho man" has existed for centuries. Rooted in an era of rigid gender roles that tasked men with providing for the family, traditional masculinity in colonial Mexico demanded the aggression necessary to defend one's own. While the core tenets of this masculinity aren't entirely condemnable, machismo has repeatedly been distorted to endorse self-reliance and unchecked pride.

Often deemed today as "toxic masculinity," this pattern is inherently ingrained in professional sports. The principles that machismo promotes in men seem to be the same ideals that all "great" athletes are expected to embody: toughness, triumph over adversity, and unwavering self-assertiveness. It is no surprise, then, that these ideals of independence permeate athletes across every sport; to compete at the highest level, many believe, requires projecting dominance and control at all times. As a result, many look down upon external displays of emotional struggle. Tears are a cardinal sin for an athlete.

When Chicago Bears quarterback Caleb Williams was in college at the University of Southern California, he faced backlash after a loss to the University of Washington on Nov. 4, 2023—but not because of the final score. Distraught after the loss that all but ended USC's championship hopes, a tearful Williams collapsed into his mother's arms.



Much of the football world was appalled by his reaction: Williams was supposed to be the leader of the USC team, and he began bawling? Jason Whitlock, a host for "Blaze TV," bashed the quarterback for failing to display what he considered true leadership. "America did not become the leader of the free world, and football did not become America's national pastime because men exhibited the emotional control of 12-year-old girls," Whitlock said.

Reporter Charly Arnolt likewise slammed Williams. "Grown men—at least real men—have some pride and dignity [...] how is [Williams's emotional response] deemed acceptable," she said.

Williams was only 21 years old.

What these detractors misunderstood was Williams' dedication and love of the sport. How is it reasonable to expect someone not to be upset after they've devoted so much time to the sport? Instead, athletes should be praised for the bravery it takes to express their feelings—not shamed for falling short of some outdated notion of a "real man." Hiding these battles misrepresents what it takes to be successful and constructs a false reality, not only for broader audiences, but also for many young fans who idolize these athletes.

Similarly, National Basketball Association phenom Victor Wembanyama of the San Antonio Spurs drew criticism for his own display of raw emotion. After defeating the defending champion Oklahoma City Thunder in the Western Conference Finals, Wembanyama was seen crying on the court. NBA Champion and Hall of Famer Kevin Garnett was upset by the scene. "That was too emotional for me [...] You've got to go through the Finals now," he said.

Wembanyama was just 22, returning from a sophomore season cut short by blood clots—the same condition that has sidelined many NBA bigs and even forced legend Chris Bosh into retirement. He had just led the Spurs to the NBA Finals after back-to-back losing seasons. Yet, he was criticized because the job wasn't finished. As a young star, Wembanyama is playing on the global stage with many constantly ready to call him out for any mistake. Is it reasonable to expect him to also hide his feelings? "I refuse to carry the burden of having to hide my emotions," Wembanyama said in defense.

Behind the Scenes

Future generations deserve to watch their idols and learn that maturity and peak performance are born from emotional honesty—not from a hardened

refusal to feel at all. Whether this vulnerability comes on or off the court should depend on the athlete, not the media.

Many studies have shown that emotion suppression can increase the risk of earlier mortality. So why do we keep telling young athletes that toughness means never crying, never showing emotion? These athletes already face many stresses from handling the expectations of family, friends, and fans, not to mention the constant threat of injury, hyper-competitive environments, and so much more.

Sure, these athletes face extreme harsh criticism from fans. Often, though, these competitors' harshest critics are themselves. Boston Red Sox outfielder Jarren Duran revealed he attempted to take his own life after poor performances in the 2021 and 2022 seasons. Fortunately, his attempt was unsuccessful, but Duran's story reveals the sheer pressure these athletes face. There is no reason for these same athletes to also be expected to hide these emotions and woes to meet some outdated expectation of manhood.

Accepting Support

Rushing's embarrassment over his outward display of emotion reveals a deeper flaw in how we view support. A strong support system does not mean depending on others to survive—it means leaning on others to soften life's blows. Wanting this foundation isn't a weakness. No one should have to weather life's triumphs and pitfalls alone.

Unfortunately, the community surrounding an athlete isn't always a source of strength. Toxic coaching, destructive fans, and worse can further exacerbate personal struggles rather than relieve them. Still, these experiences, however traumatizing, should not dissuade anyone from seeking out a support system they can actually rely on.

"It takes humility to acknowledge your own shortcomings and allow others to help you build a stronger front."

Showing emotion and needing help are not signs of a weak athlete or even a weak man. In my opinion, allowing oneself to be open and grateful isn't a weakness, it's a strength. It takes bravery to show the world what they are going through. It takes humility to acknowledge your own shortcomings and allow others to help you build a stronger front. Maybe these ideals do not align with an archaic ideal of masculinity. Maybe that's a good thing.

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GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27

The Striking Viking: How Erling Haaland Became the Face of the World Cup

What still brings the world together in 2026?

BY ADIN HOOTNICK '29

Every four years, the FIFA World Cup elevates players who somehow become bigger than the tournament itself. The spotlight usually belongs to a seasoned veteran like 39-year-old Argentine Lionel Messi or a hot new breakout star like 19-year-old Ivorian Yan Diomande. It is more difficult for someone to capture the world's attention through sheer force of personality.

"I like the Americans... I think they are kind of hilarious as well. They are funny. So I like the way they are."

- Erling Haaland

This summer, the world fell in love with Norwegian striker Erling Haaland. By the end of Norway's improbable run, his speed, strength, and precision felt almost beside the point. Standing at 6-foot-5 with long blond hair and the build of a Viking warrior, one would expect Haaland to be known simply as an intimidating striker. Instead, he gained 32.1 million social media followers and was dubbed a "golden retriever" and internet boyfriend to all.

How, then, is it that millions of people, many of whom had never watched a full soccer match before, suddenly became passionate fans of Erling Haaland?

Haaland arrived at the World Cup as one of the world's most prolific strikers; he had built a reputation for himself as a relentless goal scorer at his club, Manchester City.

Norway itself was hardly expected to dominate. The nation, after all, had not appeared on the World Cup stage since 1998, four years after Haaland's own father represented the national team. For decades, Norwegian soccer had existed in the margins of the sport. This year, the team became impossible to ignore.

On paper, Haaland's performance in the tournament was remarkable: he finished with seven goals, tying for the third-highest goal total at the World Cup with England's Jude Bellingham, behind only France's Kylian Mbappé and Argentina's Lionel Messi. Norway as a team advanced farther than almost anyone would have predicted.

Had that been all, Haaland would be remembered as just another talented player who rose to the challenge during the World Cup. What transformed Haaland from an athletic star into a cultural phenomenon, though, was not anything that happened on the pitch—it was everything that happened off it. By the end of the tournament, his athletic performances felt secondary.

After Norway's astonishing victory over

Brazil, Haaland grabbed the drum and led the now-famous Viking Row celebration for his teammates and supporters. Days before, he had embraced Southern culture by posing in a cowboy hat and boots at Wild Bill's Western Store in Dallas, Texas after Norway's round of 32 win. Videos of the celebrations and his own playful social media posts began to circulate alongside his goals, and he suddenly became as much a meme as a highlight reel.

Norway's fanbase swelled right alongside Haaland's own popularity. Casual fans who could not have named a single Norwegian player a month earlier quickly found themselves cheering for the underdogs, painting their faces, and drumming along to the Viking Row from their living rooms. As the World Cup progressed, Haaland became not only the team's star, but Norway's greatest advertisement.

Much like most celebrities, elite athletes are often expected to project a carefully controlled image. Every interview and every celebration feels

a polished, serious image, Haaland was more than happy to engage with the internet's excitement around him.

"The World Cup has always been about more than soccer. Every tournament leaves behind something that defines it. In many ways, that impression often says more about the world watching it than the game itself. Sometimes it is pure skill. Sometimes it is resilience. This summer, it was joy."

His response to the attention was just as lighthearted and playful off the field. When asked about his growing popularity in America, Haaland, embracing the moment and energy instead of trying to sound calculated, answered simply: "I like the Americans." "I think they are kind of hilarious as well. They are funny. So I like the way they are," he said.

The World Cup has always been about more than soccer. Every tournament leaves behind something that defines it. In many ways, that impression often says more about the world watching it

than the game itself. Sometimes it is pure skill. Sometimes it is resilience. This summer, it was joy.

Norway's run eventually came to an end, but by then the results did not seem to matter. Long after people forget exactly how many goals Haaland scored or which round Norway reached, they will remember his grin after another celebration, the drums that echoed through the crowd, and the sight of one of the tournament's best players also being the one having the most fun. To Erling Haaland: Americans like you too. We like the way you are.

ADIN HOOTNICK '29 (AHOOTNICK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES WORLD LEADERS WILL BRING HAALAND ALONG TO LEAD PEACE TALKS.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27

The Top 8 Controversies of the 2026 World Cup

Spoiler: half of them involve the President of the United States.

BY ELLA RICKETS '28

When the final whistle blew on the FIFA World Cup 2026™, I found myself reflecting on a tournament that brought tears, drew cheers, and inspired hope in equal measure. While the World Cup offered a shared language of love at a time when it feels like geopolitical tensions have destroyed all sense of global unity, it was not without controversy. To understand the Cup's legacy, I look to the off-field drama that sometimes overshadowed the game itself. Here is my breakdown of the eight most controversial events at the 2026 World Cup.

8. The Infamous FIFA Peace Prize

Long before the tournament's first kickoff, FIFA introduced a new "Peace Prize" to be awarded annually as part of its "Football Unites the World" campaign. What could possibly go wrong delivering a highly political trophy under the guise of unity? In hindsight, almost everything about the award sparked controversy, beginning with the decision to present it to one of the most polarizing figures in modern history: President Donald Trump.

At the Kennedy Center in Washington on Dec. 5, FIFA President Gianni Infantino presented the award to Trump for his role in brokering the October ceasefire between Israel and Palestine. This gesture has not aged well. Not only has this ceasefire been violated at least 3,600 times by Israel alone, but the United States also coordinated air strikes on Iran in late February.

In the future, I would advise Mr. Infantino to stick to organizing tournaments rather than fabricating political prizes.

"Artan responded much classier to the incident than I would have, saying that what happened to him was 'unfortunate. Perhaps this is why he officiates internationally, and I don't."

7. Eat-Your-Retirement Ticket Prices

Any economics teacher will tell you that when demand is high and supply is limited, prices rise. However, there has to be a point at which we start to question if pricing out the most diehard fans is worth the extra pocket change for FIFA. For example, tickets for group-stage matches in Vancouver and Toronto that did not feature Canada ranged from more than \$600 to over \$1,600. With lodging, travel, and food, the total easily climbed into the thousands.

The heavy fan backlash prompted FIFA to offer a limited allotment of \$60 tickets to be allocated to national federations for "regular" supporters. Even considering this accommodation, I sympathize with the millions of fans who wouldn't dare to dream about getting their hands on any World Cup ticket, let alone a final.

Note that the championship match between Spain and Argentina has become the most expensive U.S. sporting event ever, with the average price hovering around \$11,327 and the cheapest being \$7,402.

6. The Referee Who Was Denied Entry

There is no doubt that referees are a fundamental part of the game, ensuring fair play and offering fans an outlet to unleash their pent-up frustration. Years are spent selecting the very best officials, including CAF Men's Referee of the Year Omar Artan. Yet after being interviewed for over 11 hours, the Somali referee was denied entry into the United States at the Miami airport despite holding a diplomatic passport.

No details were given by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection besides "vetting concerns," but considering that Somalia is one of the nearly 40 countries on the travel ban list implemented by Trump, it isn't exactly difficult to infer the reason. FIFA later confirmed that Artan would miss the tournament, stating that "FIFA is not involved in the host immigration process, including visa adjudications."

Artan responded much classier to the incident than I would have, saying that what happened to him was "unfortunate." Perhaps this is why he officiates internationally, and I don't.

5. Iranian National Team Border Battle

From beginning to end of their tournament run, the Iranian national team had to overcome extraordinarily hostile treatment at the hands of U.S. immigration. A day before the World Cup started, the team was forced to relocate from their training camp in Arizona to Tijuana, Mexico. Meanwhile, 14 members of Iran's wider team and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation were reportedly denied visas entirely. Recovery was difficult because players were only permitted to enter the United States a day prior to their match and had to leave on the same day for each of their first two group-stage matches. For their final game against Egypt, the team was fortunately able to arrive two days earlier, allowing for better rest.

Ultimately, I give credit to the Iranian players, who did well to compete with dignity knowing they were unwelcome because of a war beyond their control. tournament, Ghanaian player Thomas Partey was denied a visa by Canadian authorities for falsely claiming that he was not facing any criminal charges. The former Arsenal player has been charged with five counts of rape and one count of sexual assault involving several women he dated between 2020 and 2025. In February 2026, two new counts were added after a woman came forward to allege

that Partey raped her twice in one day. The midfielder has pleaded not guilty on all counts.

"While I do believe that Partey has the right to a fair and free trial, I also believe that national teams have a moral imperative to select the best representatives for their country."

Because his application was denied, Partey was unable to play in Ghana's opening World Cup match against Panama. He was, however, eligible to face England as he had been approved for entry into the United States. English fans booed Partey during his first touches of their Group L match, and a video captured English defender Djed Spence appearing to refuse to shake hands with Partey. The snub quickly circulated on social media, with some users praising Spence for his strong stance.

While I do believe that Partey has the right to a fair and free trial, I also believe that national teams have a moral imperative to select the best representatives for their country. Choosing a man with serious criminal charges is a bad look for the Black Stars and overshadows the nation's accomplishments.

4. A Justified Visa Refusal?

Most of the visa refusals on this list have served a political purpose. But what about cases involving players who are awaiting trial for a violent crime? Ahead of the tournament, Ghanaian player Thomas Partey was denied a visa by Canadian authorities for falsely claiming that he was not facing any criminal charges. The former Arsenal player has been charged with five counts of rape and one count of sexual assault involving several women he dated between 2020 and 2025. In February 2026, two new counts were added after a woman came forward to allege that Partey raped her twice in one day. The midfielder has pleaded not guilty on all counts.

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“As much as we would like to believe racism is a relic of the past, we are constantly reminded otherwise.”

3. Mbappé vs. the Paraguay Senator

As much as we would like to believe racism is a relic of the past, we are constantly reminded otherwise. Right after France's 1-0 victory over Paraguay in the Round of 16, a minor incident occurred when French striker Kylian Mbappé appeared to ignore a handshake from Paraguayan goalkeeper Orlando Gill, causing the keeper to hurl the ball at him. The loss prompted Paraguayan Senator Celeste Amarilla to post a long racist diatribe on X, at one point comparing Mbappé to an ape. “Instead of mother's milk, he sucked on coconuts, and the most educated thing he heard were chimpanzees,” she stated.

Her racism was so exaggerated that it has earned condemnation from both the Paraguayan government and fans around the globe. Mbappé responded to her remarks, describing the senator as a “despicable woman” who is “unworthy” of her position. “I will never allow people like her the freedom to spread their hatred and racism across the world,” he added.

Instead of fully retracting her comments, Amarilla said that while she regretted the racial comment, she labeled Mbappé's response as a form of “gender-based violence” and demanded that he apologize to her. Quite frankly, trying to claim victimhood as the primary antagonist is not only bizarre but a poor representation of women in positions of power. From one woman to another, Senator Amarilla, please remember not to mistake accountability for oppression.

2. The Unforgettable Red Card

Do presidents have the power to change match outcomes? Apparently, they do. In the U.S. match against Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Round of 32, American striker Folarin Balogun received a red card for a challenge that caught his studs on a defender's ankle. The referee did not initially send Balogun off, but a VAR review led to a straight red card. That meant the striker was set to miss his next match against Belgium until Trump made three phone calls to FIFA, asking them to review the decision.

FIFA's disciplinary committee, which does not allow teams to appeal red cards, suspended the one-match ban, making Balogun eligible to compete in the Round of 16. Article 27 of the FIFA disciplinary code does permit the suspension of cards, provided it is not related to match-fixing, but it is rarely

invoked. The most recent player to have his red card suspended was Cristiano Ronaldo, who faced a three-match ban for an elbow during a World Cup qualification game. Though Ronaldo did miss Portugal's final

“From one woman to another, Senator Amarilla, please remember not to mistake accountability for oppression.”

qualifying match, FIFA's decision to suspend the remaining two matches of his ban cleared the way for him to play in his team's first two World Cup group games.

While the Ronaldo precedent is controversial because it opens the debate about favoritism by FIFA, it does not compare to a host nation's leader intervening mid-tournament. I worry that Balogun's suspension—even though the United States ultimately lost—sets a dangerous precedent that breaches FIFA's

foundational principle of political neutrality.

1. Just Following the Script: Egypt Accuses Officials of Match-Fixing

Alright, I'm probably going to make a few Argentine fans upset with this one. In the 58th minute, Egypt thought they scored against Argentina in the Round of 16 to put the Pharaohs ahead by two. Sadly, the goal was disallowed following a VAR review that showed Marawan Attia stepping on the foot of Argentinian defender Lisandro Martínez about 20 seconds before the goal was scored. VAR ruled that despite the foul occurring in the other half, it qualified as an offense in the build-up.

Argentina made a comeback, scoring three goals in 13 minutes to win the game. The winning goal prompted the entire Egyptian bench to decry that they should have been awarded a penalty in the build-up to the goal. During a post-match interview, the Egyptian coach said that the team was a victim of an “injustice,” and their football federation has demanded that FIFA launch

an investigation into the match officials.

“For the World Cup to maintain its integrity going forward, FIFA must ensure that VAR remains an emergency safety net for clear errors—not a tool that rewrites the natural flow of our beloved sport.”

Though I agree that there was no foul on Argentina's third goal, I do think disallowing the second Egyptian goal constitutes a strong overreach by VAR. Egypt did not gain possession in an advantageous position, so their anger, in my opinion, is justified. For the World Cup to maintain its integrity going forward, FIFA must ensure that VAR remains an emergency safety net for clear errors—not a tool that rewrites the natural flow of our beloved sport.

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IRRATIONALLY BELIEVES THAT
IT'S COMING HOME IN 2030.

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

across

4. Main component of Italian summer drink
5. Excessive temperature in an area?
6. "They're a ray of ____!"
8. Vegetable that is botanically a fruit

down

1. Last name of titular "Marty Supreme" actor
2. Harvard pre-orientation program geared towards first-generation low-income students
3. "Where does she sell seashells?"
7. Hook-shaped peninsula in MA and chip brand

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