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About

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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Kirkland Steam Pipe Triggers Fire Alarm

Harvard students share their experiences with late-night emergencies after two fire alarm incidents in the past year.

By JULIA BOUCHUT '29

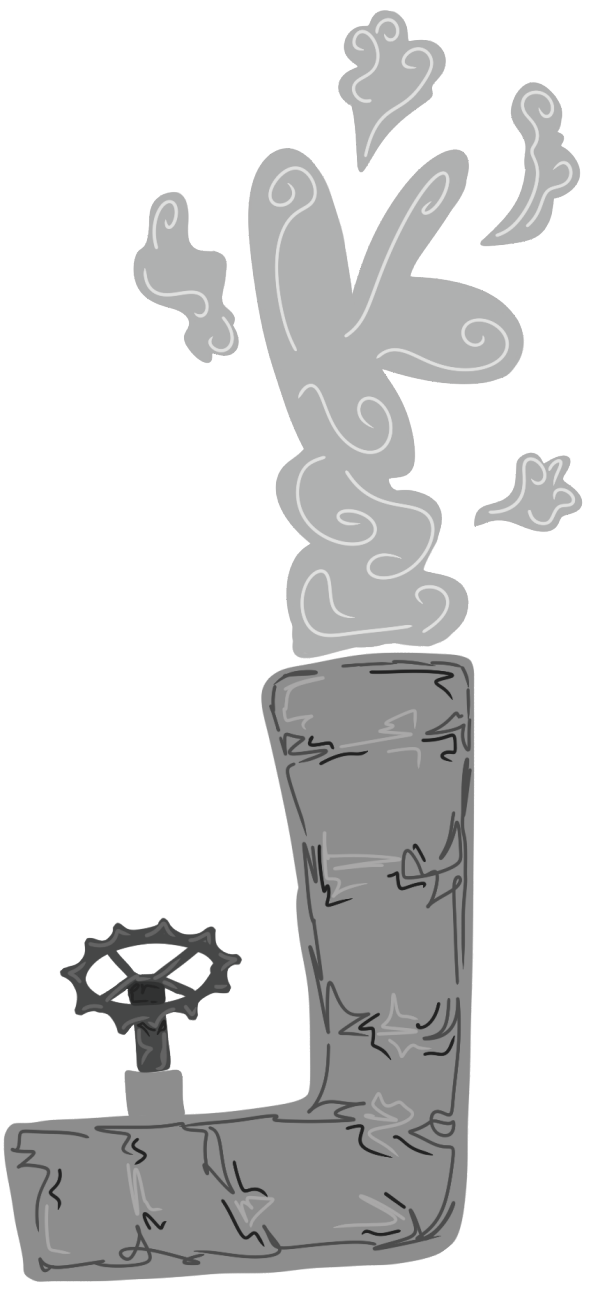
On Sunday night, Oct. 25, the Kirkland House fire alarm rang, forcing undergraduates to evacuate their dorms. According to an email sent to Kirkland residents, a steam valve malfunction in the kitchen shared with Eliot House, which is currently undergoing renovations, triggered the alarm. Most residents could not reenter their dorms until the fire department made necessary repairs, leaving many rooms barricaded as late as 3 a.m. A similar event occurred this past spring in Adams House, with students displaced well into the night.

Nellie Fitzpatrick '27 was working on a problem set due at 11:59 p.m. when the disturbance occurred. Before the alarm, she heard banging from outside her room, though this was not unusual given the adjacent construction.

At first, Fitzpatrick and her roommates were unsure whether there was a real emergency, since the alarm had rung several times in Kirkland throughout the year. As Fitzpatrick exited the dorm, though, she saw fire trucks arriving and what looked to be smoke rising from a building, which she later learned was steam. "The banging was still really loud, and we were outside with our tutors," she said. She later learned that a steam pipe caused the sound.

Other Kirkland residents, like Catherine Li '27, learned about the incident while outside their dorms. "I got texts from my entire suite of roommates," Li said. "I was like, 'There's no way [Kirkland]'s actually on fire.'"

The Kirkland deans and tutors invited students into the faculty deans' house to escape the cold and give updates about the incident, Fitzpatrick explained. As they waited, the Kirkland community came together to enjoy each other's company, she said. "It was a nice bonding moment, all being in the faculty deans' house and kind of commiserating together, eating candy and chips," she said. "There was someone [who] had a ukulele, and they were singing songs."



Li felt that Kirkland faculty did a great job of supporting students given the situation. "It was a little bit tough because no one really had that good of information going on," she noted. She appreciated how the house deans welcomed students into their house and encouraged Kirkland residents to reach out if they needed accommodations for the night.

The house faculty proposed several solutions to help students sleep, including setting up cots in the Malkin Athletic Center, Li said. "They were just trying to figure out contingencies to get students to bed as soon as possible."

Students in the Kirkland Annex, separate from Smith Halls and the house's furthest building from Eliot, were allowed to return first around midnight. Still, because of the uncertainty, Fitzpatrick stayed at a friend's dorm.

Because Fitzpatrick left her room in a rush after the alarm, she didn't bring any of her work and couldn't finish her p-set in time, disrupting her plans for the night. "It was frustrating not being able to have my laptop and do work that night, and we weren't allowed to go back in our rooms, and then I didn't get as much sleep as I wanted to," she said. Still, Fitzpatrick appreciates that safety comes first and that professionals on the scene took the necessary precautions.

Similarly, Li only had her wallet, phone, and keys with her, she explained. Li said she wanted to wait out the repairs before accessing her belongings. "I wear contacts … So I was a little concerned about my ability to just function the next day."

At around 1:30 a.m., Kirkland staff brought small groups of students into the dorm to pick up necessities, Li said.

Li's professors were accommodating and supportive as she reached out, even though she had to miss class the next morning. Some of her friends, on the other hand, had pressing commitments, including midterms at 9 a.m. the next day. "It definitely put a little bit of a damper on a Monday," she noted. "These emergencies happen, similar to how it happened in Adams last year, and you are just gonna have to put things on hold until that figure is out."

A similar event occurred last April in Adams House, with students displaced into the night. Suitemates Henry Zeghibe '28 and Ryan Brewington '28 were forced to sleep in a different building and were eventually asked to move to a different dorm room for the rest of the semester.

Because Zeghibe's room was below the room that caught on fire, he and his roommates woke up to water dripping from their ceiling, having soaked into the floor, he said.

"We were definitely initially surprised. But then I think we all knew that, you know, if it's a fire, which clearly made sense that there was actually something happening because there was that water coming through the roof," he explained. "Kind of early on, we already had the expectation that this was not just a drill."

Furthermore, Zeghibe explained that because Randolph is in a separate building from the Adams dining hall, it did not experience false fire alarms last year. "I don't think we ever had a false alarm last year, and the only time it ever went off was when we actually had that fire," he said.

In contrast, Fitzpatrick noted that Kirkland has experienced multiple fire alarms since the start of the school year.

After leaving the dorm, Zeghibe saw smoke coming from the room right above his. "We figured that was obviously connected to [the water dripping above us], and then we sort of … had a sense that this was going to probably affect us quite badly," he noted. "After a while, I think the Adams House people understood what was happening." Zeghibe spent the night with a friend.

"Fitzpatrick noted that Kirkland has experienced multiple fire alarms since the start of the school year."

When Brewington returned to his room, he saw that the water had soaked his and his roommates' belongings, including clothes, electronics, and personal items. In response to the water damage, Brewington said the University took all their clothes to a professional cleaning company.

Maintenance workers also came to repair the damage in the affected rooms, Zeghibe said. "They had all these different kinds of equipment to try and get the moisture out of the walls and things," he explained. "That might have worked for some lower floors, but I think our floor was certainly a little bit of a lost cause."

The Sunday after the April fire, Brewington said the University informed the suite that they would need to move to the Eliot Inn. The investigation into the fire's cause was inconclusive.

Brewington remembers his deans coming to his suite and asking what they could do to help in the moment. "Our response was, 'We need a blanket and pillow. We don't even have anything to sleep on.' We literally moved all our stuff over, but our bedding was taken by the professional from the professional cleaning company," he added.

Brewington got help from both his friends and his teammates during the move. "We had to literally move everything from the third floor to Eliot, which isn't that far, but when you're carrying a couch and a TV and a coffee table…" he said. "If I didn't have them, I don't really know what I would have done."

Today, people are living in the formerly damaged suites. "I think what they had to do is they just had to tear them up and redo them over the summer," Zeghibe said.

From the experience, Brewington learned always to be prepared. "College is already very unpredictable. But when something like this happens, you really have to be able to roll with the [punches]," he said.

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Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

The Diplomat: Political Truth Through Fiction

Keri Russell, Debora Cahn, and Samantha Power explored the intersection of television and politics at the JFK Jr. Forum.

By COURTNEY HINES '28

On Oct. 26, Harvard Kennedy School's John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum hosted actor Keri Russell, showrunner Debora Cahn, and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power to discuss the creation of the television show "The Diplomat." Titled "The Diplomat: On Screen and in the World" and moderated by Shorenstein Center Director Nancy Gibbs, the conversation examined how the Netflix drama portrayed public service, from the strain it puts on personal relationships to the consequences of dissent inside the government.

"The Diplomat" follows Kate Wyler, played by Keri Russell, as she navigates her responsibilities as U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom while dealing with her strained marriage to fellow diplomat Hal Wyler, played by Rufus Sewell.

Beyond acting, Russell served as an executive producer, following earlier television roles in "Felicity" and "The Americans." Cahn has written and produced for "The West Wing," "Homeland," and "Grey's Anatomy," alongside "The Diplomat." Power served as the UN ambassador from 2013 to 2017 and USAID administrator from 2021 to 2025 before returning to Harvard as a professor. She joined Russell and Cahn to discuss the parallels between her experience and the show's depiction of international negotiations.

> *"This show is meant to be a love letter to the foreign service."*
>
> *- Russell*

The event followed the release of the show's fourth season on Oct. 20. After showing an opening trailer at the forum, Gibbs asked Cahn why diplomacy, a profession concerned with defusing conflict, had appealed to her as a subject for television.

"When I finished on 'The West Wing,' I felt like that show had primarily focused on domestic politics, and I wanted to try to do a little bit of the same for foreign policy," Cahn said.

Cahn recalled meeting former U.S. foreign service officer Beth Jones during a research session for "Homeland," whose accounts of dangerous assignments helped inspire the U.S.-focused series. Drawing on "Homeland's" approach of grounding the drama in the experiences of actual practitioners, the production of "The Diplomat" later consulted former ambassadors and intelligence officials, as well as specialists, including British civil servant Jonathan Powell.

Russell emphasized her excitement about portraying the people whose work supported more visible political leaders. "This show is meant to be a love letter to the foreign service," she said.

The conversation then shifted to how the show blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction. "You endorsed someone's description of the show [as] 'not realistic but authentic,'" Gibbs said. "And so I'm wondering where you see that line and what you will bend for drama and what you wouldn't."

Cahn described asking consultants to review outlines and scripts, then deciding which objections to address and which departures from real practice to retain to further the plot. "We try to address those things, and sometimes we don't, but at least we've chosen to break the rule. We are not just blithely losing interest in what actually goes on," Cahn explained.

Power praised a different kind of accuracy in the show: how decision-makers bring in outside voices to test a plan. "So [as a diplomat] you bring in a team completely cold from the outside to have that reaction and to see whether something will work," Power explained.

This practice, similar to "red teaming," is a means of challenging groupthink and the pressures of hierarchy: by introducing a subject to unfamiliar eyes, diplomats have been able to develop innovative solutions, such as adapting Provincial Reconstruction Teams for Iraq and offering modest concessions, including civilian aircraft parts, to support European negotiations with Iran.

The discussion also examined the relationship between Kate's professional responsibilities and her marriage. Russell brought up "The Human Factor," a documentary that examined negotiations between Israel and its neighbors through the experiences of American negotiators.

"It always comes down to people, and what their relationships are with each other or how that specific person operates," Russell said. "And every episode is a version of that. You know, what is someone's redline? How far can you go? And what Debora has created so brilliantly is you are watching a marriage go through that at the same time as countries," she explained.

Power extended the comparison to her efforts to maintain a relationship with Russia's UN ambassador. The UN Security Council can impose sanctions, authorize military action, and establish peacekeeping missions, giving its decisions consequences for conflicts around the world. Any of its five permanent members can veto substantive resolutions, so maintaining diplomatic relationships with adversaries was essential to Power's ability to negotiate collective action.

"This made my Ukrainian colleagues crazy that I would continue to try to invest in this relationship, but you can't walk away from a marriage when there are five permanent members of the Security Council, and they all have vetoes," Power said about her ties with Russian ambassador Vasily Nebenzya.

The discussion of public service took on a more immediate political dimension when Power addressed the dismantling of USAID. The agency stopped operating as an independent aid agency on July 1, 2025, after extensive funding and staffing cuts, and its remaining aid programs moved to the State Department. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had defended the changes as a shift toward more targeted assistance and investment. Power described the speed of the changes as a blow to employees' belief that they could influence events.

"And the effectiveness of the people with the wrecking ball was that they did it so quickly and it really was shock and awe," Power said.

Cahn also described the people she interviewed during research trips to Washington as moving away from a desperate mindset; they began taking practical steps to respond to the Trump administration. Her remarks came eight days before the midterm elections, scheduled for Nov. 3. She linked the approaching midterms to renewed optimism among her contacts.

"Everybody was kind of past it [the aid cuts] and onto the solutions of what happens next," Cahn said.

During the audience questions, a student asked what happened when officials who challenged a president's decisions were no longer in the room. "One of the reasons governments fail and authoritarian governments often make bad decisions is they don't have checks and balances; they don't have dissent," Power said. The State Department formally established its Dissent Channel in 1971 to bring policy objections to senior officials, providing one institutional mechanism for that kind of challenge.



"But it comes from the top as to whether a leader believes that in the end, they and the country will be better off with more guardrails," Power added.

When another student asked about the show's British setting, Cahn acknowledged that its fictional prime minister also provided a vehicle for commentary on American politics.

"The portrayal of … the British prime minister: that is our way to portray Trump without saying we are talking about Trump. Make it about another country," Cahn said.

A final audience question asked how Harvard students as graduates can change imperfect organizations from within. Russell pointed to Cahn's leadership on set and argued that professional excellence had to be accompanied by responsibility for the people doing the work.

"And I respect that very much. And it's vital when you are working within an organization or a group you have to take care of the group if you want the whole to succeed," Russell said.

Power recalled regular meetings among female senior directors during her time on the National Security Council. "And lo and behold, people who had been in government for 20 years, people who had jobs where they saw the president three times a day were having very similar experiences to mine," Power said. The meetings became known as "The Wednesday Group."

"And then our ability to change the organization from within came from the security of knowing we were not alone and the brainstorming that we were able to do about the kinds of changes that could be made to the culture," Power said.

Gibbs closed by returning to television's role in making government work visible to audiences who might otherwise see little of it.

"It's very hard for public service to succeed if people can't see it," Gibbs said.

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Graphic by Emma Crago '28

FORUM

What's Your Sense of the Place?

Reflections on my first 72 days at Harvard.

By SADIE TRIBE '30

I have been a student at Harvard for exactly 72 days, which some might say is enough time for me to "get a sense of the place." Friends and family often ask me, "What's it like? What's your sense of the place?" I know they ask this partially out of concern for me, and partially because what Harvard is actually like is a perennial object of intrigue for people. Harvard's outsized reputation makes it, in the eye of the public, more a name than a collection of faces. My friends and family are eager for any account I can give of the institution's human underbelly.

"I cannot help but think that institutions like Harvard thrive on insecurities like mine."

Yet after 72 days here, Harvard still sometimes feels distant, formidable, and inaccessible to me.

To be clear, I have made friends here, and they have buoyed me through long nights in Lamont, bouts of homesickness, and the periodic realization that I have no idea what I want to concentrate in. They are funny, wonderfully nerdy, and reassuringly down to earth. There's the guy I met on the steps of Weld during orientation week who knocks on my door after midnight just to chat, the girl who enthusiastically agreed to go on brisk walks by the Charles with me at 8 a.m., and my best friend from high school, who by the grace of God ended up at Harvard with me, and who I often say knows me better than I know myself.

It is true that I have rarely felt lonely in my two months at Harvard, and, as I frequently remind myself, just being here is something I should not take for granted. Yet, probably like most other students in the class of 2030, I often feel that despite my hard work and ambition in high school, Harvard is a place for people far smarter and more accomplished than myself. This feeling of inadequacy, which upperclassmen assure me will gradually subside, is a double-edged sword: I stand both in awe of my peers and what they can teach me, and in reproach of myself and how I might fall short.

I cannot help but think that institutions like Harvard thrive on insecurities like mine. My sense of needing to achieve more is precisely what got me here, after all, and what motivates me to spend that extra hour in Lamont before an exam. It's no secret that this university is chock full of people with something to prove.

I am not the first to claim that the very competitiveness Harvard selects for and encourages in its students is antithetical to the formation of community on campus, especially among first-years. But I will say it again.

When I admit that Harvard feels distant, formidable, and inaccessible, I am not thinking of the friends I have made, but rather of the clubs I have been unable to join, the conversations about grades that I am sick of overhearing, and the huge lecture halls in which I am all but anonymous.

My friend, a sophomore at the college, informed me that the first time I got my "dreams crushed" would be the worst. She meant getting rejected from a club, and it is a mark of this moment's inevitability in the experience of Harvard freshmen that she had not even asked me which, if any, clubs I was applying to (in fact, I had just been rejected from the Outing Club's leadership team).

It was also clear from my friend's statement how much she glorified admission to clubs, which did not surprise me—I have been told that they are the locus of undergraduate social life. The idea of using clubs to make friends with mutual interests is a good one. Unfortunately, after two weeks on campus, I realized that the old adage "the hardest part of Harvard is getting in" should be revised to include "to a club."

Between their odd pseudo-hazing rituals and months-long comping processes, clubs at the college are unnecessarily and regrettably sealed off from unsuspecting first-years. At initial comp meetings for "The Lampoon" and "The Advocate," prospective members received less information about the publications than they did members' secondhand smoke. As November draws near, both comps remain ongoing.

The unwelcoming atmosphere perpetuated by many clubs at Harvard is mirrored in its academic settings. With the college transitioning toward a grade-cap system, which would make it much harder for students to get straight As, some of my classes have become barbed with competitive rhetoric. "I am going to make it impossible for you to get an A in this class," one of my professors announced at the beginning of our first lecture.

Over meals at Annenberg, I often hear students quibbling over Bs and A minuses, grades that objectively indicate proficiency in a subject. I am sure that many of my classmates are not used to receiving imperfect scores on their assignments, and that to some extent, these conversations are the growing pains of transitioning to a rigorous college. Still, between club rejections and grade caps, the dog-eat-dog mindset is hard to unlearn.

There is also the fact that many of the classes freshmen take, far from being intimate and conducive to personal learning, have hundreds of students in them. In this model, the lecturing professor is hardly aware of the individual learner, and unless that student has the guts to take on office hours, she will depend on the instruction of her Teaching Fellow, a position now uncertain in light of the Graduate Students Union's current strike.

"Still, between club rejections and grade caps, the dog-eat-dog mindset is hard to unlearn."

Should I have known what I was signing up for in choosing to attend Harvard? I think I did know, as well as anyone who can only observe an environment without placing themselves in it, that it would be cutthroat. What else could I expect of a school composed of 7,000 of the nation's brightest? But competition is easier envisioned than experienced.

Perhaps I simply do not have the chops to grind it out for the next four years at one of the best universities in the world. Big whoop. There are thousands of 18-year-olds who would gladly take my place, and might enjoy it more.

But I do not think my sensitivity to the wear and tear of the Harvard hamster wheel makes me less worthy of my place here. I enjoy learning, and the college claims—with all its rhetoric about "intellectual vitality"—to value the instrumental good of seeking knowledge. It is true that I am somewhat inept at networking, but this is not a particularly fatal trait, in my eyes, compared with the joy I feel at participating in a lively discussion section.

My realization that even at Harvard, there is always another Harvard—another on-ramp to accomplishment—will seem obvious to more jaded members of our community. But I do not think that Harvard needs to be as inaccessible as I have found it. I believe in a version of our school that is more approachable and, frankly, more humane.

Sadie Tribe '30 (sadietribe@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."



Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

Artistic Anguish

Protests and pounding: a take on destruction and art.

By NOAH BASDEN '29

On March 1945, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Travers Harris, head of RAF Bomber Command, wrote a letter addressed to Sir Norman Howard Bottomley, Deputy Chief of the British Air Staff. In the letter, Harris sought to rebut Prime Minister Winston Churchill's suggestion that the bombing of German cities should be reviewed because it risked appearing to be "simply for the sake of increasing the terror."

Harris took the remark as an insult and bluntly countered it in his letter. "Actually, Dresden was a mass of munitions works, an intact government center, and a key transportation point to the East. It is now none of these things," he argued. Yet, in becoming "none of these things," it also lost what it had long been celebrated for.

"It gets burnt, vandalized, and looted, and the pain of such actions lasts far longer than it takes to put out the flames."

Known as the "Florence on the Elbe," Dresden was one of Europe's major capitals of music, culture, and art; however, after the Feb. 13-15, 1945, bombing raids, the city was unrecognizable. Whether the decision to raze the city was justified remains fiercely debated; however, this article does not focus on that debate. My principal concern is what burned alongside the munitions factories and rail yards: the collections, the architecture, and the craftsmanship that connected Dresden, and Europe, to its past. It is important to note that in omitting engagement with this debate, I do not mean or want to forgo acknowledging the colossal loss of life that cannot be undone.

I mention Dresden because it is where my mind first went when I watched, in horror, what happened in Limoges on Oct. 17. During the current nationwide protests in France, which started as peaceful, student-led protests and have since become something else entirely, rioters forced their way into the city hall and set it alight. There was something almost poetic about watching the campanile (bell tower) resist the billowing flames for as long as it could before eventually growing weary of its fight and collapsing into the fire. History literally going up in flames.

It goes without saying that looting and the destruction of property is not only a crime before the law but a crime against community—against the cultural institutions which hold our society together. A town hall is not merely government property but a museum to the art it holds, a monument to the town it serves, and something that belongs to the people, for the people, built by the people who live under its shadow. Still, for all it gave its people, it burned. In a previous article, "A Commentary on Conservatism (Not the Nasty American Kind)," I wrote that it takes only a few to destroy what many have built, and what happened in Limoges made that idea manifest.

Art, and by extension culture, fundamentally shapes our individual identity and our understanding of our place in time and space. David Zwirner hit the nail on the head in his May 22, 2020 article in the "New York Times" titled "Art Is How We Justify Our Existence." In the article, he writes, a sentiment I strongly agree with, "Works of art carry with them the wisdom of the world." If this is true of paintings and sculptures, then I think this truth also extends to buildings and memorials—anything that carries cultural value, good or bad. We must recognize that history includes more than the parts we are proud of. The good and the bad live in the same history books, and we cannot understand how we arrived at where we are today without understanding the wrongs committed along the way.

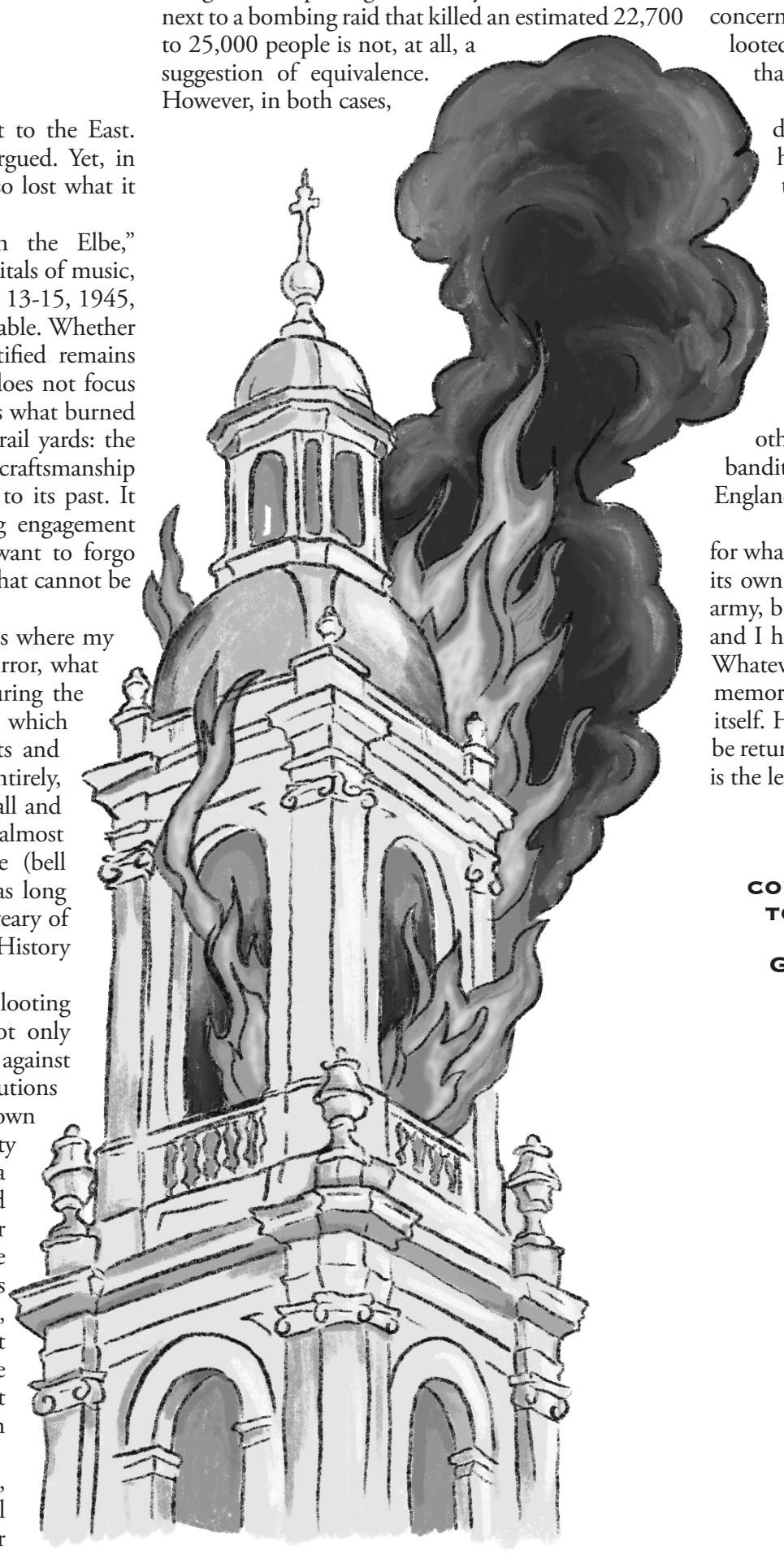
Buildings hold history in a way a history book cannot. They let us breathe the air, feel the stone, and explore the spaces in which history actually happened. Burning them does not destroy the history they witnessed, but it robs future generations of the chance to experience them as evidence of the past, and potentially our chance to learn from what went wrong and move forward.

Before I go further, I want to digress and recognize that placing a relatively isolated act of arson next to a bombing raid that killed an estimated 22,700 to 25,000 people is not, at all, a suggestion of equivalence. However, in both cases, people believed a larger cause justified the destruction. For Harris, it was shortening the war; for the protesters, it is less clear, given the range of topics being protested at the moment, such as housing crises, economic inequality, and the cost of living, to name a few. My argument is not to diagnose either cause, but to point out that preserving heritage never seems to be anyone's concern in the moment. It gets burnt, vandalized, and looted, and the pain of such actions lasts far longer than it takes to put out the flames.

"Art, and by extension culture, fundamentally shapes our individual identity and our understanding of our place in time and space."

This is not a uniquely modern issue. As is discussed in Professor Maya Jasanoff's '96 history class, HIST 58: the "British Empire," the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, China, was ransacked and burned by British and French troops in 1860 during the Second Opium War. China's treasures are now scattered across European museums, removed from the people and place that gave them meaning. Victor Hugo, in an 1861 letter, condemned the act, saying: "One day two bandits entered the Summer Palace. One plundered, the other burned. [...] Before history, one of the two bandits will be called France; the other will be called England."

Hugo condemned both France and England for what they did, and 165 years later, France watches its own heritage burn, not at the hands of a foreign army, but from within. The town hall may be rebuilt, and I hope it is. Dresden shows that it can be done. Whatever is rebuilt will be done out of memory, but memory, however well-intentioned, is not history itself. Hugo thought that what is looted can one day be returned, but what is burned is gone for good. This is the lesson that France is learning.



Noah Basden '29 (nhbasden@college.harvard.edu) hopes not to get canceled for this piece.

Graphic by Neshama Ryman '28

Scared of a Little Skin?

Purity culture and sexualization have shaped Halloween costumes.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30 & SALMA GHEITH '30

Corsets, glitter, and, of course, a sexy garter belt: all Halloween classics. Halloween, although often thought of as a spooky, scary holiday, has recently become more associated with going out and dressing provocatively. For college students, "Halloweekend" has become synonymous with partying for several days in a row while wearing sexualized costumes. And though no one should feel pressured to dress a particular way, Halloweekend participants unfortunately and inevitably face different expectations every year.

The role of Halloween costumes has certainly evolved since the holiday's inception. Halloween originated over 2,000 years ago as Samhain, a pagan holiday the Celts celebrated to mark the beginning of winter. People believed the veil between the living and the dead was thinnest during the transition into the colder months, so celebrants disguised themselves to fend off spirits. In the 8th and 9th centuries, the Church moved All Saints' Day to Nov. 1, making Oct. 31 All Hallows' Eve. This Christian adoption gave rise to the name "Halloween."

Costumes remained a key part of Halloween; in medieval England and Ireland, participants wore outfits alluding to the dead and spirits and went door to door requesting "soul cake" treats in a custom known as "souling." Irish immigrants brought the tradition to North America in the 1840s, where it

"Purity culture is continuing to gain traction, but we should not let it control us."

quickly became popular. Costumes were originally centered on spooky anonymity. Then, in the early 20th century, pop culture began influencing costumes as companies saw an opportunity to market fictional-character costumes to consumers. Halloween also evolved as a day to break social norms, leading people to dress up as anything from pirates to unhoused people.

Halloween pranks also became commonplace, and by the 1930s, property damage and vandalism had worsened. Officials reframed the holiday as directed towards younger children, further disconnecting it from its origins surrounding death.

World War II simultaneously began shaping Halloween traditions in another direction, as Hollywood and wartime media popularized pin-up photos of glamorous models and actresses, helping create the idea of the "sexy" costume. By the 1960s, adults were dressing up again, leaning towards costumes inspired by pop culture and media. Popular costumes of the era included the Addams Family and James Bond. In the 1970s and 1980s, LGBTQ+ communities across the United States used the holiday to wear creative, out-of-the-box outfits, host parades, and freely express their identities, helping lay the foundation for today's Halloween parties and seductive costumes.

Halloween has always been a little beyond what society considers typical; it offers a chance to dress up as who you might secretly want to be perceived as, without judgment. Halloween's role as a chance to subvert social norms has contributed to the rise of sexier, skimpier costumes, letting people dress in ways they find empowering absent criticism.

However, 29% of Americans say "sexy" costumes are the most overused. Revealing costumes are often criticized for setting a problematic standard for younger women, and TikTok creators also claim they want to stay in on Halloween to "honor their future husbands." Risqué Halloween costumes have become a lens through which people can criticize those who partake, particularly women, shaming them and viewing them as less moral.

These critiques are an aspect of purity culture, a social and religious movement primarily emerging from white American evangelical Christianity in the 1990s. Purity culture ties an individual's spiritual identity, morality, and personal worth to sexual abstinence before marriage, teaching that women and

"Halloween's role as a chance to subvert social norms has contributed to the rise of sexier, skimpier costumes, letting people dress in ways they find empowering absent criticism."

girls must dress modestly as they hold responsibility for the sexual thoughts and actions of men. Furthermore, purity culture often utilizes degrading metaphors to imply that engaging in premarital sex or being promiscuous permanently ruins a person's value.

Purity culture has been on the rise, and some commentators have linked it to a broader conservative shift under the Trump administration. Trump has consistently pushed anti-wokeness, and it has bled into how we think about fashion and costumes. Anti-wokeness reflects a shift away from a sexually liberated future and a desire for a return to a more traditional past, particularly with respect to gender roles. These conservative ideas have spread on TikTok and other social media through prominent trad-wife creators such as Ballerina Farm, who create content about serving a traditional homemaker role and dressing modestly.

Criticism of women's bodies and choices is not new, and though it has changed form over the years, its content remains the same. There are, of course, reasonable arguments against sexualized Halloween costumes: encouraging women to dress in revealing outfits can reinforce the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her physical appearance and can perpetuate social or peer pressure. However, purity culture itself exists in parallel to sexualization—encouraging women to dress modestly and shaming those who do not still objectifies women and ties a woman's value to what she wears.

Purity culture is continuing to gain traction, but we should not let it control us. From a onesie to micro shorts, people should be able to wear what they want without judgment. We must avoid forcing a problematic standard onto others: dress in what makes you feel comfortable, but don't expect what works for you to work for everyone else.

Criticism of women's bodies and choices isn't new, and though it has changed form over the years, its underlying messages have stayed the same. The pressure surrounding Halloween is multifaceted: mandatory sexualization can reinforce the idea that women must use their bodies to gain social capital, while purity culture shames and objectifies those who dress in revealing clothing. Any attempt to control what people wear strips individuals of their agency and limits their self-expression. Halloween's history shows it was always meant to be a holiday of subversion and an opportunity to escape social norms, even if only for one night. Let's try to keep it that way.

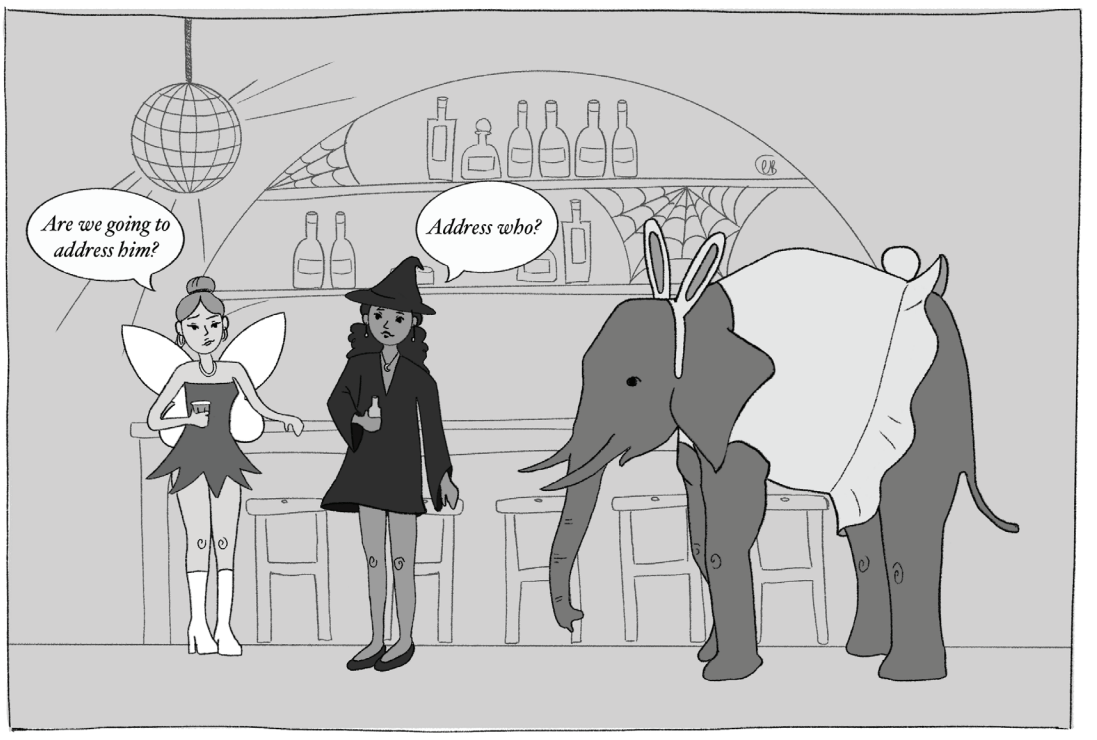
Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) and Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) hope to see everyone wearing their favorite costumes at Indyween!

Graphic by Amelie Lima '27



Costume Party

By SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28
Designed By CAMERON BERNIER '29



Coital Conundrums

Am I John Doe? On the murky grounds of sexual exploitation.

By SPARTACUS

In the popular imagination, I have found that sexual assault and crimes of that nature are seen purely as a women's issue. Logically, we know this to be false, given that 43% of American men have reportedly experienced some form of sexual violence; however, the statistics show that women bear the brunt of this problem. A problem arises when we categorize sexual assault as a "women's issue" because it moves the topic out of the category of solely a violent crime and intertwines assault with gender politics. In this issue, people often debate a victim's credibility more publicly than in any other case.

Ask someone, for example, to describe their 21st birthday on the day and then ask them again a year later. The two stories probably wouldn't match exactly, if at all; yet no rational person would conclude that the birthday never happened. However, with sexual assault, there increasingly seems to be a narrative that a shifting account is evidence of a fabricated narrative, even though the prevalence of fake allegations sits between 2-10%, depending on which studies you look at.

This framework has been apparent in much of the internet discourse surrounding the horrific "Cornell 7" case. Rampant online commentary suggests Jane Doe's current testimony should be taken with a grain of salt because her story has changed since 2024. This is a narrative I find to be frankly insulting—not only to her but to all victims of sexual abuse. I know too well the process of trying to recollect a traumatic incident, the emergence of new memories, and the doubts of old.

Now, I may or may not have been a victim of something similar to Jane Doe's experience, but I still had an experience in my youth I felt was pertinent to share here.

"I know too well the process of trying to recollect a traumatic incident, the emergence of new memories, and the doubts of old."

Many years ago, I, like many of you reading this, was an overzealous teenager who thought that the only way to have proper fun on a night out was to drink in excess. One night, my friends and I went out for a birthday; drinks flowed, heads bobbed—everyone had a good time. Then, I met a girl. A girl I would not have met under normal circumstances, which should have been a sign, but after X number of drinks, those signs pointing me in the opposite direction melted away with the music.

As I was saying, I met this girl, and we danced (leaving little room for Jesus) and danced some more. All the while, the drinks kept flowing. I hadn't noticed then that the number of drinks I had consumed did not match hers, but I was taller than her and a man (if you could call me that at that age), so I paid it no heed.

"Do you want to go somewhere quieter?" she asked me.

"Sure," I replied—my first mistake. A minute later, we were walking hand in hand away from the club and toward her apartment.

Over the years, I have fought the urge to blame my friends for not stopping the situation, but knowing their brains were about as developed as mine at that age, they probably thought I was on my way to getting lucky. We arrived at her place and moved some bases before I felt a wave of tiredness enshroud me; I also realized I was too drunk to do anything further.

"I'm sorry," I told her, pulling my clothes back on and resting my head on her bedroom floor. "I'm too drunk to do this." Then the proverbial screen went black. I woke up the next morning without my clothes, not on the floor, with no real recollection of what happened that night. I've racked my brain to try and piece together what we did or didn't do, but as time has gone on, I have lost more and more of it. But I remember the feeling. That feeling I will never forget.

A feeling of disbelief, feeling so small and untethered. This stuff happens to other people, I thought cynically; it doesn't happen to me. When I told my friends my version of events, they congratulated me, oddly enough, on "my potential ability to perform against all odds." They still did not get it.

"Malking amongst you, you'll find thousands of John and Jane Does: some who know it, some who don't, and some who are confused about where they stand."

For years, I kept this story under wraps out of embarrassment. This was my second mistake. Would I be seen as less than? Part of me thinks I let myself get into that situation and allowed myself to be potentially victimized. I reiterate "potentially" because nothing may have happened in bed that night, but the uncertainty frightened me for years. How could I not know what happened? I asked myself that question, but as time passed and my memory of the incident grew hazier, I came to terms with my version of events. The version that best fits the innate goodness I think we all have as humans, the version that kept me safe.

By telling my story, I am trying to illustrate that memories change. Trauma has a funny way of shielding us from our worst fears, and as we grow more detached from the initial incident, we gain and lose parts of events. This is why the discourse around Jane Doe has infuriated me to the point of sharing my story.

Her story is a tragedy, and we see it too often across college campuses and beyond. We are not here to judge the validity of her testimony; a story that changes over time is not evidence of a lie, but evidence of memory doing what memory does.

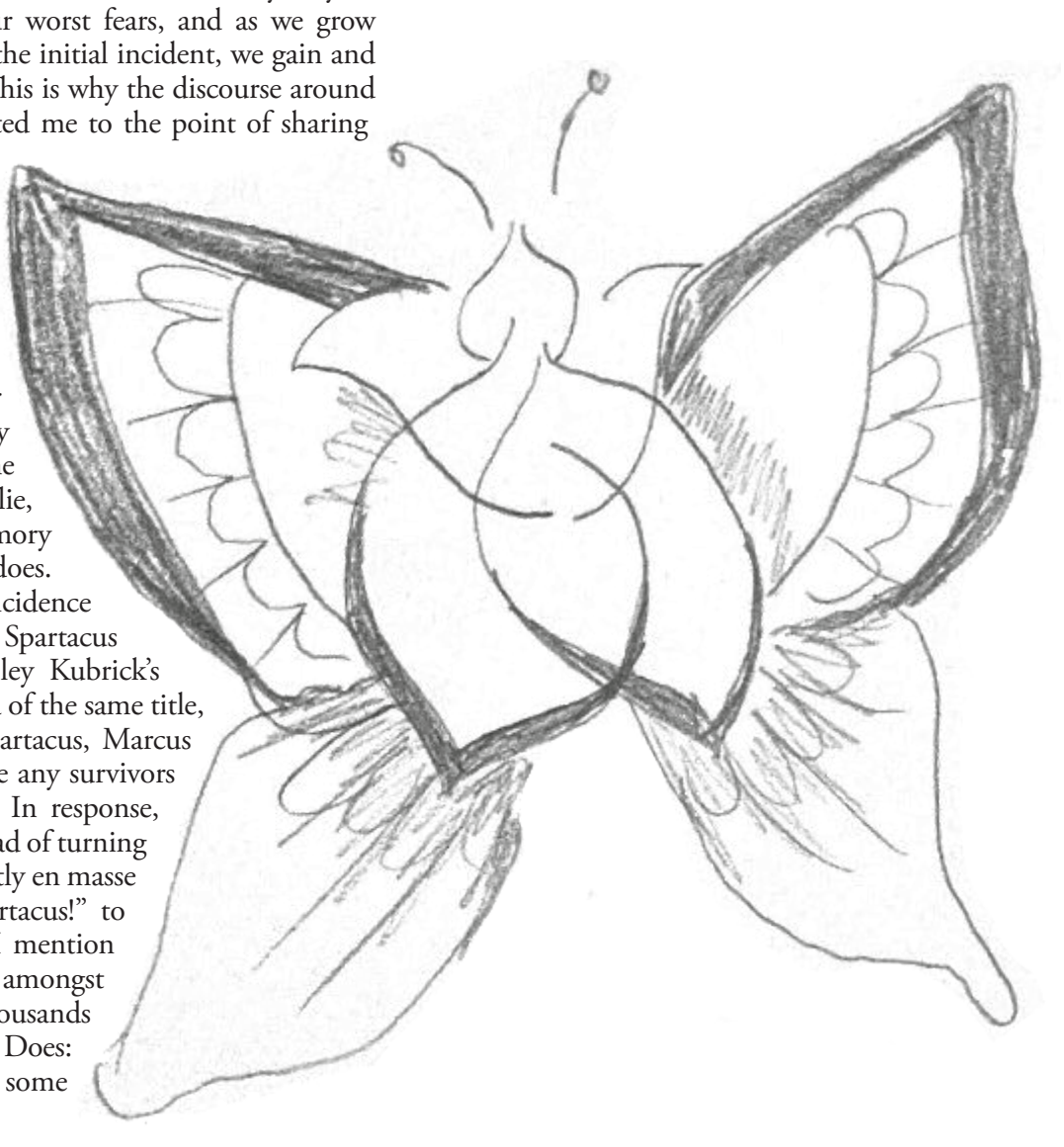
It is no coincidence that I have chosen Spartacus as my alias. In Stanley Kubrick's 1960 historical drama of the same title, after they capture Spartacus, Marcus Crassus offers to spare any survivors if they identify him. In response, his fellow slaves, instead of turning him in, replied defiantly en masse to Crassus, "I'm Spartacus!" to protect their leader. I mention him because, walking amongst you, you'll find thousands of John and Jane Does: some who know it, some who don't, and some who are confused about where they stand. They are out there—the statistics back it up—Justice Department analysis of violent crime in 2016 (though slightly outdated, the point remains the same) showed that roughly three-quarters of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported.

Friends, family, colleagues, neighbors—people you know, love, and care about. The survivors who are brave enough to tell their stories are only a fraction of those living quietly, held back by a myriad of fears, in many cases suffering greatly for what was taken from them. I myself have come to terms with my own experience, but it took a long time. It was probably as confusing to get to that point as it was to diagnose what happened in the first place. I am no longer ashamed or afraid, yet I hide my name. I hide my name because this story is not only mine. I do it not out of shame but solidarity, for every survivor who cannot speak or may never be ready to.

I am Spartacus. If you stand with any survivor, knowingly or not, you do, too.

Spartacus regrets all the drinking he did in his youth.

Graphic by Nuala Mernin '29



"What, Like It's Hard?"

Anyone can be press secretary, yes, even you.

By SALMA GHEITH '30

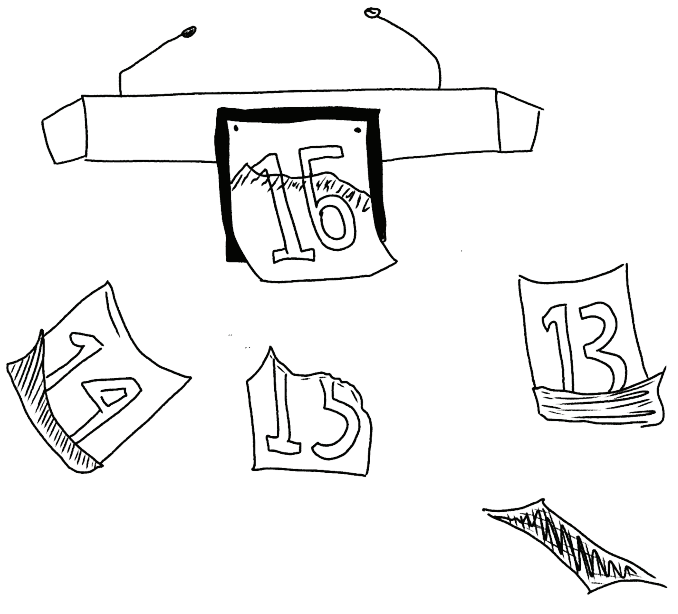
Katie Zacharia made American history this month with her five-day tenure as White House press secretary. Although she served the shortest term of any press secretary in history, her five days in D.C., and her life leading up to them, tell us what the Trump administration values, prioritizes, and rewards.

On Oct. 9, Trump took to Truth Social and named Zacharia as Karoline Leavitt's successor. Leavitt resigned in August 2026 to spend more time with her young family. "[Zacharia is] a loyal and brilliant supporter, right from the beginning," Trump wrote in the post. Less than 48 hours after the announcement, several controversial items from Zacharia's past began circulating online. According to a "CNN" KFile review of her social media presence, she avidly followed and publicized several conspiracy theories. These include, but are not limited to, warnings to her audience that "the radical left Hollywood elitists are sick pedo cannibals" and calls to suspend habeas corpus and the right to know why you are being detained. Journalists also found internet activity and posts that supported a third term for President Trump, and a retweet claiming that 81-year-old Joan Rivers was murdered for saying Obama was gay.

Katie Zacharia is an American political commentator and communications professional. She studied at Pepperdine University, earning a Bachelor of Arts in political science and a Juris Doctor from Pepperdine Law School. Zacharia began her political career as an intern for the Republican National Committee and served as a White House intern during George W. Bush's administration in 2006. After law school, she lived in China for two years and worked as an associate for the Beijing-based Zhong Lun Law firm from 2011 to 2013. After returning to the United States, Zacharia appeared as a political commentator and legal analyst on networks including Fox News and One America News.

Zacharia's only briefing, her first as press secretary, lasted just 14 minutes, during which she mistakenly referred to her husband, Tyler Zacharia, as the president, misspoke more than a few times, and slowly read through the administration's latest accomplishments. She did take three questions afterward.

Zacharia's claim to fame is her numerous television appearances, where she often uses "lawyer" and "attorney" interchangeably. Under federal law, no single, all-encompassing statute defines the word "lawyer." It merely refers to someone who has graduated from law school. In contrast, "attorney" is short for attorney at law and refers to a licensed professional who has not only graduated from law school, but also passed a state or federal bar examination and is legally authorized to advise clients, draft legal documents, and represent people and organizations in court.



However, when asked which state she passed the bar in, Zacharia answered, quite surprisingly, China. Legal experts and scholars from China immediately pounced on the claim, and after conducting research, explicitly stated that Katie Zacharia was not a licensed lawyer in the United States or China.

While lying about credentials on a resume is abhorrent on its own, it is arguably worse that no one in the Trump administration looked into this before hiring her. Zacharia's five-day tenure is not just a story about an unprepared professional. It diagnoses how this administration operates—television presence and unwavering (well, maybe not even that) loyalty to MAGA are sufficient qualifications. Hires do not need to be prepared, and when it all goes wrong, you can always blame it on the press.

Soon after her press briefing, the watchdog organization Campaign for Accountability filed a complaint with the California State Bar, citing around 18 television appearances in which Zacharia calls herself a lawyer. On Oct. 15, just two days after her first briefing, she confirmed on live television that she had never passed any bar exam in any country. In the same interview, she also criticized China's lack of proper toilets, drawing attention to and sparking discontent in its foreign ministry. The next day, Oct. 16, Trump said he told her to reconsider continuing in her role, while a White House official claimed she was "transitioning out of her role." However, Trump has denied firing her.

All of this is extremely avoidable: don't hire a fake attorney, a conspiracy theorist, and someone who has lied about their credentials on national television. So what motivated the current administration? Trump's own announcement seemed to point to a few answers—she was loyal from the beginning. The conspiracy posts themselves certainly were not disqualifying; the President has promoted similar theories himself. This all points to an administration that values complete deference to authority and groupthink over anything else. One can lie, cheat, and still land the position. It is no surprise, as this administration was never merit-based.

No one ever questioned the job "interview" itself … because there was none. Zacharia fit the formula that has caught many people's attention before (and no doubt will again): a loyal, televised conservative commentator. It was later revealed that she tracked President Trump's public schedule and Truth Social activity so she could be on air when he was most likely watching.

Zacharia was called from the Oval Office, flown to D.C., and reportedly offered the job the day after her "interview," without extensive formal vetting. On "Fox," she said nobody asked whether she had passed the bar before offering her the position. Trump introduced her as an attorney, even though any formal vetting would have caught it. Similarly, no one seemed too concerned about her social media presence. Journalists found her post history less than two days after the announcement. If a reporter could find it that quickly, why could the White House not have?

The answer is simple: they could have; they just do not care. Credible institutions vet, especially the most powerful government in the world. The process includes extensive background checks, research, and interviews. Skipping this part is a choice, and it directly reflects what the institution values. Almost every other White House official in other administrations has been extensively vetted through the chief of staff, the counsel's office, and numerous background checks. Zacharia got the job via an executive assistant's fond recollection of a Fox episode and a phone call.

Before leaving the position, Zacharia was asked what she would do differently. "I would absolutely be very well prepared on the briefing," she said, implying she wasn't comfortable with the briefing information in the first place.

Several other moments during the briefing suggested this: she cut the briefing short, told reporters they could "ask President Trump," and did not answer questions about Ukraine intelligence sharing.

Although she left her position, Trump maintains the media treated her unfairly. "I said, 'Is this for you, Katie? Because honestly, you don't need this. You don't have to be treated that way. I would call it fake news, but generally the media has been very rough,'" he recounted.

He framed it as being in her best interest not to represent the administration. Reports seem to conflict on whether she resigned or was pushed out.

Loyalty seems to run in one direction. "Fox" turned on her, pressing her on whether or not she still had the president's confidence. Her exit statement praised Trump, and, appropriately, she was seen wearing a MAGA hat just days after being removed from her position.

Many administration supporters, and Trump himself, have said she was hired as a spokesperson, not a lawyer. This may be true, but misrepresenting credentials on national TV for years is a credibility problem, and credibility is basically the whole job. Others said she has a law degree and technically worked at a Beijing law firm. She may have worked at a law firm, but the issue is that she let herself be called an "attorney at law," and then she claimed she passed the bar in China.

> *"It diagnoses how this administration operates—television presence and unwavering (well, maybe not even that) loyalty to MAGA are sufficient qualifications."*

The press secretary is the public's daily line into the White House. With the press already limited, who answers questions, and how they choose to answer, matters more than anything. It signals how seriously the administration takes accountability to the public. This administration gave the job to someone whose interview was a news segment, who was never vetted or briefed, and who was gone before this week's bread went stale. The podium is empty, and the White House is yet again without a press secretary. Trump said that he is in no rush to fill in the position. This might be the most honest answer the briefing room has given all month.

Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) is excited to see who the next press secretary will be.

Graphic by Tess Harris '30


HAPPY


OWEEN!

What Makes a Good Halloween Tradition?

How to keep Halloween fun when you're busy with midterms.

By AUDREY CHENG '30

The scariest time of year is here: midterm season. And I guess Halloween comes in at a close second.

By the last week of September, Trader Joe's lines its entrance with pumpkins and Target turns the back-to-school section into a jumble of themed Oreos, plastic skeletons, and polyester costumes designed for the landfill. By Oct. 31, it can feel like the holiday has been building toward a single question: how much have you done to make it festive?

In my London neighborhood, the answer is "a lot." Each year, my neighbors line their doorsteps with pumpkins, guard their doors with a skeleton, and hang up webs. But recently, their displays have grown far more ambitious. More pumpkins, fuller graveyards, even fog machines.

"But when the holiday starts to feel like a contest, the decorations can become more important than the people meant to enjoy them."

One skeleton is no longer enough. Houses across the block battle to outdo one another with bigger decorations, better candy, and increasingly elaborate displays. And the numbers suggest it is not just my street—according to the National Retail Federation, consumers are projected to spend $13.5 billion on Halloween in 2026, about $115 per person.

I'll give these fanatics this: decorating is fun, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to make your residence the spookiest among similarly spirited neighbors. But when the holiday starts to feel like a contest, the decorations can become more important than the people meant to enjoy them.

So what makes a Halloween tradition worth keeping? Halloween is best when it is easy to join, so the best traditions give people something to do together. If a tradition requires a big budget or massive production, it is not open to everyone. When traditions meet that standard, a few clear winners emerge.

First, trick-or-treating is the clearest and most classic example. It lets the whole neighborhood take part, which makes it the most shared of all. For children, the goal is to collect as much candy as possible. It also offers the pleasure of walking from house to house, seeing the costumes, and talking to neighbors. According to "Smithsonian Magazine," trick-or-treating descends from earlier customs like "souling," where people went door to door offering prayers for the dead in return for food, and "guising," where children performed their talents for treats.

As the modern American custom spread in the 1920s and 1930s, common, disruptive Halloween pranks gave way to organized trick-or-treating, offering a safer alternative. It has lasted because it made the holiday friendlier by giving people something decoration alone cannot: a reason to knock on a neighbor's door.

The same logic explains why a movie might be the best tradition for anyone with a packed week. The right film depends on the fear factor you want: "Hocus Pocus" or "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown" for a cozy night in, "The Shining" or "The Silence of the Lambs" for a proper scare, or "The Nightmare Before Christmas" if you are already ready to move on to the Christmas mindset. But the movie matters less than the ritual: when someone picks a good film, an ordinary night in your dorm with your roommates fills with Halloween spirit.

Pumpkin carving and haunted houses work as good traditions for the same reasons, but in their own ways. A perfectly carved pumpkin looks impressive on a doorstep, but the fun is in the process: scooping out slimy pumpkin guts and seeds, trying to draw a face on a curved surface, and loving your imperfect creation anyway. It is a decoration you can enjoy making rather than one you have to buy to show off, which is exactly why it beats the fog machine.

A haunted house is the more intense version of that, and even with a ticket price, it earns its place because of who you go with. There is the dark hallway, the sudden noise, someone leaping out from behind a curtain, and a friend grabbing your arm in fear. The attraction is partly the scare, but also the fact that everyone goes through it together, and the fear is temporary enough that you can laugh about it as soon as you reach the exit.

Costumes are where the competition is most likely to creep in. Adults are planning to spend an average of $60 this year on their costume alone. The more detailed the outfit and the more niche the reference, the better the costume, or so the thinking goes. But a costume can be funny and recognizable even if you make it from things already hanging in your closet. Last year my friend and I left our planning much too late, and we ended up going to a Halloween party dressed as each other. It cost us nothing, and no one could tell what we were, but we still had fun.

Halloween's best traditions do not require elaborate planning, a big budget, or even much enthusiasm for being scared. The only ones that do not make the cut are the ones built just to be seen: the biggest display, the most dramatic costume, the most photogenic party. That is not to say that they are worthless, but the problem comes when the contest comes before the fun. Ultimately, the "best" Halloween tradition is subjective: it is whatever you feel like doing.

At Harvard, where Halloween lands in the middle of midterms, problem sets, and all the ordinary demands of the semester, it can feel like one more thing to get right. But this year it falls on a Saturday, so that work can wait until Sunday. A movie in the common room or a costume thrown together an hour before you head out takes almost no time or effort, and either one gives you a reason to look up from your laptop and spend an evening with people. The traditions are just an excuse to have fun.

"At Harvard, where Halloween lands in the middle of midterms, problem sets, and all the ordinary demands of the semester, it can feel like one more thing to get right."

Halloween's customs have changed over time, and the goal is not to preserve one perfect version of it. For some people, that will still be a massive decorative skeleton. The rest of us can make memories with friends and family, pick a good movie, and enjoy the tricks and treats. The point of a tradition is not to have the best-looking Halloween, but to enjoy the spookiest season of the year.

Audrey Cheng '30 (audreycheng1@college.harvard.edu) is planning to use Halloween as an excuse to wear pajamas to class.



Graphic by Ella Cohen '29

"Still on the Line": Have the Callbacks Held Up?

The Harvard Callbacks celebrated their 40th anniversary with alums.

By AADIT SHRIVASTAVA '30

A distinct kind of magic reverberated through Sanders Theatre as four decades of the Harvard Callbacks' legacy came to life for hundreds of audience members. Balancing a rich historical perspective with a vibrant showcase of their current lineup, the Callbacks delivered more than a standard college a cappella concert. Their show, "Still on the Line," traced the evolution of college a cappella over the years while highlighting the Callbacks' unwavering vocal harmony and unity as an ensemble.

To understand the weight of the Callbacks' 40th anniversary, it helps to look back at how the group first formed in Holden Chapel. In the fall of 1986, a handful of exclusive groups like the Krokodiloes and the Opportunes dominated Harvard's a cappella scene. Facing a massive talent bottleneck during auditions, many Harvard singers were rejected after reaching the final callbacks round.

"We found a group of singers who had also made callbacks but didn't get selected. And we decided that we wanted to be a group, and we wanted to be an official group," founding member Craig Hickman '90 said to the "Harvard Independent." "We had to fight the administration to have us officially recognized for the first four years before we could even get a concert in Sanders Theatre."

In their recent performance, the bond forged through the Callbacks' tumultuous early history shone through. "Trust me, we're your typical family. We fight, and there's drama, but we come together because we all love the music, and we all grow to love each other," founding member Morgan London '90 said. "We'll have each other's backs, and we still keep in contact with each other."

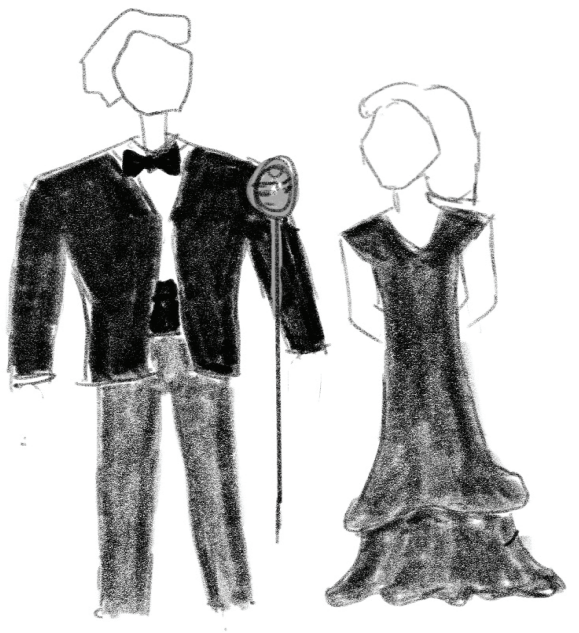
The alums structured the evening into a retrospective of a cappella arrangement styles through the decades. The standout number of the night was "Evergreen" in the 2020s set. The arrangement featured a gradual, patient percussive backdrop, transitioning smoothly into soaring high notes from the soloist and rich, responsive harmonies that honored the emotional weight of the lyrics.

As the songs traveled backward into the 2010s and 2000s, the arrangements showcased more intricate syllabic textures and heavy rhythmic drives, such as the bluegrassy syncopation in "This Time Around." In songs like "Woman," intricate beatboxing laid a clean foundation, contrasting with floating soprano lines and mid-range harmony layers.

Meanwhile, the 1990s set embraced theatricality and pure community joy. "Like a Prayer" was a crowd favorite for the choreography, particularly when the male singers channeled their inner Madonna with hip circles. The dedication and laughter from the performers were infectious, with one of the most pronounced audience reactions of the night during this number.

"I was talking to one of the alumni, and they were talking about how they only ran through their practice one time, and yet they memorized this five-minute choreography," audience member Uche Aguwa '30 said. "Seeing them come together and make the audience all connect and come together was really magical."

The dancing continued with an impromptu tap-dancing break during "Charleston, Flappers, and Razz-a-ma-tazz," as the founding alumni showed they could still bring their trademark silly energy to the stage. But the lulling, choral-like Zulu chants of "Homeless" also showed how the Callbacks continue to push their artistic boundaries.



While the alums brought decades of polish, the current generation of Callbacks carried the torch in their opening and closing acts. The first piece of the night, "Suzanne," featured standout soloist Ike Opayemi '28, who showed great patience by holding back before delivering clean vocal acrobatics in the final build-up.

Pieces like "Headlock" highlighted the group's appetite for complex arrangements. Although it was one of the evening's trickier arrangements, the ensemble's togetherness stood out. Audience members especially loved the build-up from overlapping melodic lines to the unified beat drop.

The night also introduced the group's newest members, first-year students Noah Adeoye '30 and Nina Galindez '30. Tasked with the freshman feature on "See You Again," the duo brought electric energy to their duet, making it my pick for the best of the current members' pieces. Adeoye's falsetto introduction and faster rap parts stood out as challenging, exposed solo moments that he fully embraced. Galindez also brought strong stage command alongside her warm melodic lines.

"The support from the crowd, stepping out in front, and then seeing everyone cheer helped me a lot," Adeoye shared. Adeoye also noted that the group's prevailing mindset was to lean into the pressure. "It was like, 'Let's just have fun here.' Because it's a fun song at the end of the day, that was the reason that we did it, you know. We wanted to have fun with it, so I'm glad that we brought the excitement and the energy," he said.

The anniversary concert drew to a close with a Disney-like grand finale on "The Letter," with all alumni and current members crammed on the stage. The bond between the performers was undeniable, as they cheered after each soloist sang their part and broke into a group dance for the final chorus.

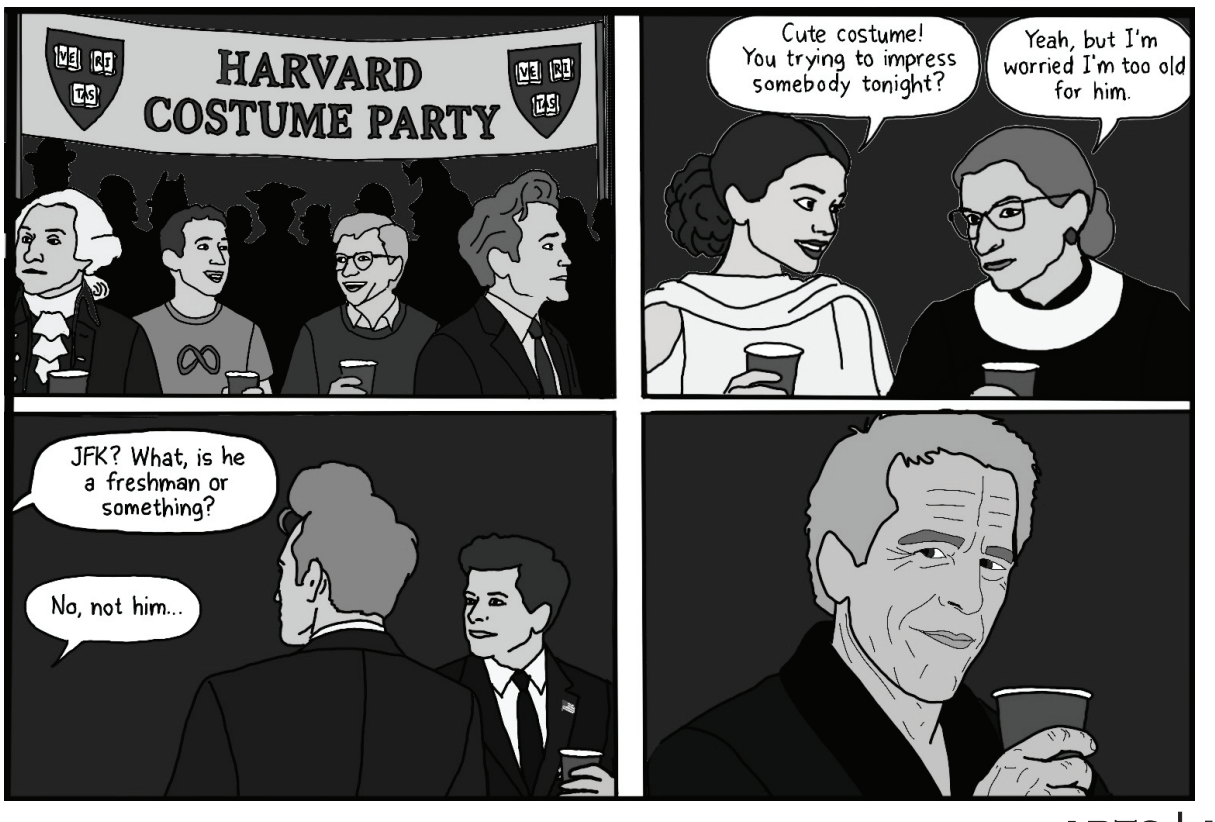
For generations of members, the Callbacks have anchored their undergraduate years. "The one concept across all the different styles and evolutions of the singing is that this is the group that people have told me made their Harvard experience worth it," Hickman reflected.

Aadit Shrivastava '30 (aaditshrivastava@college.harvard.edu) thinks a cappella is cool now.

Graphic by Sophia Jo '29

The Groom Reaper

By COURTNEY HINES '28
Designed By MAYA KODALI '30



Exploring Worldwide Hometowns: Philadelphia, PA

My love for the City of Brotherly Love.

By KATHLEEN SHOVLIN '29

In Philly, trees line my street. Old sycamores tower overhead, dropping large branches on parked cars whenever a bad storm rolls through. Their bark peels off in thin sheets and falls to the ground. They are messy trees—whether it is fall, winter, spring, or summer, there is a crunch underfoot. As I have grown up, the trees have too, some dying. After a crew hacks down a tree, they replace it with a skinny sapling. It will not reach its predecessor's height for another 30 to 40 years.

The city sits in the southeast corner of Pennsylvania, where the state meets New Jersey. Philadelphia sits between Washington, D.C., and New York City, and just an hour from the Jersey Shore. My mom was born and raised in the city's northeast section, while my dad grew up about half an hour north of Philly in a town called Yardley. The city is filled with historical sites, especially from the American Revolution and the abolitionist movement. Some of the city's most notable parts, like the Ben Franklin Parkway, were explicitly modeled on Paris's grand boulevards. Center City has dense, tight streets and popular block-sized parks. The city feels walkable, bustling, and welcoming.

Philly is a hike in the Wissahickon.

After waking up on a Sunday morning, I rush to get ready so I am not left behind. Once my family and I get out the door, we meander through our neighborhood's winding streets toward the coffee shop. Our puppy Winnie leads the way, stopping to smell bushes and flowers. Once we settle at a table outside, I get a hot chai latte and a breakfast burrito from one of the food trucks that regularly park in the lot.

After I sip the last drops of my latte, we trek down the hill, through the neighborhood, and over the train tracks. At the bottom of the hill, we enter the Wissahickon Valley, stepping over fallen trees and muddy puddles. Now that we are well into autumn, the trees are almost entirely bare, with only a few brown leaves clinging to the slender, swaying branches. Winnie rushes ahead, going as far as her leash will let her.

"The city feels walkable, bustling, and welcoming."

Philly is tight quarters.

On my block, rowhomes are cozied together, touching on each side. Our front doors are feet apart. I am lucky to have a walkway to the back driveway that separates my house from the next one. Many of our neighbors have moved out as their families have grown. They moved to the suburbs for a bigger house, a real yard, and better parking. My family has stayed in my childhood home. With the four of us, it can be cramped, but I would not have it any other way.

Philly is New Year's Day.

After a late night out, the morning is slow. My friends and I pile into a car in our pajamas and makeup from the night before. After a breakfast of a Dunkin' pecan latte, hash browns, and munchkins, I go home and gear up for a cold day outside. I put on two pairs of pants, three long sleeves, and my winter coat. Once my family and I are bundled up, we drive down to South Philly. We park in the closest spot we can find and head to South Broad Street. By the time we get there, the sidewalks are full of people pressed against barricades lining the street. In a couple of minutes, groups of mummers will march down Broad Street. Philadelphia's historic Mummers Parade takes place every New Year's Day.



My family and I prefer to watch the string bands, who strut down the street playing classics like "Mr. Sandman." Each group wears extravagant outfits with colorful feathers, gems, and sequins. These outfits include large backpieces and striking face paint. When I was a kid, I was so scared of the mummers; I would break into tears anytime one came close. Now, I love taking pictures with them and catching the beaded necklaces they throw into the crowd.

Philly is a school night at a Phillies game.

The weather has finally changed for the better. The gray rain has cleared, and the skies are blue. We go to school but spend most of the day lounging in the grass under the shade of a large oak tree. Once school is let out, we head downtown to kill time before the game. It is Central Night at the Phillies, my high school's yearly night when all students go to a Phillies game together. As first pitch approaches, my friends and I drive to far south Philly, where the stadium is.

It is hectic, but we find our seats before the game. The setting sun reflects off the city skyline. The buildings look hazy from this far away. Every year, I am too busy talking with my friends to pay any attention to the game. Whether we win or lose, I leave happy.

Philly is a Wawa parking lot.

On a summer night with not much to do, my friends and I drive to the nearest Wawa. I get my usual order: a turkey hoagie, mac and cheese, and a bag of sour cream and onion chips. We return to the car with our arms full. After putting on music and devouring the first half of my hoagie, we talk about anything and everything, catching up on "Love Island" and college life updates. Even as we stay late into the night, the parking lot is busy with cars coming and going.

Philly is a blistering evening in July.

It is too hot to cook inside, so my parents are grilling dinner outside. The air fills with the shrieks and giggles of kids playing outside, weaving in between the houses on our block. They shoot each other with water guns to cool off. They play in the driveway behind my house, the one that was cracked and crumbling when I was growing up but has since been repaved with smooth asphalt. When Rose's Water Ice truck drives down our street and its bell rings, my sister and I run inside to grab cash from my dad's wallet.

Philly is a stroll around Rittenhouse Square.

In summer, regular produce markets and art galleries line the block around the park. The sidewalk is crowded and congested with shoppers stopping to admire fresh strawberries, oil paintings, and Amish dairy stands. The original La Colombe location is right off the Square and perfect for a refreshing iced tea. After some window shopping and a stroll around the block, I head into the park and scan for an open bench. After finding a seat, my parents, sister, and I settle in. People watching is the main event.

"I miss how at home I feel there and how small and intimate the city feels."

As much as I love Philly, I wanted to leave it for college. I needed to know what it was like to live somewhere else, to see if my hometown was still as perfect as it had always seemed. Now that I live in Cambridge, Philly feels even more special. I miss how at home I feel there and how small and intimate the city feels. My dream is to move back to Philly post-grad with all my friends. The city is cheap and fun, and I already know my favorite spots. Plan B is to move back when I am ready to settle down and start a family. Either way, I know I will return.

Kathleen Shovlin '29 (klshovlin@college.harvard.edu) misses her home in Philadelphia.

Graphic by Caleb Boyce '29

Vive Les Étudiants

A charcuterie board of media, the NFL, and the French student protests.

By SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28

Flames, shattered windows, and riot police have dominated the media coverage of the recent protests sweeping France, particularly Paris. These acts have given the movement the unsavory but headline-grabbing label: riot. It is understandable why the media condemns, but pushes, videos of shops being looted, cars burning, and Paris seemingly in shambles. The coverage reinforces the vilification of a protest meant to disrupt everyday life. Furthermore, American interests have entered the stage during the first-ever regular-season NFL game on French soil.

The French student protests began on Sept. 17 at a high school in a Paris suburb, then quickly spread throughout the city and nation in solidarity. The protests have continued to gain national momentum and international attention. Students' demands include educational improvements such as addressing staff shortages, overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating infrastructure, and Parcoursup—the online platform French students use to apply to higher education, which students say is confusing to navigate and unfairly favors some applicants.

"Yet while the NFL brings millions in revenue to Paris, residents and students still struggle with high living and education costs."

These protests are not limited to the underprivileged areas of France. They extend beyond class, race, and immigration issues, and they are not solely a youth issue. Students mobilized these protests, but teachers, parents, public sector employees, mayors, elected officials, and other protest organizations, such as the Gilets Jaunes, have supported them.

Many Americans are already familiar with France's long history of revolutionary action, but you do not need to go back to the 19th century to find precedent for these demonstrations. In May 1968, university students led what is now considered one of the largest and most disruptive protests in French history, and the movement still influences French revolutionary culture. The 1968 protests transformed social structures, government interference in social freedoms, and educational infrastructure. Most importantly, these protests united ordinary people across lines of division, pointing blame not at their neighbors, but at their government and the systemic frameworks of their society.

It is no mystery why so many are invoking the 1968 student protests today.

Yet most media does not cover the students' demands; instead, it turns a vision of unity and mobilization into a picture of dystopian upheaval and destruction. By foregrounding looting, which is undoubtedly devastating for those affected, it shifts focus away from the masses' agenda. This frames activism as radical and villainizes it.

American media has also covered the protests sweeping France. The widespread civil disruption has raised international safety concerns. Videos show tourists navigating the barricaded streets of Paris with suitcases in hand, orchestras being tear-gassed, and protesters being met with water cannons. Yet, for many American audiences, the unrest takes on another dimension as the beloved sport of football touches down on French soil for the first time.

The Pittsburgh Steelers and New Orleans Saints played the inaugural regular-season game in France on Sunday, Oct. 25. Leading up to the match, the game drew heavy press coverage, both promoting it and covering security logistics.

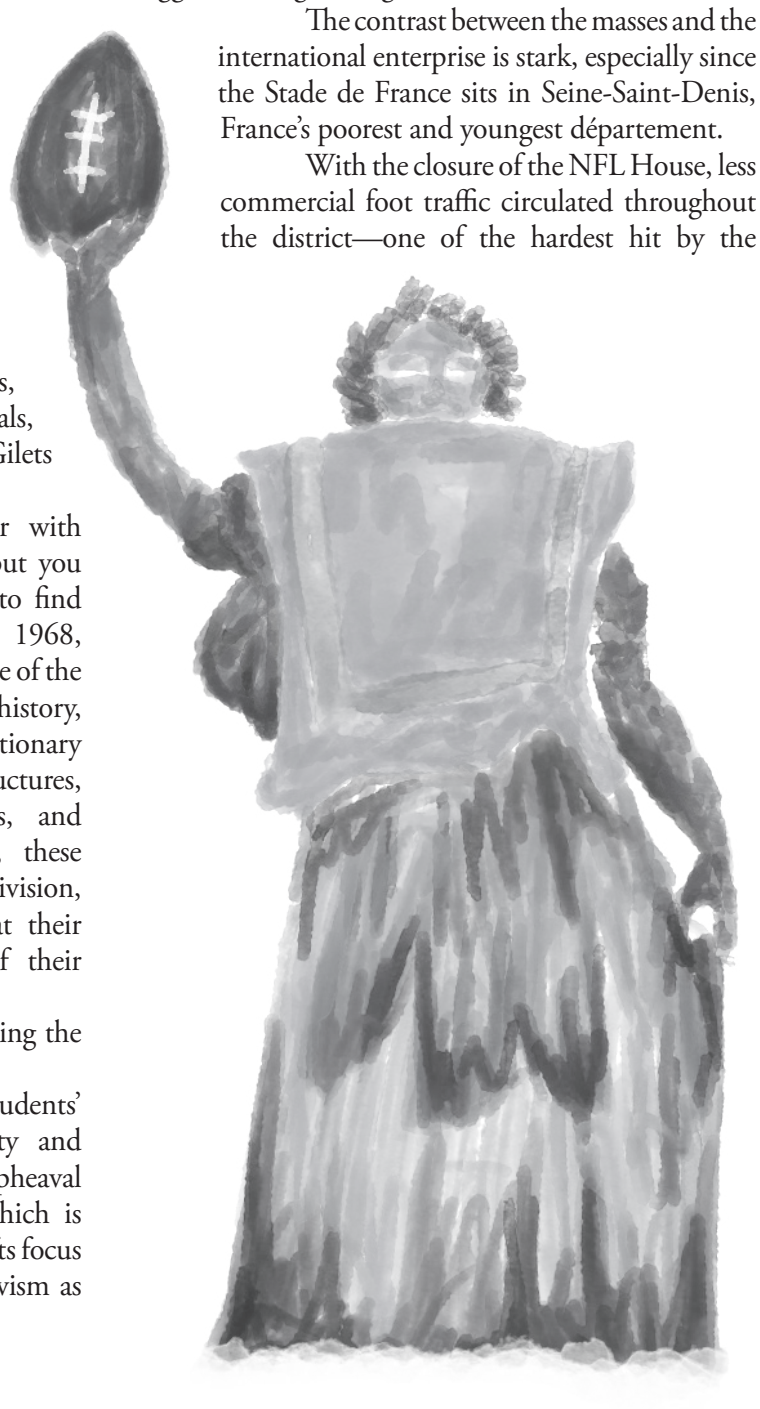
Amid protests, civil unrest, and the NFL game, French police have been stretched thin and implemented a weekend curfew. However, the NFL said it was confident in the event's safety and did not expect to need broader resources.

Many pre-game events were disrupted or canceled, including the closing of the Paris "NFL House" and even major tourist attractions like the Louvre. Fans who hoped to attend events were left wanting, but many reported a positive time despite the unrest. These visiting fans' experience has assured many that all of Paris is not, in fact, engulfed in flames.

The NFL is the world's highest-grossing sports league. When the behemoth visits a city, it creates an economic boom, generating millions of dollars in revenue, thousands of viewers and visitors, and a positive host relationship with the city. Yet while the NFL brings millions in revenue to Paris, residents and students still struggle with high living and education costs.

The contrast between the masses and the international enterprise is stark, especially since the Stade de France sits in Seine-Saint-Denis, France's poorest and youngest département.

With the closure of the NFL House, less commercial foot traffic circulated throughout the district—one of the hardest hit by the protests. While NFL expansion also aims to expand economies and relations abroad, businesses in marginalized districts are more likely to cater to tourists and viewers than to residents. Ticket prices ranged from €90 to €500, while over half of France earns less than €2,092 per month after tax.



Before the game, an American-based fan account dedicated to the Steelers released an AI video that quickly went viral on social media. The video slowly zooms into the back of a Steelers football player; a protester carrying the French flag ablaze runs through the foreground, while a group in the background bursts through a fiery storefront window towards a hijacked police van where another waves the French flag. In the background, a barricade and the Eiffel Tower are falling apart.

The scene, now posted by several football-associated accounts, is vivid and tells a story about how Americans perceive what is happening in France. When monuments, storefronts, cars, and streets are on fire, they provide a shock value. However, beyond the arson, a key aspect of these protests is the deliberate disruption of events. This disruption is meant to draw attention to their cause, but shock-value headlines and coverage benefit media corporations and fuel divisiveness.

Echoing the current protests, the 1968 French Open at Roland Garros also saw logistical chaos. Spectators and players struggled to reach matches, forced to find alternative routes amid fuel shortages. Photos from the 1968 protests also depict flames, overturned cars, streets filled with civil protestors, and police retaliation.

Yet now, when people look back on 1968, they do not see it as a disgraceful riot. They see it as a pivotal moment in French revolutionary history and an example of what civilian protest can accomplish.

The violence, looting, and burning on some fronts of the student protests do not directly align with the movement's aims. Still, these actions often sit at the forefront of mass mobilization. However, there have also been large numbers of arrests and reports of police violence against the protesters. Classifying the protests as riots raises questions about which narratives are prioritized. Tourism is a vital pillar of the French economy, but the country also faces a national debt crisis. As American organizations like the NFL expand, they inevitably become entangled in French affairs, but they also offer economic stimulus. As these sectors converge, the student strikes highlight which interests receive institutional support and global media attention.

Student protests continue to gain international traction as civil unrest spreads across Europe. History has shown that united movements like these can be a formidable force for change. Ironically, the NFL game's success amid the protests shows that everyday life in France is not as apocalyptic as the media makes it out to be. Yet instability and uncertainty around civil unrest can become a spectacle that distracts from the progress dissent has built.

Sophia Gonzalez '28 (sophiagonzalez@college.harvard.edu) hopes French students can learn in equitable conditions and encourages readers to look beyond the headlines.

Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

Hands to Yourself

A Duke player's apology and reflection on swatting a trainer.

By Anika Gupta '30 and Salma Gheith '30

A five-second video has broken the internet. In the third quarter of the Oct. 17 Duke-UNC game, redshirt junior DeShawn Stone lay motionless on the turf after an injury, as his teammates surrounded him. A female member of Duke's training staff, Grace Dietrich, ran onto the field to assist Stone. She placed her hand on defensive back Kimari Robinson, who stood between her and Stone. Robinson aggressively swatted Dietrich's hand away. Robinson stayed to watch Stone receive medical attention.

Stone later walked off the field himself, but the video sparked a much larger conversation about Robinson's behavior toward the female aide as well as the treatment of women in heavily male-dominated areas like sports. Manny Diaz, Duke's head football coach, called Robinson's behavior "below [the] standard" he wanted Duke players to meet.

Fans across social media expressed outrage, calling for Robinson to be suspended or removed from the team. Critics have noted that athletic trainers, such as Dietrich, are medical professionals and should be able to provide care without hurdles. As of now, the team and university have not commented on a suspension.

The incident clip went viral on Saturday, before Robinson made any public statements. He apologized on Sunday, the day after the game, after the video had gained traction and received news coverage. Robinson said he had spoken to the trainer before going public on X, where he wrote, "I want to publicly apologize to the member of our training staff for how I acted toward her during Saturday's game. The injured player on the ground, DeShawn Stone, is like family to me, and I was scared he might be seriously injured."

"Watching someone you love be unresponsive is extremely jarring, and his emotions may have run high in the moment."

"But worrying about him doesn't excuse how I treated her. I should have controlled my emotions, and I didn't," he continued.

The public seems largely split into two camps: critics and sympathizers. Critics claim that Robinson only chose to apologize after the clip went viral, reflecting a broader pattern of problematic behavior toward women in which men apologize solely in response to backlash. However, his apology deserves nuance—he provided context without using it to excuse his behavior, suggesting he tried to convey sincerity regardless of how fans and onlookers interpreted his actions. Sympathizers are more open to his perspective—watching someone you love be unresponsive is extremely jarring, and his emotions may have run high in the moment. Commentator Jason Whitlock, a former ESPN personality, argued that Dietrich initiated physical contact with Robinson and that Robinson was merely responding.

While both sides may have some truth, another detail complicates the story. A second video has surfaced showing Robinson swiping at a stadium staffer before Duke's away game against Georgia Tech on Oct. 10. This detail could undermine the analysis that he simply feared for Stone and instead paint him as someone who regularly struggles to manage his anger, especially with people he is meant to work with.

It is necessary to consider the role that gender serves in understanding the player's conduct. Dietrich is much smaller than Robinson and was trying to do her job on the scene when she was physically contacted. Critics of Robinson noted that Dietrich appeared visibly afraid after he swatted her away.

"The high-stress, high-adrenaline nature of sideline athletics, particularly combined with the gender imbalance of male sports, can create situations where the authority of female professionals is undermined."

The high-stress, high-adrenaline nature of sideline athletics, particularly combined with the gender imbalance of male sports, can create situations where the authority of female professionals is undermined. Female trainers often face resistance when trying to earn players' respect and direct them away from urgent medical situations. A former female trainer described her experience on X, saying that male college athletes regularly referred to her as "baby," "boo," and "mama," which she found inappropriate, and explained that coaches had done nothing to resolve the issue.

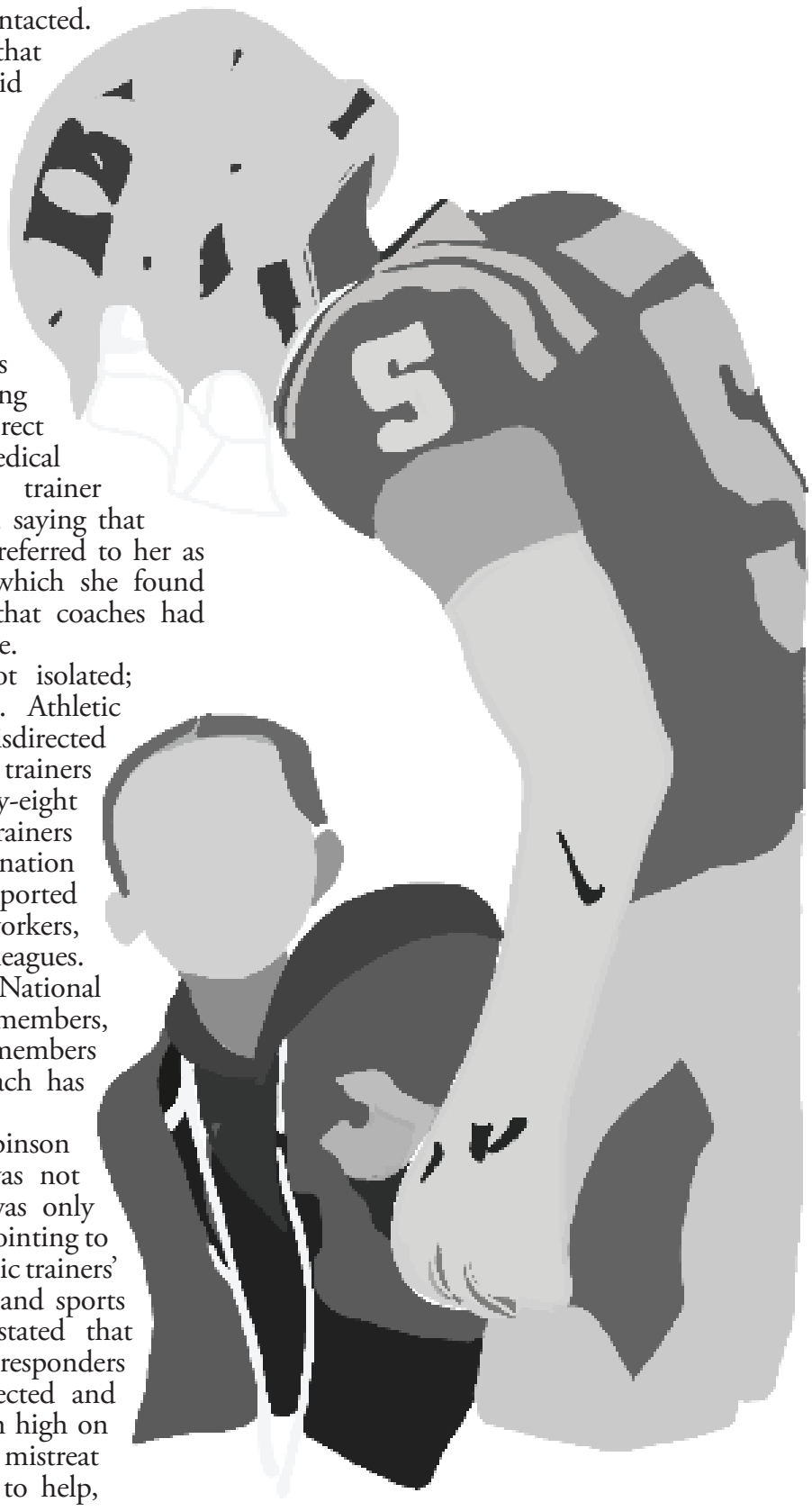
These incidents are not isolated; they reflect a systemic issue. Athletic trainers are already prone to misdirected sideline aggression, and female trainers report additional barriers. Eighty-eight percent of female athletic trainers reported experiencing discrimination from employers, and 90% also reported unfair treatment from co-workers, fellow students, and colleagues. Women make up 55% of National Athletic Trainers' Association members, and nearly 90% of surveyed members said an athlete, parent, or coach has questioned their competency.

Sympathizers of Robinson have claimed that Dietrich was not actually helping, saying she was only bringing a bottle of Gatorade, pointing to the broader devaluation of athletic trainers' work. However, other doctors and sports medicine professionals have stated that athletic trainers are critical first responders on the field who are disrespected and underpaid. While emotions run high on the field, it is unacceptable to mistreat people who are simply trying to help, especially when they are already perceived as less and treated with less respect than you.

Actions like Robinson's in sports serve as a microcosm of the difficulty of existing as a woman in high-stakes, male-dominated fields. From corporate boardrooms to heated discussions in college classrooms, women and gender minorities often find their credentials minimized and their boundaries ignored. Crises often reveal who can express unregulated emotions as intensity and who has their professional standing and safety undermined. Until organizations can enforce basic standards of respect at all times, including in high-stress situations, women and gender minorities will continue to bear the cost of misdirected aggression in professional environments.

Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) and Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) are comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Karishma Kodali '29



Weekly Sports Preview: October 30–November 5

Your weekly what-to-watch for Harvard Athletics.

By LUCY DUNCAN '28

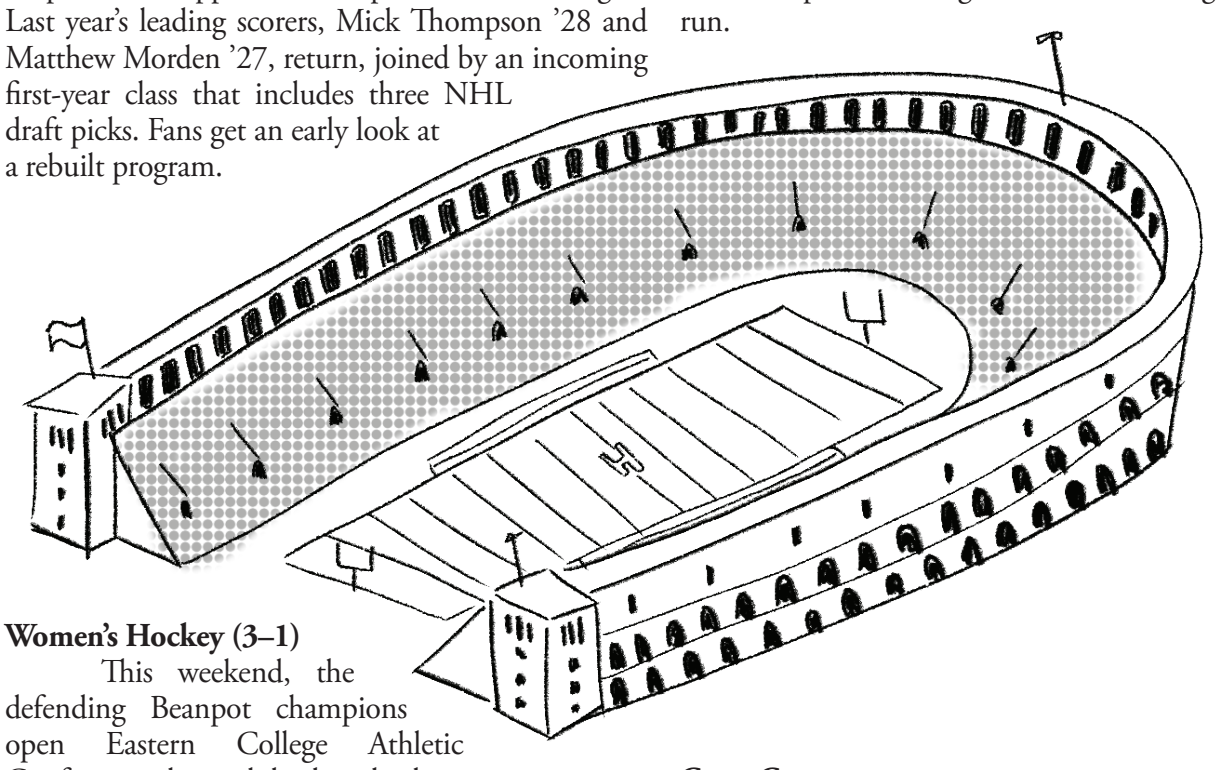
This weekend is Halloween, but that is not the only scary thing on the horizon for Crimson Athletics. As fall seasons wrap up and teams make their final pushes for playoff bids, some of the season's highest-stakes games start this Friday. The pressure is on.

Football (6–0)

On Friday at 7 p.m., the Crimson plays Dartmouth in Hanover, New Hampshire. With a six-game win streak, Harvard is the only undefeated Ivy League team this season after a 35–7 win over conference No. 2 Princeton on Oct. 24. Harvard has won the last four meetings against Dartmouth, so they'll be looking to extend their win streak and take a step toward the Ivy League title. Much of the Crimson's success this season has come from an oppressive defense that has held four opponents to 10 points or fewer. Linebacker Dorsey Benefield '28 and defensive back Xaden Benson '28 lead the defense in tackles and interceptions, respectively.

Men's Hockey (1–0)

After opening Rob Rassey's first season as Harvard head coach with a statement victory, the Crimson returns for back-to-back games against the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Harvard plays at home on Thursday at 7 p.m. before an away rematch on Friday at 7 p.m. As the final non-conference tune-up opportunity ahead of Eastern College Athletic Conference hockey, this rapid turnaround is designed to test the Crimson's ability to adapt to their opponents and perform under fatigue. Last year's leading scorers, Mick Thompson '28 and Matthew Morden '27, return, joined by an incoming first-year class that includes three NHL draft picks. Fans get an early look at a rebuilt program.



Women's Hockey (3–1)

This weekend, the defending Beanpot champions open Eastern College Athletic Conference play with back-to-back games. Last year, the Crimson reached the ECAC quarterfinals before falling to Princeton. This is a chance to position themselves as legitimate title contenders with a statement win early in conference play. On Friday at 4 p.m., they play Clarkson University at the Bright-Landry Hockey Center. This matchup has historically challenged Harvard, with Clarkson winning every game since 2022, including a 9–1 win in 2024. With a high-scoring opponent on the slate, big saves will be needed from goalkeeper Ainsley Tuffy '28, who boasted a conference-best 0.950 save percentage last season.

Then, on Saturday at 3 p.m., the Crimson plays their second home game of the week against St. Lawrence University. Harvard met St. Lawrence three times last year, with a single-point regular-time win, an overtime win, and a tie. Both games should be exciting, neck-and-neck matches for the defending Beanpot champions.

Women's Volleyball (14–3)

Women's volleyball plays Brown this Friday at 6 p.m. at the MAC. This rematch has high stakes—their first meeting this season on Oct. 3 ended Harvard's program-record 11-game opening win streak. The Crimson will be looking for a statement comeback, led by athletes like Sofia Rossi '29, who leads the team in kills and service aces.

On Saturday, Harvard plays Yale. The Bulldogs have long been a tough rival for the Crimson, with the fifth-set victory on Oct. 2 marking Harvard's first win in this series since 2021. Harvard is fourth in the Ivy League, so a second win over conference leader Yale would help solidify its standing as it pushes for its first Ivy League Tournament bid since 2023. Ryleigh Patterson '27 won their last meeting with a fifth-set kill and led the game in kills and aces, so her on-court prowess will be critical to a second Crimson win.

Field Hockey (14–1)

On Saturday at 1 p.m., field hockey plays Yale at Berylson Field. This is the regular-season finale, and Harvard—which already clinched its second consecutive regular-season Ivy League title—will look to end the season undefeated in conference play. The Ivy League Tournament is slated for Nov. 6-8, and the NCAA Tournament is Nov. 13-22. Harvard is ranked fifth in the country and is coming off a historic national semifinal run. This weekend will give them a chance to perfect their game ahead of a tough playoff run.

Cross Country

On Saturday, Harvard will race in the Ivy League Heptagonal Cross Country Championships in Attleboro, Massachusetts. Last year, Princeton took both the men's and women's titles, so Harvard is looking to end their run. Both teams have a good shot at a title, with Aelo Curtis '30 leading the women's scoring and Tam Gavenas '29 leading the men's. This is the Crimson's final opportunity to tune up ahead of the NCAA Northeast Regional Championships on Nov. 13 and the NCAA Championships on Nov. 21.

Men's Soccer (4–6–3)

On Saturday at 5 p.m., Harvard heads to Princeton for their penultimate regular-season match. Ivy League leaders Cornell have already clinched an Ivy League tournament berth after their Oct. 24 victory against Dartmouth, so it's a tight race for the three remaining spots. Harvard is tied with Dartmouth for fourth in the conference standings, so a win this weekend is essential. Princeton has taken the last three games in the series, but the Tigers are having a difficult season with a 1–3–1 conference record. This could be a season-defining game for the Crimson.

Women's Soccer (9–4–1)

The Crimson is headed to the University of Pennsylvania this Friday at 4 p.m. With two games left in the regular season, Harvard is tied with two other teams for the final two Ivy League tournament spots. After a 1-2 loss to Penn last year that kept Harvard from its tournament goals, the stakes are high as the Crimson looks for a statement comeback. Penn is ranked sixth in the Ivy League, so this is Harvard's chance to secure a tournament bid before facing conference leader Cornell next week. Ólöf Kristinsdóttir '27, who is tied for the Ivy lead with 10 goals this season, will be a critical on-field asset.

Men's Basketball

On Monday at 7 p.m., men's basketball will make its season debut against MIT at Lavietes Pavilion. Harvard has dominated this series, with only four losses since the first meeting in 1901. This should give the Crimson a chance to ease into the season ahead of a series of non-conference road tests over the next few weeks. It will be head coach Tommy Amaker's 20th season leading the Crimson. He has led Harvard to an unprecedented seven Ivy League championships. All-Ivy selections, Robert Hinton '28 and Thomas Batties II '27, are still looking good, and the incoming class of 2030 includes three guards, a forward, and a center. This gives Crimson fans a chance to get to know this year's program as the season begins.

Women's Basketball

Harvard makes their season debut on Monday, Nov. 2 at No. 17 University of Minnesota. For the rest of the fall semester, the Crimson will face a series of long-distance tests against high-ranked power-conference opponents before beginning Ivy League play. Harvard has played Minnesota only three times, most recently in 2016, so this is an early test against an unfamiliar Big Ten team. Harvard returns with last year's leading point scorer and All-Ivy First Team selection, Karlee White '27, alongside Ivy League Rookie of the Year Olivia Jones '29.

The regular season is wrapping up for Harvard's fall athletics. With conference playoffs just around the corner, this week is the final chance for many Crimson teams to secure their qualifying bids, and they need support most. Meanwhile, fans of winter sports are getting their first glimpses at Harvard's rosters for the season. It's a great time to tune in!

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Graphic by Cameron Bernier '29

The Beasts We Face

A look at the fear factor of Ivy League Mascots.

By STAR BINYAMIN '30

As we near the end of the regular fall sporting season, highlight reels will play, and hype will build for each game's victors. But scores, plays, and players cannot determine the true winner—who watches the game just to watch the game? No, the only real measure of victory is intimidation. But ritualistic chanting, synchronized dress, and fresh air all pale in comparison to the spookiest beast: the mascot. The figurehead bears the vital responsibility of making innocent onlookers scream. After all, what is scarier than a teenager in a fur suit?

However, I cannot, in good faith, attest that all mascots achieve this objective. The biggest disparity in athletics and education today remains the unequal spookiness and scare factor between college sports mascots. While it may be a bigger challenge to consider the valid spookiness of all mascots, we can, at a minimum, look at a few mascots' success in this field. Join me in evaluating the fear factor of Ivy League sports mascots.

9. The Penn Quaker

Not a shiver runs down the spine at the thought of the Penn Quaker. Perhaps in Pennsylvania they haunt the night, but to any outsider, the Penn Quaker is simply an oddly dressed man in a great hat—"great" being generous, and not the operative word. The Penn Quaker inspires no dread or fear in opponents, audience members, or civilians alike!

8. Touchdown

Cornell's Big Red Bear has never truly been red, but it was a bear for a long time. From 1915 to 1939, the University featured live American black bears at football games and occasionally at campus events. However, (not to point fingers) Touchdown IV (the bear, of course) caused some disturbances on a road trip, effectively ending the tradition. Cornell was so embarrassed by the debacle that it was mascotless until 1970. Now, there is just a student in a suit—talk about a downgrade. Tell me, are you more afraid of the bear or the student? Perhaps the student is the rational choice, given Cornell enrollees' tendency to hunt their own mascot. Rather counterproductively, it seems the people and beast are not yet unified enough to pose a viable threat. Perhaps a bear loose on the field, chased by undergraduates with hunting permits, is just as effective at sowing fear in the crowd.

"Tell me, are you more afraid of the bear or the student?"

7. Bruno the Bear

Another bear? With some of the nation's brightest minds, one might expect more creativity. That is not to say Bruno, hailing from Providence, Rhode Island, and Touchdown are without distinction. One may infer from his name alone that Bruno the Bear is more domesticated than wild. He seems rather polite—a nice young gentleman who merely supports his peers and does not need a shiver, shake, or quake from the general populace.

6. John Harvard

Honestly, what is scarier than a random man from hundreds of years ago? I am certain his ghost still haunts West Cambridge, waiting for the perfect moment to exact revenge for all that has been done to his statue (for those who are unaware, let me tell you that the faded toe is not just from sweaty hands). However, fear of repercussions should sit in the hearts of the Harvard students who defiled the man, not the opposing team—which is why our dear John does not top this list. In fact, John Harvard might quickly find allegiance amongst the opposition. Perhaps that is why we shout "Go Crimson" instead of "Go John." Such treason is certainly taunting his spirits.

5. The Princeton Tiger

At first glance, the Tiger may seem a worthy, wrathful beast, but let's look closely at how the real tiger actually behaves. Tigers spend most of their time sleeping, and that's not a great look. How are you expecting to be taken seriously if your mascot is falling asleep on the field—even if just for a short catnap?

4. The Yale Bulldog

As painful as it may be to admit, dogs can be scary—sometimes terrifying. But is a Bulldog the epitome of the fierce beast? It's fair to fear the slobber, but the average passerby would accept it and move on. Perhaps we are simply too desensitized to fear this beast truly. A dog has teeth and claws, and the ability to attack—yet we willingly let it into our homes and hearts. The dog may strike when we least expect, when we are least prepared. Complacency is terrifying in its own right.



3. The Columbia Lion

Any New Yorker can tell you, the Lion belongs in the library, not on the field. While I applaud the effort to find a predator, are not lions just really big, fluffy cats? If I scratch the lion's chin, will it fall asleep in a sunbeam? I suppose this issue is moot as the sun sets earlier and earlier, but the initial concern remains. Yet I must confess some fear of the Columbia Lion, especially its artificial blue hue. Is this the effect of climate change, or just animal cruelty? Either way, the eerie impact of our actions on the world's innocent, big, fluffy cats haunts me.

2. Dartmouth Big Green

While it may be easy to write off Dartmouth as lacking a mascot worth considering, much less fearing, that assertion misses a vital aspect of terror: the abstract. A defined animal or figure offers ease and the comfort of the recognizable, but an abstract mascot offers the opposite. The simple letter 'D' excels in ambiguity, which breeds fear and resentment. Could the 'D' stand for destruction, death, decimation, deceit, debt? We may never learn what the 'D' means, but we can certainly cower at how it makes us contemplate our existence.

"We may never learn what the 'D' means, but we can certainly cower at how it makes us contemplate our existence."

1. Keggy the Keg

What is this? More Dartmouth? A second, not-so-secret, unofficial mascot. Overindulgence is scary, is it not? In fact, few things are scarier than alcohol. A mascot promoting this ruffian lifestyle is beyond spooky; it is downright distressing. Moreover, a single glance at Keggy the Keg makes it clear that the beast in question has made a deal with some god or devil without so much as a flinch. It will reach into your soul and destroy something deep within you; please do not look it in the eyes.

So, what did we learn today? Evidently, just because a league is old does not make it worthy. Each of these universities, their athletic departments and teams, had free rein to pitch and perfect an impeccably terrifying mascot, and they fell short. The time has come; we must push mascots to do what they are meant to do: spook and scare, or, for some, exist outside the realm of colors and letters.

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Graphic by Lola Selberg '30

Back from the Dead: A Second Shot at Glory

What happens when the world's greatest athletes are told they will never compete again?

By ADIN HOOTNICK '29

Professional sports rest on a fairly simple idea: the best athletes win. We celebrate record-breaking performances, championship titles, and the seemingly superhuman abilities of the world's greatest competitors. But every once in a while, an athlete accomplishes something that makes winning feel almost secondary.

What happens when the very people we once considered unstoppable can no longer compete? For Tiger Woods, Alex Smith, and Klay Thompson, this question was not hypothetical. Each suffered injuries that threatened to end their careers, forcing them to confront the possibility that years of competition had worn down their bodies to the point that they might no longer be able to compete. Yet all three eventually returned to competition, producing some of the most memorable moments in recent sports history.

Few athletes have experienced a more dramatic rise, fall, and resurrection than Tiger Woods. By the early 2000s, the name Woods had become practically synonymous with professional golf. His dominance was so complete that people rarely asked whether he could win another major championship, but how many more he would collect.

Then, almost impossibly, the injuries began to pile up. Years of chronic back pain and repeated surgeries transformed one of the most dominant athletes in history into a player who could barely swing a golf club. "I'm not feeling my best right now," Woods told PGA in 2013 after falling to his knees at The Barclays.

After undergoing four back surgeries, including a spinal fusion in 2017, Woods faced questions about whether he would ever return to competitive golf. As Woods explained, he struggled with pain so severe that even lying down hurt. However, he changed this narrative at the 2019 Masters.

Eleven years after his last major championship victory, Woods arrived at Augusta National no longer the invincible young golfer the world once knew. At 43, he faced younger competitors, many of whom had grown up watching him dominate the sport and had since overtaken him. By the final round, however, something remarkable was happening. Woods was not just competing anymore; he was winning. "I was trying to make sure that I could hit a high draw and call upon it with driver, 3-wood, 5-wood, any club in the bag. I somehow found it," Woods recalled to "Golf Digest."

When he secured his fifth green jacket and 15th major championship, the crowd erupted. But the moment's significance exceeded the trophy itself. After years of debilitating back injuries, surgeries, and serious doubt over whether he would ever compete at the highest level again, Woods had returned to win the Masters. What made the moment extraordinary was not simply that he won another major, but that he did so after his body nearly forced him out of the sport altogether.

In the NFL, a league defined by its physical brutality and constant risk of injury, quarterback Alex Smith defied both medical odds and public expectations.

On Nov. 18, 2018, Smith suffered a devastating compound fracture to his right leg in a game against the Houston Texans. A 2023 study by Houston Methodist found that athletes who experience lower-extremity fractures have low return-to-sport rates and tend to see declines in post-injury performance and career length. Smith's case was more extreme than average. After surgery, Smith developed a life-threatening bacterial infection that led to sepsis. Doctors considered amputating his leg to save his life. Over the following nine months, Smith underwent 17 surgeries, enduring a recovery process that involved learning to walk and eventually run again.



At that point, a return to the NFL seemed out of the picture. The question was no longer whether Smith would throw another touchdown, but whether he would ever regain anything resembling his former physical abilities.

However, Smith remained passionate and committed to his former life. On Oct. 11, 2020, nearly two years after his injury, Smith returned to the field against the Los Angeles Rams. He eventually reclaimed the starting quarterback position the next month and helped Washington reach the playoffs for the first time since 2015, earning the NFL's Comeback Player of the Year award.

In another season, his statistics might have been relatively unremarkable. But now, the numbers weren't the point. Seeing Smith stand behind the offensive line was a feat in itself.

Basketball star Klay Thompson's comeback followed a similarly devastating, slightly less life-threatening, path. As a central member of the Golden State Warriors dynasty, Thompson helped lead the team to three NBA championships and became one of the league's most dangerous shooters in the mid-2010s.

Then, during the 2019 NBA Finals, Thompson tore his ACL. Just as he was preparing to return from that injury, he ruptured his Achilles tendon in November 2020. After more than a year of intensive physical therapy, Thompson suddenly found himself back at the starting line of recovery.

By the time he returned to the court on Jan. 9, 2022, he had missed 941 days of NBA basketball. The Warriors, once nearly unbeatable, had missed the playoffs in two consecutive seasons. Their dynasty appeared to be fading, and Thompson's future remained uncertain.

Five months after his return, the Warriors were NBA champions.

What makes these stories so compelling is not simply that all three athletes recovered from devastating injuries. Professional athletes rebound after medical crises all the time. What separates these three cases is the severity of their conditions and the excellence of their rebounds; each defied expectations despite the odds stacked against them.

These comeback stories extend beyond the course, field, or court. Sports fans are accustomed to watching athletes do things ordinary people cannot. We admire their speed, strength, talent, and physical abilities precisely because they seem so far removed from our own. However, injury humanizes these individuals. Suddenly, the world's greatest competitors are confronting the same physical limitations, fears, and uncertainties as everyone else.

Perhaps that is why Woods, Smith, and Thompson's journeys resonate so deeply. They offer something that even the most dominant championship performance cannot: the chance to watch someone who has already lost nearly everything find a way to win again.

"In the NFL, a league defined by its physical brutality and constant risk of injury, quarterback Alex Smith defied both medical odds and public expectations."

"What separates these three cases is the severity of their conditions and the excellence of their rebounds; each defied expectations despite the odds stacked against them."

Adin Hootnick '29 (ahootnick@college.harvard.edu) believes in second chances.

Graphic by Mia Stewart '29

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