



# The Spectator

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*"The Pulse of the Student Body"*

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## SCIENCE You're Not Alone: Zoom Fatigue Is Real

Science writer Riona Anvekar explains the scientific basis behind "Zoom Fatigue," and the complex calculations that our brains make every day in a remote setting.

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## HUMOR Frog and Toad: Where are They Now?

Humor writer Krista Proteasa catches up with classic children's book characters Frog and Toad, and reveals what they've been up to since their time in the limelight.

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## The Show Must Go On(online)

By **SAKURA YAMANAKA, MAGGIE SANSONE, JAMES KANG, and EZRA LEE**

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, SING! will be hosted virtually this year. Due to the uncertainty of the spring semester, SING! will be operating on a later timeline compared to that of previous years. Though the three show dates are traditionally in mid-March, the virtual performances will be later in the year. With the recording process starting in April, the anticipated livestream date will be in June to accommodate the logistics of the large production. There will also be no dues or ticket fees collected.

SING! is an annual school-wide student-run musical competition in which each grade competes against the others (with the exception of freshmen and sophomores, who compete together as SophFrosh SING!). The crux of SING! preparation is similar to that of past years, but with modifications. In an in-person school year, SING! preparation starts in mid-January, and coordinators, slate producers, scriptwriters, songwriters, crew directors, and crew members are all often chosen by late January. From there,

there are tryouts, learning days, and practices. Because of the later timeline, current crew rosters are being finalized through February. All meetings and SING! events are scheduled to be completely online, and platforms such as Zoom and Flipgrid will be used.

In addition, all participants

given point deductions if rules are broken. "The biggest COVID-19 guideline we have in place is that SING! members cannot physically meet up to rehearse or record for SING!. With rehearsals, recordings, and writing done at home, we've been able to circumvent having an extensive

or live audition. "It is the people who would be hired in a normal SING! season that possess the skill set to not only run an efficient crew but also adapt to the new format and the new circumstances that we have to deal with to ensure that the production is just as good as any other year, if

day after school. However, virtually, we don't have this luxury, and we'd like to accommodate the altered schedules of many SING! members," Kronman said. "This has proved quite challenging, as Slate has to manage the many, different-paced schedules of crews."

In light of the changes, coordinators hope to preserve the SING! atmosphere while still upholding safety. While they are preserving the majority of artistic or production-specific elements, there will be an editing crew to each SING! production. Other crews, such as Tech and Lights & Sound, will be modified by merging with other crews to adapt to the virtual setting. "The most important thing about maintaining the feel of a normal SING! season is that sense of community and unity. The reason that people keep coming back to SING! year after year is that this is what introduced them to so many of their closest friends," Shafran said.

This year, there will be no dues collected. Instead, all money will be raised through external fundraising. In addition to a



Courtesy of Lianne Ohayon

Courtesy of Alec Shafran

Courtesy of Liam Kronman

will be held accountable to the COVID-19 guidelines set by Coordinator of Student Affairs Matthew Polazzo and coordinators Lianne Ohayon, Alec Shafran, and Liam Kronman of SophFrosh SING!, Junior SING!, and Senior SING!, respectively. The respective SING! team(s) will be

policy for how meet-ups will occur," Kronman said in an e-mail interview.

Drawing on their ability to adapt to the virtual setting, crew directors will have the freedom to decide the audition process for their respective crews, be it through a Google Form/Flipgrid

not better," Shafran said in an e-mail interview. Rehearsals will be conducted over Zoom or other video-streaming platforms.

However, this flexibility is also a challenge in regards to scheduling. "At school, SING! members would claim whole floors, and rehearsals would happen every

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## NEWSBEAT

Senior **Katerina Corr** will be the **New York representative** at the virtual **U.S. Senate Youth Conference**.

Seniors **Ian Saint-Germain** and **Isabella Lee** participated in the **Songwriters Hall of Fame Master Session**.

Stuyvesant's Ethics Team ranked **third** out of 40 teams in the **Long Island High School Ethics Bowl**.

Sophomore **Yihan Bao** placed **second** in the annual **Nengajo Contest** hosted by the **American Association of Teachers of Japanese**.

**Huge Ma ('07)**, a software engineer at Airbnb, launched **TurboVax**, a free website that compiles **vaccine availability** from three main city and state systems in New York and sends updated information to Twitter.

## StuySquad Hosts Annual Performance Virtually

By **JESS ZHANG, SARAH HUYNH, JANNA WANG, and JAMES KANG**

StuySquad, Stuyvesant's largest annual dance showcase, was hosted virtually for the first time on February 1 and streamed live on YouTube. This year, practices were conducted over Zoom, evaluations were conducted over Flipgrid, and there were no member dues. Currently, the streamed show is available for viewing on StuySquad's YouTube channel.

StuySquad consisted of 13 dance crews: Co-ed K-Pop, Belly, Tap, Boys Hip-Hop, Bollywood, Flow, Girls Hip-Hop, Latin, C-Pop, Contemporary, Step, and Girls K-Pop. Traditionally, StuySquad auditions, learning days, practices, rehearsals, and performances are all held in-person. The StuySquad presidents select board members and crew directors through an interview process; directors would then hold learning days, during which they teach the audition dance to recruit members for their respective crews. The members would then choose their dance pieces and directors would teach the choreography to the dancers.

The StuySquad Board decided to make the show virtual in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. "There was a very big learning curve when we started and

some uncertainties about how we wanted to proceed with the show this year," senior and StuySquad Co-President Elizabeth Tang said. "Originally we were planning on having people film in a studio so everyone could film it together, but that didn't pan out."



Sasha Scovellow / The Spectator

To monitor the progress of dancers learning choreography through Zoom, directors used multiple platforms for check-ins. "Dance is a very fluid action and in order for me to teach and monitor my crew's progress, I'd need to see them in person and how they use the space around them," senior and StuySquad Co-President Roshni Patel said. "To get through [...] these challenges,

we [...] [used] Edpuzzle video submissions for all members to make sure they were on track and having all crews edit their videos."

In addition to teaching and dancing over Zoom, there was a major shift to video editing this

show, directors were required to edit their respective crew's videos. Senior and StuySquad Director of Logistics Athena Lam and Sophia Lin then assembled each crew's video to produce the show. "There was a big learning curve figuring out the best ways to teach over Zoom and edit," Lam said. "It was a fun learning process because it took a lot of trial and error trying to think of a new solution to figure out a problem and how to approach it. It was a really nice learning experience to figure things out as a group."

Adjusting to the new environment, video editing also presented new challenges. "It was really time-consuming to sync all the members to the music and required a lot of brainpower to incorporate formations in a virtual setting," Xinlei Lin said in an e-mail interview.

Though communication became more difficult, it remained a priority for members. "Some challenges I faced in preparation for the show were making sure that everyone was communicating and on top of their responsibilities, which was especially important when we couldn't see each other in person and our only way of communicating be-

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In piecing together the virtual

# News

## The Show Must Go On(ine)

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predetermined budget from the Student Union (SU) and a donation from the Parent Association (PA), individual SING! donations will be done through the PA's Giving Tree website. All fund-raised money will be distributed among the three SING! teams evenly.

The SU, which historically plays a large role in the SING! production, will be preparing for livestream services instead of planning for ticket distribution. Tickets this year will also be free of charge. "[SING!] goes into a lot of the funding that we provide for clubs and events we host. This year we want to be especially aware of the situations that students and families are going through and we want to make SING! a cost-free thing. We want this tradition to be something ev-

eryone can participate in," senior and Student Union President Julian Giordiano said.

Compared to last year, this year's SING! will require less of an administrative role from teachers and staff members. "To a certain degree, there is less of an administrative role because a lot of what administrators need to do with SING! was over-perceived with the logistics of actually holding physical rehearsals and performance in the physical states of Stuy," Polazzo said. "Making sure that the kids were reporting themselves properly and not spilling out of their assigned rooms and getting security to watch over the hallways—the fact that everything is happening in the students' homes reduces the need for a lot of administrative stuff."

Additionally, there have been no changes to the SING! charter other than the ones needed to

adapt SING! to a virtual setting. "The essential elements of SING! are basically still the same," Polazzo said. Judging, which consists of 30 alumni judges, will remain.

Despite the virtual setting, many are hopeful for the continual engagement in SING! "It can be easy to undermine a performance that's completely virtual, but it's really important to recognize that this is going to be a really historical SING!, and we want students to recognize that and get excited for the production that we're hoping to create," junior and SU Vice President Shivali Korgaonkar said.

Coordinators themselves are optimistic about the final product. "I'm a little concerned about the uncertainty surrounding some aspects of the production, but that has been the case with all productions I've been involved with at Stuy. It always works out," Ohayon said.



Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and NASA

### WORLDBEAT

The **Biden Administration** formally offered to **restore** the **Iran nuclear deal**, which was abandoned by the Trump administration.

**Democratic lawmakers** sought to **strip New York Governor Andrew Cuomo** of **emergency powers** granted during the pandemic after he **underreported** the number of deaths in nursing homes.

**Emma Coronel Aispuro**, the wife of **Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán**, was **arrested** and charged with helping run the **Sinaloa drug trafficking empire**.

**Former President Donald Trump's** accountants handed over his **financial records** to New York **prosecutors**.

The **unemployment rate** in January 2021, which is 6.7 percent, is about **double** that of February 2020.

Nine members of **Oath Keepers**, a right-wing militia group, were **charged** for their plot to storm the **Capitol**.

## StuySquad Hosts Annual Performance Virtually

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came heavily dependent on the internet," senior and Director of Coed K-Pop Xinlei Lin said.

Many also expressed the challenge of teaching choreography online and additional technological difficulties. "Zoom lag was a really big issue because the directors couldn't tell if the dancers actually didn't know the steps, didn't know the timing, or Zoom was just messing it up for them. Plus, teaching counts is [already] extremely difficult in real life, so virtually, it was even harder," sophomore Isabella Chow said. "However, eventually we, as a crew, were able to get it down."

Senior Zi Liu performed in both the virtual SOS dance show last year and the virtual StuySquad show and found the two experiences to be similar. "The performance/practice process was more or less anticipated since we had the same virtual experience doing SOS last year. However, I definitely do think that StuySquad was much more organized and that the crew was able to better plan out logistics with each member," Liu said in an e-mail interview.

Chow found the new experi-

ence of doing solo-dancing due to the virtual setting as a refreshing change. "Performance-wise, I had a great time doing solo choreo. Normally we would be doing partner work in real life, but because we're virtual we couldn't do that and instead turned to dancing by ourselves," she said. "It gave me a chance to dance independently and not be hindered by my partner. I was able to get direct feedback on my dancing and grow as a dancer overall."

Junior William Mo, who was in the Boys Hip-hop and Co-ed K-Pop crew agreed: "While I miss being able to actually be with the people I was dancing with, it was still great seeing everyone have fun on my laptop screen," Mo said. "StuySquad kinda felt more serious since there was less fooling around over Zoom practices than during in-person practices."

For freshman Lorraine Li, a highlight of her first StuySquad experience was unique costumes used for her Bollywood crew. "My favorite aspect [of the show] were the costumes we had. Lehengas and dupattas [popular forms of Indian ethnic clothing] were a part of our costume and I had never worn them before since it's not a part of my

culture," she said in an e-mail interview. "I wasn't exactly sure how to wear [the dupatta] [...] but my directors [taught] me how to wear and pin it to the rest of my costume."

The StuySquad virtual showcase received a positive response from the broader community. "There were a lot of supportive comments from fellow StuySquad crew members, alumni, and people from outside the school. It's very nice to see that even though we're so distant, the support and community [are] still very much alive," Melody Lin said.

However, some viewers expressed that a virtually-streamed show could not replicate the sense of community felt during an in-person show. "While the dance and choreography [are] great both in-person and remote, I think that watching in-person shows allowed it to feel like a community. I think the cheering from the audience added extra spice to the show, and when [the show] is through a computer screen, that extra spice is missing," sophomore Ruby Lin said in an e-mail interview.

Despite this, many dance crew performers found the virtual product to be rewarding.

"My favorite part of the show was seeing it all together. I'm really proud of how it all looked in the end, and the editing, I know it was really hard, but seeing everything come together was really worth it," sophomore Anjini Katar said. "Despite the challenges, I had a lot of fun learning, performing, and getting to know the others."

Though there were major adjustments made to implement a virtual show, many viewed StuySquad as a positive experience. "[StuySquad was a] very enjoyable experience outside of

school that allowed me to explore different types of dance and get out of my comfort zone [...] I'd definitely do this again next year and try out for more crews," Li said.

Tang echoed this sentiment. "Everyone who does StuySquad has a passion for dance or at least a very strong interest in dance and I feel like that hasn't changed just because we're on a different platform. Everyone who showed up to tryouts and auditions [was] there because they understood that StuySquad is a community and a close-knit family," she said.

## Students Share Thoughts on CR Option

By THE NEWS and FEATURES DEPARTMENTS

"CR [...] is kinda dishonest to whoever is viewing the grades. [...] I personally haven't CRed yet because I have to be honest with myself and see if I have improved or not. I want to be honest to my parents and my colleges, so that's why, even if I have a bad grade, I wouldn't CR that." —Manhai Liu, freshman

"I CR'd my computer science grade this past semester. I did it because I didn't do as well as I wanted in the subject, and it would seriously bring down my average even though it was a class I did not intend to continue. Were it a core class, I would not have CR'd it. I know that I have been worried that colleges would take a CR as an automatic 65, which is why even though I didn't love my math grade, I left it alone." —Maya Brosnick, sophomore

"The system does have [its] benefits though and I hope that it'll help students who have extenuating circumstances due to COVID-19 and need the extra boost from CRing their grades. Hopefully, colleges will be understanding of the current circumstances and they'll be willing to give students a break and not look too harshly at students that CR some grades." —Joshua Yagupsky, junior

"I used the CR option once for a grade below 90 in the 2020 spring semester because I had a lot of difficulties studying for that subject as we transitioned to online learning and the grade would've impacted my GPA a lot." —Anonymous, senior

"The CR system is necessary, but an attached note explaining personal circumstances is probably more important [...] It's necessary as long as we have remote learning, but once we're all back in school full time it should be done away with [...] It takes some of the pressure off, but at the same time, that might lead students to miss their own expectations." —Maximillian Farrell, senior

"I, personally, even though I'm not super happy with my grades, have not chosen to use CR, just because I think I'd rather try to explain this to colleges than just not have it count toward my grade [...] I don't want to completely not have a class grade just to have my average be slightly higher, so that's just personally for me, but if students need to use it, then that's definitely fine for them." —Olivia Zheng, sophomore

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## Features

## Family, Food, and Festivities: Lunar New Year Despite a Pandemic

By **SABRINA LI, SOOBIN CHOI** and **ZIFEI ZHAO**

Firecrackers pop in the distance as happy voices trail from the dinner table. The TV is blaring songs and flashing dances. And the smell of delicious food drifts through the house, creating a bubbly atmosphere that salutes the arrival of spring and the New Year.

Lunar New Year as we know it today was created based on the Lunar Chinese calendar, as well as the appearance of the full moon between January and February. But beyond being just a way for people to tell the time, Lunar New Year has become a holiday for celebrating family and traditions and has spread to many countries throughout Asia. This year, February 12 marked the beginning of Lunar New Year. It is a day that many Asian Americans at Stuyvesant use to celebrate their heritage with family, food, and festivities.

A large number of Asian Americans have either rarely, or never visited their home country, a pattern that is only exacerbated by the pandemic. Junior Alyssa Choi detailed what celebrating was like in quarantine: “This year I didn’t really have a celebration because all my family, like my grandparents, are in Korea,” she said. However, in the past, the celebration was grand. “My oldest memory [of celebrating] is in kindergarten, because I used to live in Korea when I was in kindergarten. Every Lunar New Year we would just have this really big celebration with all the traditional foods, and then my cousins and I would dress up in hanbok, and then we would bow down to my grandparents, and they would give us money and stuff,” she said.

The Korean Lunar New Year morning starts off with a savory scent filling the air. The table is not set yet, and there is a huge pot filled with *Tteokguk* prepared the night before. *Tteokguk*, a rice cake soup eaten with egg garnish, is an essential food to the Korean tradition. To Choi, it’s what makes the New Year special in the first place. “[Lunar New Year] is definitely special, especially in Korean tradition [...] because in Korea it means you turn a year older,” she said.

Meanwhile, Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations typically last a little over a week, but on Lunar New Year Eve, families get together and have a huge feast. Some might even watch special performances to start the new year off in a positive way. Sophomore Gil Zheng would usually celebrate with many relatives and eat lots of different foods. “I usually invite some relatives over and we eat hot pot or rice with a lot of other side dishes. And we watch TV afterward, something called the CCTV Spring Festival Gala where there’s a conference or festival that occurs in China that

we just watch,” he said. “We eat *nían gāo* and eggs—a lot of eggs, boiled eggs.”

Similar to Chinese New Year, due to their large Chinese community, Malaysia and Singapore [celebrate](#) Lunar New Year with overlapping traditions. In the streets of Malaysia, there are often dragon dances and big feasts with traditional Chinese foods; in Singapore, there is *hóng bāo*, or red envelopes, decorating the streets with fortune.

Tibet also celebrates Lunar New Year with a different name: [the Losar Festival](#). Two days before the actual New Year, Tibetans eat *Guthuk*, which would be filled with wool, coal, or any number of things.



Courtesy of Alyssa Choi

In Vietnam, the celebration is known as *Tet*, and it can’t be celebrated without the essential *chung cakes*. These are made out of sticky rice, green beans, and pork, in a shape that symbolizes the Earth and are used to show gratitude to their ancestors and homeland.

Yet many normal festivities this year were canceled due to COVID-19. “We usually watch the dragon dance in Flushing or Chinatown, but this year we didn’t go,” Zheng said. “I definitely got less money this year because not as many people could visit.”

Similar to Zheng, freshman Unique Zhang didn’t participate in the normal festivities. “I don’t want to say that it lost its meaning, but it certainly has a different feel. I didn’t go to church and see the big dragon dance and whatnot,” she said. But though this year’s celebration wasn’t quite what she expected, Zhang just appreciates spending time with her loved ones. “[Lunar New Year] is just for me to be with my family honestly, cause I don’t really expect many *hóng bāo* anymore, so it’s okay. I don’t mind,” she explained.

But Zhang also reminisced about her prior celebrations that were full of festivities. “I remember distinctly waking up and [hearing] the chatter from downstairs or from another room and it [felt] like a dream,”

she said. “I would go to church and we’d have this whole little festival, a little celebration. And they had dancing dragons and whatnot. I would get scared that the dragon would bite my hand off,” she said. She also recalls the bag of colorful chips she received from her grandmother as a child. “I don’t know what they are, what they’re called, but I remembered I had [a] specific bias toward the green and the pink one. [...] It just sucks the living daylight out of your tongue,” she said.

Sophomore Ryan Lee shared a similar experience. In an e-mail interview, Lee wrote: “My family always has this tradition of having a large dinner with tons of extended family, with so many amazing dishes you’d get

this year we just made dumplings and *fā gāo* [a type of muffin],” she explained. “It was a very small gathering [at my home but] I don’t think that really degraded my experience for Chinese New Year. I think the feeling still stayed the same even if it wasn’t a lot of people,” Jia continued. She went on to reminisce her favorite memory from a typical Lunar New Year gathering: “[When] my parents and relatives were all done playing mahjong and the pieces were all messed up, my cousins [and I] would just go and pretend we were playing the game, such as stacking the mahjong piece, even though we didn’t know what we were doing and just pretending to play.”

Beyond just food and festi-



Courtesy of Alyssa Choi

to eat once a year.” Lee especially loves how each dish represented different attributes of luck for the coming year. *Pén cài*, a Chinese casserole mixed with abalone, shrimp, and pig’s feet, represents unity and teamwork, while *yī miàn*, or longevity noodles, is said to bring long life.

In addition to food, Lee also celebrates the holiday with a praying ritual to connect with his ancestors and spirits. “We would pray to pictures of them with a table filled with food for the spirits to eat, and after that, we would get a large pot and start burning fake money and other ceremonial items as a way to wish us and the spirits of our ancestors good fortune,” he explained.

Lee also faced differences in his celebration due to the pandemic. “Usually we’d have over 30 people over with hundreds and if not a couple thousand dollars worth of food for everyone, but this year it was just eating takeout,” Lee said. “In addition, the rituals we’d usually perform just didn’t happen, and we weren’t able to go to the temple because they had closed because of the coronavirus.”

Still, despite the pandemic, sophomore Isabella Jia felt that she still had a meaningful time with her family. “Usually I would visit our relatives’ house and make barbeque pork called *chā shāo* and all that stuff but

Lunar New Year is a way for Asian Americans to connect back to their roots. Many Asian American students often feel disconnected from their heritage, but Lunar New Year provides a way for many students to embrace both sides of the story by celebrating their Asian ancestry in America.

Choi lived in Korea for a few years as a child, but she still misses being fully immersed in Korean culture. “In some ways my culture kind of diminished, and I miss being able to live in Korea and be surrounded by my family,” she said. “In the end, I don’t feel less Korean, but I still wish I was closer to my culture and family.” While Choi does feel nervous to take on the pressure of continuing a tradition, she wholeheartedly still wants to. “I don’t know if I could hold a whole tradition. But when I become an adult, if I have kids, I definitely want to pass down this tradition and celebrate with my mom when she becomes my kids’ grandparent and celebrate with my whole family and relatives.”

Similar to Choi, Zhang felt that she could strive to better understand her Lunar New Year culture. “I don’t know really the actual tradition, all I know is that I get *hóng bāo* and I get dragons dancing, [and] I get to see my family, but I don’t really understand the true meaning of Lunar New Year,”

she explained. “But I enjoy celebrating it and that’s all that really matters. And I look forward to more.”

Zhang also enthusiastically added that she would still celebrate Lunar New Year for years to come. “I don’t want to be whitewashed. [...] I don’t want to be so American,” she said. Zhang’s Asian identity is a large reason why she wants to continue the tradition. “I’m Asian, I want to be proud of being Asian. And that is one good step toward it. And I don’t want to teach my [future] kids like, ‘oh, Chinese New Year is [only] all about *hóng bāo*,’” she added.

Zheng also feels strongly about continuing to celebrate Lunar New Year: “My parents aren’t really religious [and] we don’t celebrate Christmas or anything, but we still celebrate Chinese New Year like it’s a religion.” He added that he would continue to celebrate. “Of course, I’ll definitely make my future generations do the same stuff that we do now,” he said.

Alternatively, Lee feels that Lunar New Year helps him explore his identity. Lee comes from a third-generation immigrant family and at times feels incredibly Americanized; the holiday is a way to reconnect with his heritage. “I can speak Chinese and eat the dishes my grandma makes me, but it doesn’t really substitute all that well,” he said. “When the New Year comes, that’s when I really get to see a lot of my heritage. I get immersed in these traditions and get to know myself and my identity to its fullest extent.” Lee also expressed a similar interest in sharing this holiday with future generations: “I want to see my future kids have the same joy that I have and had. This holiday is extremely important to me because it’s a way I can see family and friends and have a good time while also exploring and celebrating my heritage.”

Beyond identity, Jia sees the Lunar New Year as a way to connect and honor her ancestors. “Recently, my grandpa passed away and it definitely helps with remembering him better. And ever since I was young, it was a holiday I looked forward to because my relatives are always working and everything and it was just a chance for us to come together and just enjoy each other’s embrace,” she said. For Jia, the holiday is a living memory.

Especially in the pandemic, and with the recent surge in Anti-Asian violence, the Lunar New Year not only provides solace to Asian tradition, but also celebrates the existence of Asians and their culture in America. As a considerable number of students at Stuyvesant are Asian, Lunar New Year is a meaningful and important holiday for family, food, and festivities—all despite the pandemic.

## A Gaze On Stuy’s Virtual Grades

By **MILLIE BELL, OLIVIA WOO, JUNI PARK, ANDREW OH** and **EUGENE YOO**

The continuation of remote learning through the fall and winter of the 2020-2021 school year has caused many Stuyvesant students to notice

significant changes in their GPAs. Whether they have had more time to study due to the elimination of commutes and shorter schedules, or else have found it difficult to focus in a home environment, some students’ grades have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, stu-

dents are forced to reevaluate their relationship with schoolwork.

For many, the pressures of online learning have become burdensome to students’ GPAs. Senior Chloe Terestchenko described the effect of online learning fatigue on declining grades: “I think it’s been really

exhausting having Zoom six hours a day and having a lot of homework after. I’ve talked to a lot of friends and everyone’s been mentioning how it feels like after a whole day of school online on a computer, we have all our homework again on a computer, and I think that’s where it gets really exhausting.”

A significant increase in the amount of at-home work given at Stuyvesant this year was also a contributing factor to the decline of some students’ grades. Many teachers placed a large emphasis on homework, and students observed that this

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## Features

# SETSS up for Success: Learning Differences During Remote Learning

By **DALIA LEVANON,**  
**CATHERINE CHING,**  
**ISABELLE YAREMENKO**  
and **ELLEN PEHLIVANIAN**

Remote learning has been challenging for all Stuyvesant students, but dealing with a learning difference on top of other pandemic pains can make COVID-19 schooling even more taxing. However, despite the extenuating circumstances, these students have made the best out of their situation, and continue to remain hopeful and optimistic about pandemic-era learning.

One student, who wished to remain anonymous, explains that their learning differences haven't made much of an impact on their remote learning experience, and the only real difference lies in their experience in remote Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) class in comparison to pre-pandemic SETSS classes. "Class periods [pre-pandemic] were normally spent on laid-back conversations about what was going on in the world and in our lives," they explained. The student further excitedly recounted that they even got to leave their spring session of SETSS with a new guitar hobby. However, in a remote setting, the class has become more structured, with planned lessons, videos, and discussion questions in place of free flowing conversation. The anonymous student couldn't help but miss in-person SETSS class: "By far the most useful aspect of SETSS inside the school was access to a room in which students could work quietly and productively, and unsurprisingly, we no longer had access to that room when Stuyvesant closed," they explained.

Another anonymous student, Student B, admitted that their remote learning experience has been more of a challenge, underscoring the difference in signals and communication from in-person to remote environments. In regular classes, students might be able to give their teachers non-verbal cues, like a cough when the teacher is going too fast. However, in Zoom classes it is nearly impossible to judge these same cues from students. Moreover, Student B explained, "It's also harder to have the same 'flow' of discussion as you can in real life."

It is not only the flow of discussions that has been interrupted. There has also been a disruption to social flow. Student C, a freshman, described in an email interview that one of the greatest challenges of remote learning has been the cultivation of friendships. "Probably the worst part of remote learning is the lack of meeting new people, so only your friends from middle school are reachable," they said. This is an issue that countless freshmen,

not just those with learning differences, experienced this year. Many ninth graders did not know anyone when they entered Stuyvesant, leading to intense isolation. Although the Student Union and Big Sibs have made tremendous efforts to increase socialization by hosting "speed-friending nights" and "home-room mix and matches," making friends on Zoom is simply not the same as meeting people in person.

Benjamin Ho, a junior on the autism spectrum, also mentioned how his relationships evolved due to remote learning. Since he was rarely able to see his friends outside of school during in-person classes, Ho didn't feel that there was much of a difference when he switched to quarantine. However, he found that he has been redefining some of his friendships during quarantine, saying in an email interview that "Some have been really supportive during these hard times, while others have revealed themselves to be 'fair-weather friends.'" Ho explained that his remote learning experience has generally been positive because of the support and understanding that he receives from his teachers and guidance counselor. In addition, Ho has found that he doesn't have a difficult time concentrating on his work regardless of the fact that he has to sit in front of a computer all day long. Ho reinforced the

fact that autism is a huge spectrum, and that he can't speak to anybody's experience but his own. "Each person with autism will react differently to a situation, including the one we are all in right now," he explained. "So while I am doing well with remote learning, another person with autism in Stuy may be having a really bad time."

In this vein, an anonymous junior with a learning difference reported that she was facing immense difficulties in the virtual classroom. She described how, during in-school lessons, she was able to stay concentrated and interested in her classes because she took medication in the mornings. However, getting homework done after school was always a struggle. And now that so much of school is homework—work done at home—learning has become a struggle. She explained, "Without structure, I have a hard time getting things done. I always do well while I'm in class. I pay attention, I participate, I enjoy working, but I have struggled with homework." In addition to the difficulties of staying motivated and on top of the assigned work, a few of her teachers have been less than understanding about her learning differences, claiming that she shouldn't get accommodations, such as getting extra time for tests, because the teachers believe that they give enough time for all students to

complete their work.

Fortunately, there are also some teachers who are supportive and accommodating. Among them is Michael Waxman, the teacher of the SETSS class. Waxman strives to assist his students as much as possible, and finds it rewarding to see their progress over the years. One girl, whom he had taught for the past four years, recently asked him for a recommendation letter. "When I asked her why she asked me, for example, she alluded to the fact that I know her best since I have continuously worked with her throughout her high school years," Waxman said. "Just one example. There are many others."

Many students with learning difficulties are fortunately seeking out the good in remote learning, and continuing to take steps to better their learning experiences. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the challenges of going through the COVID-19 pandemic with a learning difference, and help other students and teachers become aware of these struggles. One can never be sure if a peer has an added challenge, so it is imperative to support everyone in the Stuyvesant community. As Waxman reminds us, assisting students with learning differences may not only change their lives, but also be incredibly rewarding for the supporter.

## Students Share Thoughts on CR Option

"The CR option is really helpful because it takes all of our situations into account. We can't learn as much [...] by looking at a computer screen compared to being in a classroom so we might receive grades that we think are low and unsatisfactory. CRing grades allow us to hide grades that don't show our full capability, which prevents our overall GPA from going down."

—Jasmine Shek, sophomore

"People are afraid to CR in the first place [...] Most people aren't abusing the system. There's a general fear that colleges might look at it negatively, so people aren't trying to abuse."

—Mahin Shahrier, junior

"Neither good or bad feelings; I know I will never use it since I'm positive I'll keep all my class averages above 85s, but I guess it's a good option for people who do want to use it."

—Freda Dong, freshman

"It's a nice option for those who wish to use it."

—Edward Wu, junior

"It seems pretty good to me, but everyone's saying how colleges will assume the worst about the grade that you kept off your transcript."

—Sasha Burshteyn, junior

"It's a great option for students whose grades are not consistent with their performance pre-COVID. I think colleges will show sympathy for those students since everyone has different circumstances, especially during this difficult time."

—Marilyn Shi, sophomore

"It's a good way of compensating for hardships that students are going through that might reflect on their grades, but there should be more clarification from counselors about how colleges view CR because while some people are scared to use it in case colleges assume they got a 65 in the class, others are using CR for grades which are perfectly fine, just not up to their high standards."

—Riona Anvekar, junior

"CRing a grade is a good thing [in] these challenging times. I personally would not use a CR unless I have below an 80."

—Ariel Fuchs, Sophomore

"Changing grades to a CR are up to the person and their standards, but I personally wouldn't do it, especially if my grades aren't close to failing."

—Kaitlin Tan, freshman

"I don't know much about it and I have never used it, but I always appreciate that the option is there."

—Yarza Aung, freshman

"I've never CR'd a grade but I think it's nice that people have to choose to do so if they want to."

—Vicky Liu, Junior

"CR is cool, but I'm confused as to how they're gonna determine GPAs [for those who CR]. What if one kid CR'd everything but his 100s and then becomes valedictorian—what do you do then?"

—Anonymous, Junior

"For the people unfortunate enough to have to balance school and familial issues, the CR option is a good way for them to not worry about seeming like they're slacking in school because their grades are dropping, especially if they're still trying their best."

—Sydney Lau, sophomore

"The CR option is really helpful because it takes all of our situations into account. We can't learn as much [...] by looking at a computer screen compared to being in a classroom so we might receive grades that we think are low and unsatisfactory. CRing grades allow us to hide grades that don't show our full capability, which prevents our overall GPA from going down."

—Jasmine Shek, sophomore

"CR is a really good option for people who need it and I think it's not fair to judge other people who might really need that option."

—Bella Rosen, freshman

"It is good that Stuyvesant gives students the option to choose to CR a grade. There are pros and cons to CRing, and it honestly comes down to the person on whether or not they think it is right for them. But overall, I am glad that it is there"

—Jason Wang, junior

## Food for Thought

By **ARIANA DEVITO**  
and **ISABELLA JIA**

Individuals around the world are converting to plant-based eating at unprecedented rates, but why exactly are people revamping their diets? Some simply seek longevity and better health. Others advocate for sustainability and ethics. The many benefits behind a plant-based diet are gaining momentum, with Gen Z championing what it means to be meat-free. Vegetarianism and veganism have expanded from just a diet plan into an outright protest against the growing factory farm industry. Regardless of their reasons, people are making an impact on society and the world from their dinner plates.

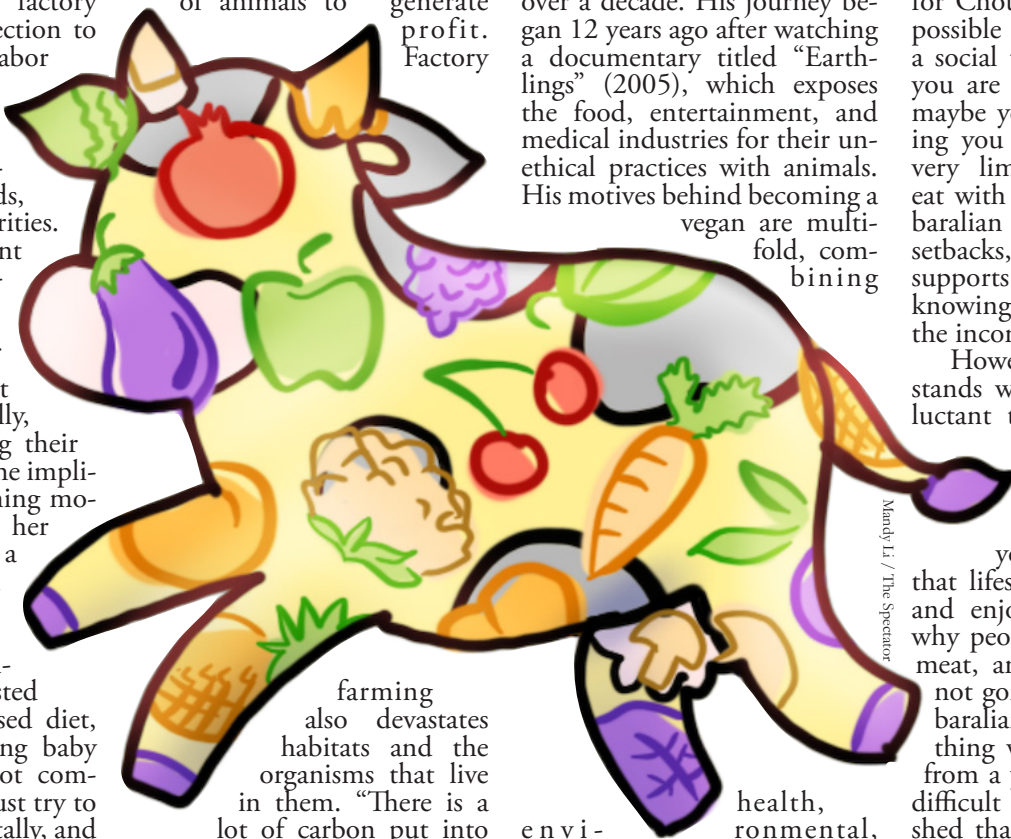
For senior Roshni Patel, vegetarianism has been a lifestyle adopted since birth due to her Hindu background. Though her faith permits the consumption of non-cow-derived meats, Patel and her parents have abstained from animal consumption entirely. “I grew up a vegetarian, so it was the easiest thing for me to continue doing,” Patel explained. While Patel has diligently stayed true to her words, restaurants are not always accommodating. She reports having to frequently preview a restaurant’s menu in advance for vegetarian options. However, Patel does recognize the growing inclusivity in the food industry. “I think since veganism and vegetarianism have been more popularized by the media and celebrities especially, it has changed,” she said.

Sophomore Shivani Shah has also been a vegetarian since a relatively young age. Her vegetarian lifestyle started when she was five years old after her mom influenced her to become one. Religion also contributed to Shah’s decision, but the change was mainly due to her mother also being vegetarian. “My mom saw me eat 15 chicken nuggets in one round when I was five, and she was startled and was like ‘let me just make Shivani vegetarian,’” Shah described. Shah also finds that being vegetarian helps her indecisiveness with food choices. “I’ve grown used to the fact that when I go to the restaurant I have two to three, or sometimes one choice on the menu, which is good for me because I’m indecisive,” Shah explained. However, despite this, she would still like to see more

variety in vegetarian meals at restaurants. “When I’m on a road trip and there are fast food restaurants, I’d rather get more choices,” she noted.

While Shah and Patel were influenced by religion and nurture, the environmental aspect is one of the leading reasons why so many young people are making the switch to plant-based diets. Stuyvesant’s Factory Farming Awareness Club (Stuy FFAC) promotes a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle by raising awareness of the issues brought about by factory farming. The club encourages people to choose healthier alternatives by having a plant-based diet in order to mitigate the detrimental effects of the consumption of meat. Stuy FFAC founder and co-president sophomore Lauren Lee was a protege of FFAC last fall when she learned about the effects of factory farming and its connection to other issues, such as labor exploitation. One key point she learned is that factory farms are usually located in low-income neighborhoods, populated by minorities. The few employment opportunities available to these minority groups are often traumatizing—much of the job entails constant slaughter. Additionally, wages are low, making their work easy to exploit. The implications of factory farming motivated Lee to change her dietary habits to make a difference, along with founding the FFAC chapter at Stuyvesant. For advice to others who may be interested in starting a plant-based diet, Lee recommends taking baby steps. “It’s okay to not completely go vegan, but just try to eat less meat incrementally, and be compassionate with yourself, knowing that it’s hard,” Lee suggested. Additionally, her secret tip to motivate others to become vegetarian is to watch the “[Dominion](#)” (2018) documentary on YouTube. The documentary captures the reality of factory farming and allows viewers to catch a glimpse of the brutality that factory animals experience. An animal abuse trigger warning should be acknowledged before you decide to watch the documentary. “If you watch [Dominion Academy](#) on YouTube, you’ll immediately go vegan,” she claimed.

Lauren Lee, alongside Olivia Zheng, Sarah Huynh, and Ziyang Jian, has chartered her own club called Green Garnish, affiliated with Stuy FFAC. Green Garnish is a student-operated, bi-monthly vegan cookbook. Through their recipes, the team strives to create a more just and sustainable food system. Passionate about the ecosystem and climate mitigation alike, the club founders have found that vegetarian eating aligned better with their morals. “Animals use a lot of resources to grow and then [go] to slaughter. Animals like cows produce a lot of methane, and that’s really worsening our climate change crisis,” co-president Olivia Zheng said. The demand for animal products pressures the meat and dairy industries into factory farming, a system that confines copious numbers of animals to generate profit.



factory farming also devastates habitats and the organisms that live in them. “There is a lot of carbon put into this process [...] the environmental impacts that we have on our world, and also for the people that live near the factory farms [...] that was absolutely horrible, and that’s a big part of why I don’t support it,” Stuy FFAC Vice President Sarah Huynh affirmed.

With all of these issues, it becomes evident that a transition toward a meat-free society is better for the biosphere as a whole, for humans and other animals alike. Though vegetarian and vegan diets are not always accessible and budget-friendly to the masses, it is only a matter of time before

prices on these food items are affordable for a larger percentage of the population. “When those of us can become vegan [or vegetarian], we are helping plant-based industries be able to make more cheap products, and this is going to benefit those who maybe aren’t in the financial situation to do so be able to transition,” Zheng explained. In other words, if the demand for plant-based products increases, the government may subsidize these products, widening the sector of the population who can sustain a meat-free lifestyle.

As they further their research, many of Stuy FFAC’s members have made the decision to go vegetarian. While some are new to vegetarianism, physical education teacher Vasken Choubaralian has maintained a vegan lifestyle for over a decade. His journey began 12 years ago after watching a documentary titled “[Earthlings](#)” (2005), which exposes the food, entertainment, and medical industries for their unethical practices with animals. His motives behind becoming a vegan are multi-fold, combining

health, environmental, and ethical factors. Choubaralian cited biomagnification, the accumulation of toxins higher up the food chain, as one of the leading health reasons. “It reduces the toxins that come into our body from all of the pesticides, antibiotics, and from the stress hormones released by these animals before they are killed. [...] I didn’t want to take this negativity into my body,” he articulated. Additionally, Choubaralian shared similar sentiments with the founders of Green Garnish regarding the environmental complications created by factory farming. “These include the

nitrogen that gets released into the water supply from all the wastes from the animals, the methane that gets released from the cows, and the cost of fuel and oil to ship and deliver all of this food and all of this meat across the country,” Choubaralian explained.

The meat industry is plaguing Earth’s natural landscape through the air and water, but it is taking a particular toll on rainforests, which are expected to vanish [completely](#) within the next century. Plant-based eating could help rescue rainforests and the animals that inhabit them from their impending extinction, and it is ultimately the variety of ecological advantages that inspire Choubaralian to continue his current diet, even if that means sacrificing taste. However, concerns about taste are minor inconveniences for Choubaralian compared to possible social drawbacks. “It’s a social thing, I think. Mostly you are out with friends, and maybe your friends start judging you perhaps [...] you are very limited where you can eat with your friends,” Choubaralian added. Despite these setbacks, Choubaralian still supports his vegetarian lifestyle, knowing the benefits outweigh the inconveniences.

However, he also understands why others may be reluctant to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, considering that most people have been eating meat since they were young. “Coming from that lifestyle where I ate meat and enjoyed it, I understand why people would want to eat meat, and it tastes good, I’m not going to deny it,” Choubaralian explained. “It’s something we’ve been exposed to from a young age. It becomes difficult when we get older to shed that because it’s been ingrained in us, within our identity. A lot of people continue to hold that conviction that they cannot see themselves not eating meat.”

The plant-based movement is catching on as people take charge of their own health and environment. Vegetarianism and veganism may not be possible for everyone, but for those looking to transition, Choubaralian offers a word of advice: “Do things gradually. Don’t try to just quit everything at once. Start slowly limiting the quantities, limiting the type of meat, and work your way up to being a full vegetarian or vegan.”

## A Gaze On Stuy’s Virtual Grades

*continued from page 3*

was fundamentally less effective than in-person instruction. Lack of engaging lesson plans ultimately leads to burnout and declining GPAs.

Despite their disheartening experience with remote learning, some students’ grades remain unchanged, and others even saw improvement. One student who noticed little to no change in his grades agrees that a large factor in his success is due to the newly shortened schedules in remote learning. “I can proportion what I want to do and I can focus more on one subject in one day,” freshman Zareen Islam said. She mentioned that her GPA never saw a drastic change, mostly due to

the new learning environment that she has gotten accustomed to. “They’ve stayed pretty constant,” Islam said when asked about her grades. “The classes are as I would expect, I mean all the classmates are different, but as for the learning experience itself, nothing is out of the ordinary.”

Freshman Maksim Iofinov has had similar experiences to Islam, finding that most of his classes were of a similar difficulty level to in-person school, and thus experiencing similar grades. He expressed that, despite the comparable difficulty of most classes, maintaining his grades has required effort: “It has required a lot of work, but then again, some classes more than others. I’ve been

trying to keep it consistent with my work and homework and all of that stuff. So it’s definitely required effort.”

Effort to maintain high grades can often come at the cost of students’ mental health. Terestchenko observed that she saw an increased amount of unhealthy idealization of overworked or burnt-out students at Stuyvesant. “Stuyvesant has always had a problem with the ‘Stuy mentality’ from both faculty and students, where there’s the idea of being really competitive, like ‘how little sleep can you get?’” she said. “There’s a negative aspect of that, and I think over quarantine people have started to realize that.” Terestchenko aspires to bring more attention to

this mental health issue in the hopes that students will start to regulate their grades in less harmful ways.

One way that freshman Rebecca Bao maintains a healthy relationship with schoolwork is by altering her work ethic and time management plans. In an email interview, Bao offers solace to students struggling with remote-learning: “For the first two marking periods, I was still getting used to the workload, tests, and which study methods would be the most effective for me. However, in the third marking period, I have established and gotten used to learning habits and time management skills [...] I saw a significant increase in my GPA at the end of the first semester.”

Learning from earlier marking periods to ascertain which courses require the most attention is a surefire way to show significant progress over the course of a school year.

Stuyvesant’s emphasis on grades has become even more noticeable during remote learning. Some students have found the shortened class schedules to be a relief when trying to maintain good grades, while others are exhausted from looking at screens for hours. In the end, regardless of students’ individual experiences with remote learning, most students agree that, especially in remote-learning, it is incredibly important to nurture a healthy school/life balance.

# Editorials

## Student-Teacher Relationships: Virtually Impossible?

Some facts about your teacher:

1. Lives indoors.
2. Lives somewhere with at least one wall and sits in front of it while on Zoom each day.
3. Owns multiple shirts.
4. Jackhammering means residing near a construction site. Yelping/barking/screaming means residing with children and/or dogs.
5. Knows as little about you as you know about them.

To know somebody on Zoom is to know them inside of a box. Specifically, it is to know them inside of a rectangular box with an often inaccurate name tag in the left-hand corner that the DOE does not trust you to change. It is within these boxes that students and teachers must attempt to get to know one another. Though we strive to conceptualize each other beyond our tiny camera-bound frames of reference, this effort has proven difficult. Many of the old teacher-student moves do not transfer well to Zoom. There is no hallway greeting holler because there is no hallway. There is no doorway dallying because there is no doorway. And there is no high-fiving your teacher because nobody can or wants to touch each other.

These bonds that students create with their teachers are integral to the Stuyvesant experience. Often, the best memories students have of a class are not of individual lessons or projects. Rather, it is the time they stayed a few minutes after the bell to ask a question or the small talk they had with their teachers when they arrived to class before the start bell. Seeing teachers as three-dimensional figures, rather than wells of knowledge or arbiters of grades, is necessary to foster comfort and interest in a classroom; for students, getting to know their teachers out-

side of a rigid class structure brings a sense of motivation to come to class, participate, and enjoy learning. Despite this, the shift to online learning has posed a great challenge to the development of these bonds. Students are no longer able to bump into their teachers in the hallway or have a short one-on-one conversation with them, aside from Zoom-mediated office hours. Throughout this school year, students and teachers alike have likely just seen each other's heads and shoulders.

Regardless, we live in a world in which the tangible results of these relationships are still expected. Given the ways in which the pandemic has affected students, holistic evaluation—the consideration of factors other than grades—becomes more important, intensifying the need for strong student-teacher relationships. Yet these relationships, particularly in junior year, are complicated, as students may be acting opportunistically in the hopes of securing a good recommendation letter, by staying after class to ask questions or obsessively completing extra credit opportunities. Though this attitude among students is hardly exclusive to our present online model, distance-learning complicates the dynamic regardless. There is no clear understanding of whether students should go out of their ways to perform and to appear enthusiastic, or if it is even possible to allow enthusiasm and academic excellence to emerge naturally, so that their letters of recommendation accurately reflect that. Furthermore, online learning restricts these relationships to mainly just academics. However, the strain of remote learning makes it tougher for teachers to thoroughly assess students and for students to demonstrate both their personal and academic qualities. Though some

may have viewed teachers as mere grading machines and recommendation writers prior to remote learning, online learning has blurred this image, making it highly difficult for even the enthusiastic to distinguish themselves meaningfully. Additionally, those who are more reserved in the classroom setting find it even more difficult to foster a relationship in the remote setting.

For students, the best way of mitigating the difficulties of strengthening a student-teacher relationship is to take advantage of the available methods of communication. Participating in classes makes it easier for teachers to recognize that a student is engaged and thinking critically. Emailing teachers about a lesson that day or with articles or book recommendations can provide necessary clarification and communicate a genuine interest in the subject. Office hours are another often underutilized opportunity to further flesh out one's understanding of the material while strengthening bonds.

On the flip side, teachers can build a relationship with students by allocating some time at the beginning of class for less academic and more personal conversations to learn more about their students. Some teachers have been holding optional meetings outside of class to get to know students better in a relaxed setting. Additionally, waiting until all students have left before ending a Zoom session could serve as the online equivalent of asking questions after class.

It is important to recognize that it is often impossible to fully replicate anything remotely, and student-teacher relationships are not an exception. Given the continued necessity of letters of recommendation, it can be easy to resign ourselves to the idea that student-

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of the  
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teacher relationships, especially in remote-learning, are inevitably shallow and transactional. However, students must remember that teachers are people too and that students should treat them as such. Whether they are in class on Zoom or learning in-person, treating teachers with respect and showing compassion for their circumstances is non-negotiable.

While empathy cannot entirely solve the issue of student-teacher

relationships this year, it is a step in the right direction. Students should keep trying to form better connections with teachers to bring back a sense of community and normalcy and regard them as human beings, rather than for the sole purpose of recommendations. With mutual respect as a baseline, we will be able to further address the issues that come with online learning and start reclaiming a bit of the traditional Stuyvesant experience.

## A People Abandoned

By AYA ALRYYES

The Israeli government has received much praise across media outlets for its COVID-19 vaccination campaign; with [90 percent](#) of elders and [44 percent](#) of the general population having received at least one dose, Israel has the highest vaccination rate of any country. Yet most ignore the millions of unvaccinated Palestinians living on occupied land toward whom Israel is abandoning its responsibility toward.

Following the 1967 Six-Day War fought between Israel and its neighboring Arab states, Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These territories remained under direct occupation until the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization signed the 1995 Oslo II Accord, splitting the land into Palestinian-administrated Area A, jointly controlled Area B, and Israeli-controlled Area C.

While Gaza, which is designated Area A, has not been under occupation since the 2005 dismantling of Israeli settlements in Gazathere and the removal of the Israeli military, it has been under de facto occupation since Israel's

blockade installation in 2007. Under the blockade, which covers land, air, and sea, no one and nothing enters or leaves Gaza without Israeli permission. Nearly two million Palestinians have been locked in Gaza for years. The United Nations, various human rights groups, and a large part of the international community consider Israel to be occupying Gaza, regardless of what the government claims.

Healthcare access in Israeli-occupied land was a major issue even before the pandemic. Israel's blockade on Gaza impeded access to medical treatment, Gazan hospitals lacked funding and resources, and permits required to travel into Israel for proper treatment were routinely denied. High population density, a depressed economy, and lack of access to drinking water—where 97 percent of [freshwater](#) in the Gaza Strip is polluted or otherwise unsuitable for human consumption—have worsened the crisis.

Since the pandemic, Gazans and Palestinians in the West Bank have suffered immensely. Many cannot afford the loss of income that would come with self-quarantining or even the cost of per-

sonal protective equipment. With the high population density, social distancing is nearly impossible. As Palestinians are in dire need of relief, the vaccine gives them hope. However, Israel will distribute the vaccines in the West Bank, but only to Jewish settlers (who are largely considered by the international community to be residing there illegally), while the Palestinians living around them are left to wait and suffer.

International law mandates that Israel provide vaccine access to Palestinians in Gaza and Area C of the West Bank. [Article 56](#) in the 1949 Geneva Convention states that "the occupying power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, [...] public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics."

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called on Israel to "ensure equal access to COVID-19 vaccines for Palestinians," citing the Convention. Ten Israeli,

Palestinian, and international human rights organizations have done the same in a [joint statement](#).

Beyond the legal aspect, the Israeli government has a moral obligation to vaccinate Palestinians as it does Israelis. As Dana Moss, the International Advocacy Officer at one of the organizations undersigned on the joint statement, puts it, "It's simply ethically unconscionable that a healthy 22-year-old living in a West Bank settlement will receive a vaccine, whereas an 80-year-old Palestinian with diabetes will not."

In defense of against such criticism, Israeli officials refer to the 1993 Oslo Accords, which place the responsibility for providing healthcare in the West Bank on the Palestinian Authority. According to Deputy Health Minister Yoav Kish, "Our responsibility is to vaccinate our own population." However, examining this argument reveals its fragility. For one, Israel regularly violates the Oslo Accords with its regular demolition of Palestinian homes and its recently planned annexation of parts of the West Bank. Israel cannot cite Oslo to use as a bailout when it is convenient and ignore the rest of the time.

Moreover, international law trumps Oslo. As United Nations human rights experts point out, "The Oslo Accords must be interpreted and applied consistent with international law, and cannot derogate from its broad protections. The ultimate responsibility for health services remains with the occupying power." Israel does not have to deem itself an occupying power for it to be one; its activity in Gaza speaks for itself. Nothing justifies Israel's continued occupation, regardless of the way the Israeli Government styles it. The situation being what it is, however, Israel must fulfill its legal and moral obligation.

In recent days, Israel has agreed to provide 5,000 vaccine doses to Palestinian frontline healthcare workers. Rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have correctly called this action "wholly inadequate," as 5,000 doses are nothing compared to the five million doses that Israelis have received and the amount needed for the two million Palestinians living on occupied land. As said Human Rights Watch Director [Omar Shakir](#), "After 50 years of occupation with no end in sight, Israel's duties go beyond offering spare doses."

## Rent: Legal Theft

By JACKY CHEN

During the pandemic, a collapsing economy and mass unemployment has left many people unable to pay their rent, provoking the question of the ethicality of the current rental system. Many landlord associations have come out with provisions for landlords. However, when thinking of the tenants, they are the ones in the arrangement without any property or fallbacks. A landlord has assets to rely on or sell under difficult circumstances. When things go downhill, the tenant is left with nothing.

So what do landlords actually do? One thing they don't do is pay for mortgage or repair bills. The tenant pays for both while their rent money is siphoned by the landlord. Additionally, apartments with utilities covered lump bill costs with the rent, making the tenant pay for those expenses anyway. Though some landlords may take responsibility for repairs, they also set arbitrary rules on the property such as no drilling or repainting the walls. While tenants have to perform wage

labor to live on a property, landlords spend an average of just a measly three to 10 hours a month managing the property.

The lease between landlord and tenant is not mutually beneficial. The landlord makes equity off of the tenant's labor. When the tenant terminates a lease, the landlord still owns the home and can find new renters. However, the stakes are much higher for the tenant. With the revoke of a lease, the tenant becomes homeless, losing a fundamental necessity. The system is overwhelmingly favorable to one side.

With this unbalanced power dynamic, the interests of one group overwhelm the other. A landlord's goal is to extract as much money from tenants as legally possible to generate revenue. One way is by being a slumlord, in which leaseholders exploit the lower class by purchasing less valuable buildings in low-income neighborhoods for a lower mortgage. These leaseholders then raise rent out of fear that tenants will not pay and with the knowledge that low-income renters must choose between paying or go-

ing homeless. In a [study](#) examining landlord incomes in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, researchers found that landlords made approximately \$151 in profit each month from a single unit in a low-income neighborhood, compared to \$21 in an affluent one.

The tenant's interest, then, is to keep as much money as possible without being evicted. This goal proves difficult to accomplish when a landlord holds leverage over a renter's head through the threat of eviction, which makes discussions between landlords and renters tricky. Landlords have more money on their side, as seen when renters in the US paid a total of \$535 billion for residential rents in 2015. Additionally, large Republican lobbyists criticized a bill that prevented evictions against unemployed tenants during the pandemic in New York, claiming that the inability for landlords to evict gave tenants too much power.

Though renting is a struggle for tenants, owning property is also difficult for the average person. It is more profitable for global investment firms to

charge rent than to sell properties. Moreover, houses become more valuable and expensive over time as the population grows. This situation is compounded by the fact that about half of New York renters are rent-burdened and have a hard time building up equity to make these investments.

It's important to remember that not all landlords are greedy, money-stealing monsters. There is a spectrum from a small-time landowner renting to make ends meet while being cooperative with tenants to a large institutional landlord disconnected from residents. However, the rent institution as a whole is morally wrong. Many landlords take part in an extortion system, working together to protect their interests. Small landlords work toward the interest of big corporations when they have to fight tenant protection laws to make profits.

Because renting is so ingrained in our society, it is difficult to imagine an alternative as the concept of landlords dates as far back as feudalism. However, land reform has also been found in countries like

Mexico and Russia, which have fought against serfdom or land monopolies. Transforming private residential properties into housing collectives removes the landlord class and pools funds for improvements or repairs. The jobs of small landowners and groundskeepers could be transformed into laborers cleaning the property rather than just landlord duties. In the past, landlords have been eliminated. For instance, Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata fought the hacienda plantation system that took over peasant farmer life in 1910 and returned the haciendas to the peasants. Between 1910 and the 1940s, when the land reform movement regressed, Mexico fought against plantations. Even without revolutionary measures, renters can still gain some power through unions and moratoriums, such as the current moratorium on New York evictions.

It will be hard to make a new system of housing without significant reforms. Despite this difficulty, housing never should have been turned into an exploitative system.

## The Traditions of Death

By LAUREN CHIN

Twice a year, my mother's family travels about an hour's drive upstate to a Buddhist temple. There, many families, including our own, pay respect to their late loved ones. Our family goes to visit my late aunt.

Together, we bow three times to statues of the Buddha and other Chinese deities and hold sticks of incense in our hands. My mother and grandmother clean the small black plaque with my aunt's name on it to ensure its protection against time and the elements. Most importantly, my family brings various offerings to burn at a fire pit. My uncles bring fake paper money, while my grandparents bring thin pieces of paper imprinted with silver or gold squares. Once we burn them, my aunt will supposedly be able to use these gifts as real currency. My sisters and I write letters, updating our aunt about our lives, and throw them into the pit to burn as well. Before returning home, we leave behind small snacks, fruits, and flowers that serve as both donations toward the temple and

as food for my aunt to eat.

My paternal family, who immigrated from Canton, China, practices similar traditions when honoring our dead relatives. My grandfather stokes a small fire in his kitchen, igniting stacks of paper money in the flames. Meanwhile, my grandmother sets a table entirely for the dead, allowing them to eat before the living members of the family. One by one, we bow three times before these plates of food. Rather than sticks of incense, we hold small cups of alcohol, which are then given to the deceased. When we visit our ancestors, who are buried in a graveyard about a half-hour's drive away, we bring even more offerings of food.

Many other cultures have similar views on honoring one's ancestors. Across the world, families throw festivals or hold ceremonies to show their appreciation and love for those they have lost. However, despite the prevalence of traditions that honor the dead, much of humanity shares an aversion and fear of death.

When I was around nine years old, I visited my pater-

nal grandparents' house with my cousins. It was the day of a Chinese festival, so my grandparents were setting up the customary offerings to our ancestors. As we waited for dinner to be served, I was tasked with entertaining two of my younger cousins. The younger of the two, who was about three at the time, asked me why we had to wait to eat dinner when the food was clearly already prepared. I attempted to explain that our ancestors had to eat first.

"Does that mean there are ghosts in the house?" my cousin asked. Though it seemed she was asking out of curiosity, I was still worried about scaring her. After all, the word "ghost" is generally associated with horror. A ghost is something to be scared of.

"They're good ghosts," I responded. "They're our family. They're just here to say hi and

eat food."

"Okay," my cousin said, returning back to her toys and seeming unaffected by my answer. Nevertheless, that moment was the first time I considered that communicating with our late ancestors could be seen as scary. After all, I had been doing it since I was my cousin's age, and there had never been a reason for me to be afraid. Over time, however, I began to realize that there was an obvious fear of the dead in Asian culture. Like many other cultures, we have ghost stories and fables that make us fear the dead.

These fearful superstitions directly contradict the traditions that place heavy emphasis on respecting those who have passed away. It's strange to think that our traditions could have such contrasting ideas about death. While we

are encouraged to respect and honor the dead whom we once knew and loved, we still corrupt or demonize the memories of others, portraying them as frightening ghosts. I soon realized why this duality was the case: in both instances, the dead are forgotten and unidentifiable. My younger cousin could not understand how the ghosts were still our family. I wonder, at what point do our ancestors and traditions simply become ghost stories?

The concept of death has always been extremely interesting to me. It's something that no one, not even the smartest scientists or wisest philosophers, truly understands. Yet, at the end of our lives, we all share a desire to be remembered and honored by those we love. With that in mind, we should not fear the dead just because we can't remember them. Regardless of whether or not you believe in an afterlife, the very least you can do is respect the wishes of the deceased to be loved and remembered. It won't be long before their stories are lost in time forever.



## Just Send the Checks

By JACOB STEINBERG

Historically, Republican Georgia elected Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in their respective run-off elections to the United States Senate on January 5. Though a multitude of factors affected the race, the promise of \$2,000 stimulus checks may have pushed Democrats over the top. The Democrats placed the thrust of their campaign on the sending of \$2,000 stimulus checks, repeating the promise in speeches, debates, and campaign advertisements. Now, they must deliver.

The Senate battled over providing COVID-19 relief to the American people throughout December 2020. Though Democrats and then-President

Donald Trump supported a \$2,000 check, the Republicans, led by Mitch McConnell, preferred [no](#) stimulus check but were willing to reach a higher number. With the debate raging on, the Democrats capitalized on the easy policy of \$2,000 into the pockets of qualified Americans and used it as their [closer](#). President Joe Biden claimed that the checks would be passed and delivered ["immediately"](#) and that the big difference between Democratic and Republican control was the delivery of these checks. And yet, this strong promise has failed to materialize nearly a month into the Biden administration.

In fact, if or when the checks do arrive, they will be in a different form than promised.

The relief bill likely to be signed into law includes \$1,400 stimulus checks, with the Democrats arguing that since \$600 checks were sent out in a previous relief bill, \$1,400 checks bring the total money received to \$2,000. Though it may sound like a reasonable deliverance, it simply does not fulfill the promise the Democrats made. President Biden communicated in no uncertain terms, saying, "[Warnock and Ossoff's] election will put an end to the block in Washington—that \$2,000 stimulus check—that money would go out the door immediately, to help people who are in real trouble." As of now, the checks will almost certainly stick at \$1,400.

This inability to uphold a promise is unacceptable for

the Democratic party. For the Democrats to fail on their most emphasized policy would be an embarrassing start to the party's first period of total control in 10 years. Unfortunately, the passage of a relief bill is not as simple as the standard 50-50 vote, and Democrat Senator Joe Manchin has wavered with regards to \$2,000 checks. However, the rules of the Senate demand the bill to be passed using budget reconciliation, a congressional rule that eliminates the use of the filibuster for bills regarding spending and deficits. If the stimulus bill were subject to the filibuster, compromise here would be permissible, but a simple majority is needed. The Democrats have no legislative excuse.

The American people need

the \$2,000 checks. A full stimulus would cover either the entire rent for a one-bedroom apartment, three months of groceries for a family of four, or the healthcare premium for a family of four. Checks for \$1,400 would either barely cover those expenses or not at all. With the economy destroying small businesses and drastically increasing [unemployment](#), the more help provided, the better.

However, the humanitarian aspect of the aid is not the sole factor. Indeed, the Democrats also need to fulfill their campaign promises. To strike out on \$2,000 checks would be a political disaster, as it would immediately undermine

# Opinions

## Ageism: Discrimination That's Considered Acceptable

By ALEX CHO

At 78 years old, Joe Biden became the oldest president in the United States to take the oath of office on January 20. Cue granddad joke here. Or, take a moment to reconsider. Whether or not one politically supports Biden, among the outcomes of the end of the Trump administration will hopefully be the close of an era of division and casual prejudice—led by a president who mocked the disabled and thrived on stoking xenophobic sentiment. And of course, most people know that bigotry against those of different ethnicities, sexual orientations, abilities, gender identities, or cultural backgrounds is unacceptable in 2021. However, one area where many of us still blithely trade in stereotypes is age. Ranging from “OK boomer” memes to open dialogue questioning the mental fitness of older people, including portrayals of the elderly in cartoons and sitcoms as out of touch and unstable, ageism is largely present in our society.

Ageism seems to be the last holdout of acceptable discrimination, even among liberals. Part of the reason for this maintained presence may be resentment among the younger generations who have struggled economically and feel that older generations had an easier time. Additionally, the younger generations tend to blame past generations for issues such as

climate change. Another reason is the perceived harmlessness of ageist comments. Data, however, shows the opposite: ageism has serious effects on global well-being, so much so that it could be seen as a public health crisis.

According to a systematic review of over 13 thousand papers published in [PLOS ONE](#), ageism caused a major decline in health in older people in 95.5 percent of its studies. Moreover, data published by the [World Health Organization](#) shows that one in six people over the age of 60 has suffered from abuse from those near them. According to the report, elder abuse “can lead to serious physical injuries and long-term psychological consequences.” In an example of an all too frequent occurrence reported by the [National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse](#), an 84-year-old woman named Elaine was imprisoned in her own bedroom and verbally abused by her yard worker, who took control of her finances under the pretense of helping her domestically. In similar cases, many of the elderly have reported that they have been sexually assaulted as well. Much of this physical and sexual abuse stems from the notion that elderly people are easier targets due to their age. Often, older people are afraid to report cases of serious abuse, because they have developed a reliance on their caregivers and feel that

their mental capacities might be questioned.

Many of us are not aware of the harms of ageism, because it is woven into our everyday attitudes, similar to the way casual sexism, racism, and homophobia are prevalent in our daily experiences. For instance, no one thinks twice about complimenting people of a certain age about how young they look or act. No one finds it strange that older people feel embarrassed to say how old they are on their birthday or dye their hair to conceal that it is turning gray. These might seem like trivial examples, but these everyday microaggressions and unthinking perceptions help contribute to an environment where age is devalued, which ultimately creates a risk for more serious abuses.

Instead, we might just as easily see it as a point of pride to have survived and thrived for a certain number of years and see gray hairs as a mark of experience and insight. One place to look for solutions might be in the attitudes toward age in certain countries. Studies have found that ageism is linked to the “individualism” of a country; the more a culture prizes independence and “forging one’s own path,” the more ageist it is likely to be. In an individualistic, competitive society, older people may just be seen as standing in the way. Their seniority rights, for instance, could pose an obstacle to the advancement

of younger people. In contrast, cultures that emphasize collective cooperation, such as those found in China and Japan, are more likely to respect older people. Rather than being seen as out of touch, older people are traditionally seen as bearers of wisdom who help bind the community together and create continuity between different generations. This connection suggests a possible benefit of eliminating ageism: it may make us more cohesive in general and more community-minded. Productive interactions between older and younger people help tie society together and create links between the old and the new.

Of course, the burden to achieve this environment should not be solely on the young. While ageism is often understood exclusively in terms of discrimination against older people, younger people face discrimination as well. Many older people have questioned the work ethic and values of the millennial generation and Gen Z; however, two recessions in a row have made the situation tougher than ever for younger people just entering the job market. In fact, young adults who went through 2008’s “Great Recession” were loaded with [debt](#) and faced less job security than older Americans. Recessions have caused hiring managers to cut back on staff and unlikely to consider less experienced employees. As a result, young peo-

ple have struggled to find full-time employment with benefits and are much more likely to be involved in part-time work and the gig economy. For this reason, wages for younger Americans (ages 16-24) have dropped in the last decade while those of older Americans (55 and up) have stayed flat—in part due to wage seniority, Social Security, and Medicare.

As a potentially economically disadvantaged group, Stuyvesant students should stand up against prejudice directed at us. Comments like “you’re too young to understand” or “young people these days are so lazy and obsessed with video games” should be met with a polite but firm response that the other party should not be so quick to stereotype an entire generation. However, resentment should not make us target an older generation, which faces its own hardship. We should be mindful of when bias is being expressed against older people and call it out, just like we would with racist, transphobic, and other toxic speech. Attitudes shift quickly when it is not socially acceptable to express bigotry. Ultimately, better intergenerational understanding would bring the same benefits that come along with other forms of diversity: different viewpoints and experiences joining together and benefiting from one another, rather than unfair judgment or exclusion.

## The Reflexive “She’s Lying”

By ANISHA SINGHAL

In an Instagram livestream recounting her experience during the Capitol riots, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez opened up about another trauma she had experienced: sexual assault. “I’m a survivor of sexual assault. I haven’t told many people that in my life. But when we go through trauma, trauma compounds on each other,” she said. After sharing it with the world, critics immediately pushed back and discredited her experiences. They claimed that she was not even in the Capitol at the time of the riots—though she made it very clear that she was in one of the Capitol building offices—and that she was only talking about her sexual assault for publicity.

People pounced on her for speaking up and were determined to tear down the credibility of her traumas. Journalist Michael Tracy responded to her coming out as a victim of assault by [tweeting](#), “This is a masterclass in emotional manipulation—a genuine political/rhetorical skill.” The hashtag [#AlexandriaOcasioSmollett](#) started trending as people claimed that her story was less believable than that of Jussie Smollett, an actor who paid two brothers to beat him up as a publicity stunt.

Unfortunately, this response

of discrediting [survivors](#) and their experiences is not new. It is heavily perpetuated by rape culture, the normalization and excuse of rape. Over one in five women and one out of 38 men are survivors of sexual assault, yet only 23 percent of survivors



[come forward](#) to the police due to shame, self-blame, and an attempt to suppress the experience. The most common reason, however, is the fear of not being believed.

In a [study](#) by the National Institute of Justice, police officers were asked what percentage of rape victims they believed were lying. The study found that one-third of the officers thought 40 to 80 percent of the accusations were false, while the actual [rate of false rape reports](#) is between

two to eight percent. Though almost every rape victim is telling the truth, the police, our supposed protectors, refuse to believe them.

Most sexual predators are serial offenders. If a predator commits the crime once and is not punished, there is nothing to stop a repeat incident. Rapists also know that people of marginalized communities are less likely to be believed and often choose their victims accordingly. [Native American women](#) are sexually assaulted twice as often as white women, people with [disabilities](#) are sexually assaulted three times as often as people without disabilities, and 50 percent of [transgender](#) people are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

Moreover, sexual offenders are master manipulators. Gaslighting and facades of being “nice guys” are common tactics to avoid imprisonment. Dr. Larry Nassar, a USA Gymnastics doctor at Michigan State University, used his profession as an excuse to inappropriately touch over 150 women. Michigan State overlooked countless accusations and told victims that they did not understand the difference between sexual assault and a medical procedure, because they refused to acknowledge that a well-respected doctor could commit such heinous acts. Vic-

tims are often manipulated into silence either by authorities, like Michigan State or the police, or by the perpetrator themselves.

Brock Turner, a swimmer at Stanford University with Olympic-level aspirations, used the “nice guy” excuse. He was caught raping Emily Doe (a pseudonym), who was blackout drunk, by two witnesses. During his trial, Turner declared himself a victim of party culture, which fueled his despicable actions and ultimately cost him his career and life. To some, it was a tragedy that 20 years of hard work were shattered by “20 minutes of action.” Emily Doe was unable to sleep at night out of fear of waking up to being touched and was deeply traumatized. Victims of rape often experience insomnia, anxiety, depression, and self-isolation after the assault. To Turner and his family, friends, and supporters, however, an Olympic career was more important. Without those two witnesses, Turner’s case would have been dismissed. Unfortunately, for every Brock Turner who gets convicted, there are [200 who get away](#).

Of the cases that are reported, only 19 percent [lead to an arrest](#), and even fewer result in a conviction. Therefore, it is understandable why victims are frightened to come forward and recount their traumas to police

officers who often ask skeptical questions, such as “What were you wearing?”; “Do you have a boyfriend and feel bad that you cheated?”; “Are you sexually active?”; and the occasional, “So why are you trying to ruin his life?” The trauma of a victim who steps forward is torn apart in pursuit of a sign of consent never given in order to excuse the acts of a perpetrator.

Rape is not the victims’ fault and should not go unpunished. To combat rape culture, movements like [#MeToo](#) and [#TimesUp](#) are providing a platform for victims to share their stories and are slowly giving power back to victims by exposing offenders. These movements have broken the silence, and if enough people start listening to and believing victims, we can reasonably aspire toward attaining justice. Speaking up is frightening for most victims, but they do so in an attempt to prevent assault from happening to others. When Ocasio-Cortez told the world about her sexual assault trauma, our society responded by trying to poke holes in her story and discrediting her pain. If we support and validate victims for speaking up instead of slamming their credibility, we will draw out more voices, making our communities safer and bringing closure to those who have already suffered.

## Just Send the Checks

continued from page 7

the faith of the country in the Democrats’ ability to execute on their pledges, which in turn may reduce the number of Democratic voters who swung the 2020 election in their favor.

Politics has a quick turnaround, and the 2022 midterm elections are in under two years. Democrats lost footing in the House in 2020, and further Republican gerrymandering may only serve to close the slim seat deficit. The [favorable](#) 2022 Senate map

for Democrats is extremely tenuous and worsened by the historical trend of opposition success in the first midterm of a president’s service. If the Democrats fail to pass the \$2,000 bill, they may be setting themselves up for electoral fail-

ure.

The Democrats made their bed over the Georgia run-off campaign, and now they must lie in it. For the Democrats to strip the American people of a considerable amount of aid would be punishing to both

the people set to receive their aid as well as the Democratic electoral chances. The passage of the bill is not simple, but the Democrats are led by career politicians who have long been trained to secure core tenets of legislation. The choice is sim-



## Cancel Culture: The New Justice System

By ERICA LI

Every couple of weeks, strangers around the world band together on social media to lower an individual's reputation and social status. Cancel culture holds people accountable when the justice system refuses to.

While cancel culture existed in various forms in the past, social media has expanded and democratized the process. The marginalized are finally able to seek retribution against their wrongdoers. Many victims, specifically women and minorities, were unable to receive closure due to the failures of the justice system but have now found a community where they are supported and can take power into their own hands. For example, at LaGuardia High School in 2019, a teacher [harassed](#) a Muslim student, Duha Elkhoul, by calling her a terrorist. Elkhoul was not the first to face the racist remarks of that particular teacher, yet when she filed a complaint to the Department of Education, she received little to no response. She kept quiet until recently, when she posted a viral video with over 200 thousand views on [Instagram](#) that detailed the incident, her feelings, and the actions of the people around her.

Her story is not unique; many people have gone through similar encounters, myself included. The judicial and school systems do not have a protocol in place to deal with cases of microaggressions. Journalism rarely broadcasts about them either, aside from a few stories that are out of the norm. This lack of coverage is where cancel culture steps in. Once Elkhoul shared her story, others started to share their own experiences in the comments section and even started a student-led movement to fight racism in schools.

Many argue that cancel culture is simply a form of bullying and that it rarely brings about real consequences. However, cancel culture merely strives to bring attention to and hold the canceled person accountable for offensive actions. It reflects our society's refusal to just accept things the way they are. Cancel culture is a form of boycott, a long-standing tactic in the civil rights movement, and a push for social change. It is used mostly by people who do not have the social, professional, or political status to combat their tormentors. When people band together, their words and actions mean something, which is especially influential when the oppressors are celebrities who have power and pay "hush money" to media outlets or witnesses, saving their

career and avoiding the consequences of their actions.

A well-known example of this celebrity status is Bill Cosby. Though sexual assault allegations surrounding Cosby popped up around the 2000s, he always denied them, and [cases](#) were settled outside of court. While the witnesses told their stories to the media in subsequent years, the accusations were not mainstreamed until Andrea Constand reopened her civil case in 2015 and again in 2018 for the retrial. In response, the public ostracized Cosby, causing him to lose most of his television deals. Even among the ones he managed to keep,



the audience [heckled](#) him when he went on stage. Cosby, the face of American pop culture for almost half a century, fell a far way from the height of his career.

This type of ostracization leaves no room for meaningless apologies. Public figures, such as YouTubers, can no longer brush past their scandals with hollow apology videos or statements. YouTubers are forced to confront the repercussions of posting something illegal, inappropriate, or outright disrespectful. For example, Sam Pepper's questionable videos, such as "Fake Hand Ass Pinch Prank" and the "Killing Best Friend Prank," drew an overwhelming amount of protest, demanding YouTube to ban him. By that point, the public was sick of his apology videos and had given up on seeing an active change in his character.

Anyone and anything can be canceled, leading to a widespread cultural shift. The power of social movements, such as the #MeToo, the LGBTQ+, or the Black Lives Matter movements, increased through the cancellation of problematic individuals on social media. Cancel culture may sound like a type of "mob justice," but because

people are fearful of getting canceled, they are finally starting to educate themselves on equality. For example, Brandy Melville's "One Size Fits All" clothing only fits people who wear sizes zero to two and have a 24-25 inch waist, communicating that non "skinny" girls are out of the norm. This sizing, coupled with viral TikToks and YouTube videos [posted](#) by former employees detailing the terrible working environment, caused many customers to boycott the brand. People are now starting to shop at Black/People of Color-owned small businesses that have better ethics than Brandy Melville. Additionally, Brandy

Melville's cancellation began an honest conversation of body positivity among young women and opened people's eyes to the extensive history of Eurocentric beauty standards.

On the other hand, any form of social system is never completely accurate, and cancel culture is not so different from our own justice system on this front. Being canceled under false pretenses can ruin an individual's life, especially individuals who do not have money and power protecting them. Cancel culture certainly did do so for [Natasha Tynes](#), who was canceled after tweeting about an MTA employee eating on the train. She was then accused of being "anti-black," "elitist," and "narcissistic" and even got her book that she had been working on for four years canceled.

While cancel culture has its downsides, it is a required force for social change. Though it has its faults, it gives the marginalized a voice—a necessity in our society. Victims are gaining the courage to open up about their experiences, and their oppressors, no matter their social statuses, are finally facing the consequences. Cancel culture is a needed movement on the journey to reform the justice system.

## The Toxicity Behind Cancel Culture

By GULAM MONAWARAH

Ostracization has always been an uncomfortable part of human nature. We set up social norms and taboos and punish those who break them. In "The Scarlet Letter," Hester Prynne and her daughter are publicly shunned for committing adultery. Prynne's breast is marked with the letter A by a court of law, and she is ostracized by the community. While we as readers understand that Prynne is innocent, the society that punishes her does so in the name of righteousness, believing that their beliefs outweigh due process and Prynne's future. In the modern day, ostracization has reached a new level on the Internet called cancel culture.

Cancel culture is the public's deliberate effort to destroy one's career and livelihood. While many justify cancellation as it holds people accountable and magnifies marginalized voices, cancel culture is too toxic to bring positive change. Its methods, such as resurfacing old statements and private matters, lead to online bullying. Furthermore, cancel culture breeds intolerance for non-mainstream ideas, which can backfire in the form of resistance or fear.

Efforts to cancel someone are online bullying. Many arguments for canceling someone are purely personal but are used wrongfully to bully innocent people. For example, in the James Charles and Tati Westbrook scandal, Charles was accused of deliberately sabotaging [Westbrook's](#) products and forcing men into sexual acts. As a result, Charles lost a large portion of his followers and was harassed by multiple fanbases, pushing him to release a video addressing Westbrook's accusations. This series of events prompted Charles and Westbrook's fans to cancel each other over a petty fight on a personal level. During the scandal, hundreds of people were hurt, confused, and ashamed by the situation. I know teenagers who were bullied for owning James Charles's merchandise or shamed for attempting to support any makeup artist involved in the scandal. Charles and many of his fans were wrongly abused on the Internet, proving that cancel culture should not always be trusted with the final say as it creates an environment fraught with fear.

Cancel culture also breeds political intolerance for opposing opinions. For example, actress Gina Carano was recently [canceled](#) over multiple

conservative posts on Twitter. She was swiftly fired from the television series "The Mandalorian" and received widespread harassment from mostly liberal Twitter users. As Democratic views slowly gain more popularity, conservative opinions are becoming less accepted online. Those who fear cancellation become angry at society, finding solace in anyone vaguely supporting their ideas, like former President Donald Trump and Senator Josh Hawley. This transition is a problem for all Americans as we may live in a bleak, mundane world in the future where freedom of speech is constantly hampered.

Many believe that cancel culture holds criminals, such as sexual offenders, accountable. However, legal cases should instead be taken to court with proper authorities to better examine evidence. In the times when the judicial system fails, people still manage to find restorative justice through conversation, rather than retributive justice through cancellation. For example, Bayan Zehlif, a high school student, spoke out in 2016 after her school yearbook printed her name as "Isis Phillips." Instead of attacking the school and authors of the [yearbook](#), she went straight to the Council on American-Islamic Relations to share her story. In this case, there was no one to cancel; if she canceled a student, she could have effectively ended that student's school prospects and potential professional careers. Because of her actions, the school made a full recall of all distributed yearbooks, rewrote, and reprinted. If we speak out the way Zehlif did rather than cancel, then we will find more honest and mature ways to combat problematic actions.

As a society, we have to punish those who commit awful acts, but we must not go too far. Cancel culture is far more extreme than simply calling out a person's behavior. If someone is a victim of a crime, there are many ways to handle the situation. One can quietly extend their support to the victim, present potential evidence to the authorities, or personally avoid problematic products without harassing others. If someone is behaving problematically on a personal level, people should engage in conventional conflict resolution techniques. We can advance social change and personal accountability without engaging in the messy and harmful methods of cancel culture.

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## Mary's Room: The Clash Between Psychoanalysis And Neuroscience

By RANIA ZAKI

Mary lives in the Twilight Zone. In an achromatic room, this imagined neuroscientist learns about the physical entities of color, such as their physics and biological basis, but has yet to perceive it with her own eyes. This thought experiment provokes a question: if Mary steps outside and sees a red apple, will she have learned anything more?

Initially, the thought experiment, proposed by philosopher Frank Jackson, affirmed that she would. In doing so, it concluded that there is a quality of color division beyond its physical description. That missing quality was her qualia, or her subjective personal experience, when she ventured outside.

Qualia dominated the psychiatric field through psychoanalysis, a theory that focuses on the unconscious in mental disorders. Philosopher Sigmund Freud developed a theory of the human psyche, where he proposed that the unconscious mind is the sole driver of all cognitive processes, including that of consciousness. Family structure, past traumas, or forgotten abuse became the unforeseen determinant of the stable mind, thus disregarding most biological causes of mental disorders. Dating back to Descartes's axiom "I think, therefore I am," the mind and the body (or brain) were seen with different states. To Descartes, both were distinct, as he could doubt his body but not his mind. However, pharmaceuticals began to treat mental illness by the end of the 1980s, and

the brain received the status of the mind. A split in Freudian theory arose: reductionism, a new mirage of psychiatry that reduced the distinction between the mind and body, made them identical.

In turn, the Mary's Room experiment was used to argue against the reductive basis by claiming that identical states must have the same properties, supporting the idea that the mind and body were not one. Reductionism equated mental states, like consciousness and behavior, with brain states, such as empirical evidence of brain activity and hormones. One way to understand the connection is to see how our perception and consciousness argue against this dualism.

Our senses are one of the best understood physical perceptions. Though the perception of sight is subjective, as you cannot see through the eyes of another, there is an objective medical basis for the processing of visual input, which goes through the retina cones down to the optical nerve that transmits information into color. Even if the same stimuli are transmitted to the brain however, our mind comprehends them in different ways, sometimes by invoking a different sensory process to an unparalleled sensory input. This is known as synesthesia, or the intermixing of communication in the brain between the senses. Stimulation of one sense leads to an involuntary and automatic experience in another sense, where some feel what they smell or see what they hear, for instance.

Though it seems supernatural, we all experience synesthesia to

different degrees. For example, in the question proposed by neuroscientist Lawrence Marks, "Which is lighter: a sneeze or a cough?" [roughly 95 percent](#) said that a sneeze was perceived with brighter intensity. Yet, how did individuals with different subjective consciousness perceive a similar conclusion?

It is because certain properties of our senses, like color intensity, do not only rely on our perception. In one test, Ramachandran and Hubbard folded a white card with a gray number on each side. One side was brightly lit while the other was in a shadow. Though the physical luminance was radically different on the two sloping sides of the card, their perceived reflectance was identical because the brain took account of this diminished luminance and subtracted the intensity of the brighter-lit right. However, the color saturation looked grossly different due to the difference in actual physical contrast, not perceived contrast. Thus, a dependence on physical contrast, not the perceived contrast, is also important in the vividness of color.

In many ways, this simple test speaks depths to the nature of qualia and how it is also not out of grasp to the physical brain state. Our brain neurons can create degrees of experiences that depend both on perception and physical quality, suggesting that qualia has a probable objective basis. A likely prediction is that the apple would seem gray to Mary due to being in the room for too long. Even without subjective qualia, Mary would

pick the red apple if contrasted by a pure gray apple, much like a colorblind patient with synesthesia. In this case, Mary did not learn something about reddish hues because though her qualia could not solely distinguish between different color hues, her physical brain could. If she possessed her qualia, the difference would be physical, except on a scale that arguably would not be within Mary's initial scope of awareness.

To understand why, consider artificial intelligence (AI). If you wire up AI to compute the same kinds of information that Mary can, you assume that it has Mary's capabilities. If this AI resided in a body cloned from Mary, even Mary herself could not assert a difference, unless the environment changed. Suddenly a physical process, like color perception (which was not possible in the black-and-white world), appears miraculously. However, if the scenario was changed and the AI was subjected to color while Mary wasn't, the validity of what defines Mary would be debatable. No matter which case you consider, both the clone and Mary learn something new when they observe color, but not through consciousness. Rather, it is similar to the difference between a dead wire and the same wire juiced with electricity.

Similar to how Mary's room delves into the extent to which knowledge can enable perception, many have attempted to revisit the argument that consciousness can be thoroughly studied through physical sciences. More psychoanalysts have begun to investigate

### SCIENCEBEAT

NASA's Perseverance rover **successfully touched down** on Mars on February 18 and is now searching for **signs of life**.

The arrival of the **polar vortex** in Texas has led to **widespread power outages and food and water shortages**, as power equipment, water lines, and gas pipelines froze in record low temperatures.

The United Kingdom approved the **world's first COVID-19 human challenge trial**, where volunteers will be **infected** with the virus to see the amount needed to cause the illness.

The **COVID-19 death toll** in the U.S. surpassed **500,000** on February 22, exceeding the number of Americans killed in **World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined**.

basic neuroscience as well as how it can relate the mind of the reader with the hand they are holding the book with. As reductionist philosophy is the dominant form, the lack of discussion on the integration of objective accounts of reality to subjective one may very well be ignoring the red apple Mary saw for a monochrome answer in a dark room.

## You're Not Alone: Zoom Fatigue Is Real

By RIONA ANVEKAR

As we approach our one-year "quarantine-versary" of the pandemic, many students at Stuyvesant and across the country are experiencing the detrimental effects of using Zoom and other video-calling interfaces for extended periods of time. After five hours of online classes a day, many students find themselves ready to take a nap and call it a day. Commonly known as "Zoom fatigue," this mental exhaustion describes the tiredness, burnout, or worry associated with overusing virtual platforms of communication, attributed not to students being lazy but to the way the brain processes social interactions.

Mental fatigue can be explained through the [rewards-cost tradeoff](#) that occurs in the brain. Before engaging in any activity, a tradeoff is made between the predicted rewards and costs of participating in the activity. Even the decision to open your laptop to begin your day is made on the basis of these unconscious estimates to maximize rewards and minimize costs. The dopaminergic pathway, essential to translate a high-rewards low-cost situation, is activated. Specifically, the mesolimbic dopamine pathway begins at the [ventral tegmental area \(VTA\)](#), a dopamine-rich area covering part of the midbrain that projects dopaminergic action potentials to another area of the brain called the nucleus accumbens (NAc). It is in the NAc where dopamine primarily mediates feelings of pleasure and reward. Whenever a person encounters rewarding or pleasurable stimuli, dopamine is released and sends signals from the VTA to the NAc, creating positive feelings that reinforce that behavior. Overall, the activation of the dopaminergic pathways triggers subjective

alertness, energy, and motivation. Social interactions are very much associated with reward circuits and oxytocin, the hormone involved in social bonding which regulates the dopaminergic pathway. Furthermore, the manner in which social interaction occurs is vital to the process of the rewards circuit. For example, [MRI data](#) reveals that live face-to-face interaction activates areas of the brain associated with rewards more than viewing record-



Cadence Li / The Spectator

ings. Thus, more active social interaction is associated with perceived rewards, activating the neurological pathways modulating feelings of alertness rather than fatigue.

That's where the problem lies with Zoom and other video-calling interfaces. The social interaction is not active enough to trigger the dopaminergic pathway because much of communication is actually unconscious and nonverbal. The brain uses various social cues in an interaction to understand

what is being conveyed and what response is needed. A short inhale before someone begins to speak, crossing of the legs, and fidgeting of the hands are examples of small but important gestures in interpreting social interactions. However, over Zoom, the brain rarely receives the social cues it needs to be comfortable in a social interaction. Even without technology or internet issues, the brain's interpretation of social interactions

is significantly impaired by more than a [100 milliseconds delay](#); unfortunately, Zoom aims for a lag of [150 milliseconds](#). These audio delays are subconsciously interpreted by the user as the speaker's inability to quickly form affirmative and confident thoughts. Moreover, a human's primitive psychology nurtures the idea that the simpler something is to understand, the easier it is to believe. Therefore, those with technological issues that impair their audio are identified as

less trustworthy because they're harder to understand. These delays create feelings of uncertainty and unfamiliarity, decreasing the reward perceived.

Over Zoom, most people are framed from the shoulders up, preventing others from viewing body language or hand gestures. Poor video quality can impair the comprehension of minute facial expressions. This leaves users dependent on eye contact and attention to words to interact with others. Evidence shows that [eye contact is vital](#) to improving the connection between two people, resulting in faster responses, improved memorization of faces, and increased likeability. However, eye contact on Zoom is often compromised because people tend to look at the center of their screen rather than the camera. Speaker view is another issue because it deprives one of the ability to see and recognize the behavior of others, which is what the peripheral vision would take care of in person. On the other hand, [gallery view causes its own issues](#) as it overwhelms the brain with multiple people and sources of information to decode, leaving it unable to process information properly. The extended split in attention creates a peculiar sense of feeling drained while having accomplished nothing. The brain is simultaneously overwhelmed by unfamiliar excess stimuli and hyperfocused on searching for nonverbal cues.

Unable to recognize clear social cues, the brain has to compensate with [extra cognitive and emotional effort](#), leaving Zoom with a low-reward, high-cost analysis. This interpretation results in a failure to release the oxytocin necessary to trigger the dopaminergic pathway and other neurological pathways associated with reward, which in turn regulates perception in a man-

ner that causes fatigue rather than alertness.

However, using Zoom has been helpful for some people with developmental disabilities, like autism. While some autistic people find it difficult to determine when to talk during in-person conversations, the lag on Zoom may make it easier for them to gauge this. Moreover, Zoom's inability to host parallel conversations in one room makes the environment more comfortable for those who are easily overwhelmed by multiple people talking. Yet, since there is a spectrum of autistic issues, some may report struggles with video chatting as it can overwhelm them with sensory triggers like loud noise and bright lights.

Nonetheless, there are activities that people can do to relieve some of this fatigue. Avoid multitasking while on Zoom. Switching between tasks tires out the brain and costs you [40 percent](#) of what could have been productive time. Reduce on-screen stimuli by hiding your face from view. People tend to frequently look at themselves during Zoom, whether it's to make sure they look engaged or to check if others can see that pimple on their chin, but doing this becomes taxing on the brain. Take a break from screen time when possible. You can do this during class simply by looking away from your screen for a few seconds occasionally or by making time for breaks between classes. Try talking to someone in your household for a couple of minutes. Even fighting with your sibling over who gets to use the bathroom works. Practice mindfulness, meditation, and yoga to re-energize your body. Exploring alternative ways to psychologically improve your perceived reward can be a therapeutic approach towards Zoom fatigue and can improve your pandemic lifestyle as a whole.

# Science

## Have You Heard About Sonochemistry?

By OSCAR WANG

The honk of a car horn, the tone of an AMBER alert, and the beep of a heart rate monitor are all auditory sensations that can spell the difference between life and death. Yet sound does not always need to be heard to save lives. Ultrasound describes sounds with frequencies higher than that of the human hearing range, of 20 Hz to 20 kHz. While acoustic technologies have existed in the medical field since the early 19th century, ultrasonic applications like ultrasound imaging emerged in the 1950s. In the 1980s however, a field called sonochemistry, which explores the application of ultrasound to cause chemical reactions, was invented. While instruments like stethoscopes will stay relevant for many more decades, sonochemistry and many other applications of ultrasound are becoming the first choice for many doctors. Because these minimally invasive instruments allow for immediate and precise results, they may replace many of the technologies and practices we use today. Whether by creating nanotechnologies that can transport and release virtually anything or causing chemical reactions directly within the body, sonochemistry is a field that will continue to evolve.

In a recent study, researchers at RMIT University in Australia utilized sonochemistry to reach a [breakthrough in nanotechnology](#). They devised a way to produce metal-organic frameworks (MOFs)—highly permeable polymers composed of a metal ion center and additionally linked organic molecules—with great efficiency. MOFs are highly versatile as they can be used in any application that requires the transport of substances on a microscopic scale, making them highly valuable in

medical and biotechnical fields. MFM-300(Al), an MOF that traps toxic gas molecules, and Fe-BTC, an MOF that removes metals like lead and mercury from water, are just two of the 80,000+ varieties of MOFs.

MOFs are manufactured through a resource-intensive process. First, the organic and inorganic molecules must be assembled in a high surface tension solvent which allows them to stay in place. Then, in a process called activation, the MOF-solvent complex is heated for hours in the solvent with a low boiling temperature until the solvents inside and outside the MOF are exchanged. Finally, the product is put in a vacuum, leaving the inside empty and ready for use. In contrast, the new technique developed by RMIT scientists uses [high-frequency sound waves](#) delivered from a special microchip that precisely alters the frequency of the sound, to meticulously order and move the molecules forming the MOFs. This method allows scientists to relocate the molecules while also removing the solvent without the use of activation. Because the frequency of the ultrasound is so high, the sound wave is over [100,000](#)

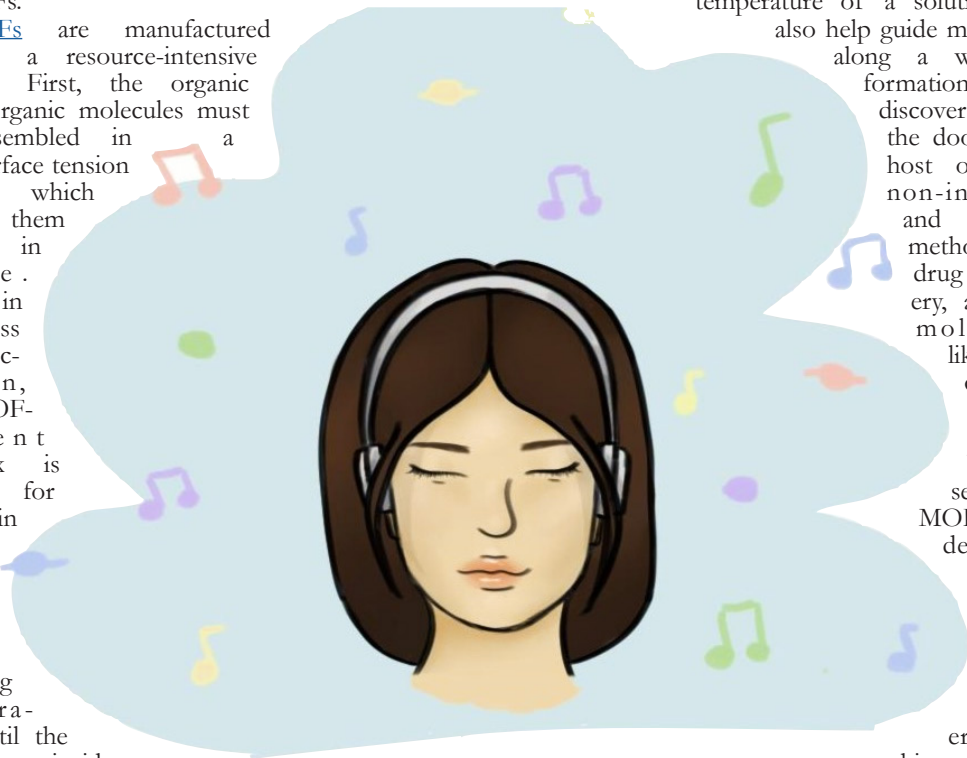
times larger than the molecules themselves. Currently, this technique is only verified to work with iron and copper-based materials; nonetheless, it serves as a proof that MOFs can be manufactured

range of frequencies that create unique interactions between a variety of materials: ultrasound-driven chemistry involving “low” frequencies between 10 kHz to 3 MHz to not only help raise the temperature of a solution but also help guide molecules

along a wave-like formation. This discovery opens the doors to a host of new, non-invasive, and painless methods of drug delivery, as large molecules like vaccine antibodies can be inserted in MOFs to be delivered. Additionally, existing nebular machines that

ultrasound applicators outside the body to cause small movements in the body that bring the cancerous tissue closer for removal by heat. This alternative is both safe and effective, and serves as a new hope for patients, especially those whose bodies are still recovering from treatments like surgery. Likewise, a team from the University of Michigan used an ultrasound method, called histotripsy, to remove tumors in the prostate. This method works by creating micro-sized bubbles within the tumor, which disrupts cellular functions and breaks down tumor cells. Additionally, scientists at Duke University are experimenting with a technique called virtual palpation, which uses the ultrasound’s ability to permeate through molecules to scan tissues and analyze their stiffness. This technique has primarily been used to detect irregularities in heart, liver, and breast tissues.

Though it has existed for over 30 years, the field of sonochemistry is still in its early stages of development. Despite being overshadowed by recent advancements in artificial intelligence and space travel, the lesser known field of sonochemistry can still lend itself to great scientific progress in the years to come. MOFs are powerful tools, but they are only one example of how sonochemistry propels multiple areas of research. Perhaps the future could see devices that use ultrasound to manipulate the molecules in our atmosphere to reduce the effects of global warming. Additionally, patients can expect to see vaccinations as a pill guided by ultrasound rather than an injection. Though sonochemistry is not the first scientific field that people ordinarily think of, it still contributes to many of the scientific advancements of the 21st century—albeit silently.



Emily Tan / The Spectator

in mere minutes.

The same group of researchers also proved that sonochemistry can also be used for drug delivery and vaccinations. Using ultrasound’s ability to move molecules once again, the researchers manipulated molecules found in vaccines using high-frequency sound waves, thereby restructuring them. While MOFs can create nanoparticles that house vaccines, the team also guided the contained vaccine to its destination in the body. Lead researcher Leslie Yeo at RMIT explains that his team has established a

range of frequencies that create unique interactions between a variety of materials: ultrasound-driven chemistry involving “low” frequencies between 10 kHz to 3 MHz to not only help raise the temperature of a solution but also help guide molecules along a wave-like formation. This discovery opens the doors to a host of new, non-invasive, and painless methods of drug delivery, as large molecules like vaccine antibodies can be inserted in MOFs to be delivered. Additionally, existing nebular machines that

administer liquid medicine as gases—can be made more efficient and accurate with the ability to create a finer suspension. Despite being an emerging technology, these techniques are relatively cheap to administer, making it possible to scale up production and create large trials before they are officially released.

RMIT University is not the only institution advancing the applications of sonochemistry. The French National Institute for Health and Medical Research also uses sound to [treat cancer](#) without the need of surgery. The treatment involves administering

## To Be Or Not To Be... Bald?

By SATHIRTHA MONDAL

You’re in the shower, rinsing your hair and singing to your heart’s delight when you look down to find clumps of hair have fallen out. You shake it off, only to find that even more strands have abandoned your scalp as you comb your hair. Worry begins to set in. The next morning, that worry escalates to fear as you see your pillowcase covered with even more loose strands.

Baldness is among one of the worst annoyances in our society as mankind has long been pestered by alopecia areata, or male/female pattern progressive hair loss. In the U.S., approximately 35 million men and 21 million women [suffer](#) from hair loss, equating to hair loss in over one in every five Americans. However, hair loss shows minimal signs of slowing, with few existing cures and many ways to aggravate the problem, which becomes distressing to victims of this nuisance.

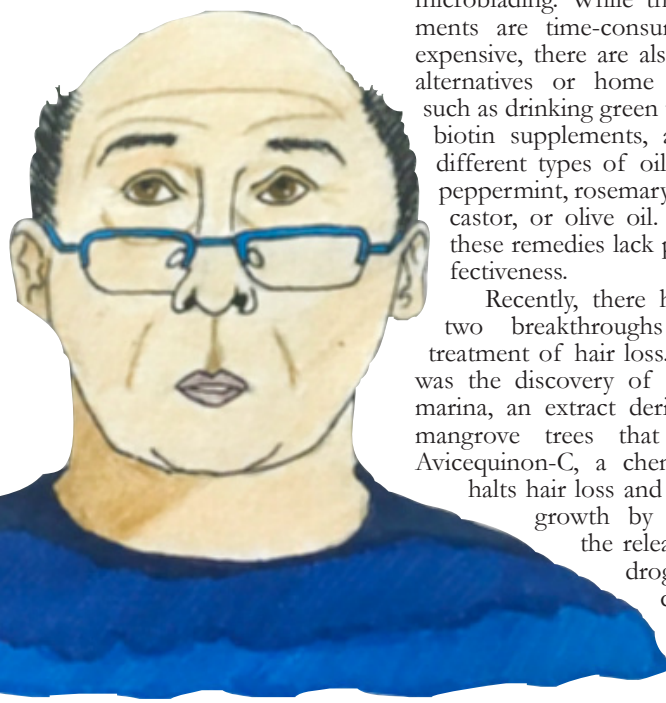
Shedding hair does not immediately indicate alopecia areata, as males and females with healthy hair may shed up to [80 and 100 strands a day](#), respectively. Though it is frightening when you find a few loose strands, don’t freak out just yet. However, once you lose more than 100 strands a day and your hair begins to feel thin, it may indicate an underlying issue for abnormal hair loss.

Anyone is susceptible to hair loss as it can result from medical conditions, genetics, hormonal imbalances, or aging. However,

hair loss is primarily caused by stress, which is correlated with three specific types of hair loss: telogen effluvium, alopecia areata (AA), and trichotillomania. Telogen effluvium results from a body change, such as weight loss, that causes hairs to be in the telogen, or resting, phase. The hair then sheds and becomes thin. However, this hair loss is reversible and may grow back normally within six months. AA is an autoimmune disorder that is triggered by stress and causes several isolated patches on the scalp. Trichotillomania, also referred to as “hair-pulling disorder,” involves compulsive hair pulling. The commonality among hair losses caused by stress is that they are temporary: since the hair follicles are not permanently damaged, hair can regrow. To encourage hair regrowth, healthy practices, such as managing your stress, eating a balanced diet that supplies vitamins essential to hair growth (Vitamins C, B, and E), and remaining hydrated can help your hair return to its normal growth rate.

While there has yet to be a certified remedy to replant hair on a bald head, there are many treatments to mitigate hair loss. The FDA approved two treatments for male pattern baldness: Minoxidil and Finasteride. Minoxidil is an over-the-counter (OTC) treat-

ment and is applied to slow thinning hair and hair loss. It is a vasodilator, meaning it widens blood vessels to improve blood flow to the regions in which it is applied. However, it requires constant usage, as halting the treatment



Yume Igarashi / The Spectator

will resume and exacerbate hair loss. Finasteride is a prescription medication and is claimed by the American Hair Loss Association to have stopped hair loss from progressing in 86 percent of treated men and increased hair growth in 65 percent. However, since it

works by increasing testosterone levels in the body, it has several side effects, including impotence, weakness, headaches, and swelling. There are other treatments, such as hair transplants, laser treatment, and, for those who fancy the aesthetic of hair, microblading. While those treatments are time-consuming and expensive, there are also cheaper alternatives or home remedies, such as drinking green tea, taking biotin supplements, and using different types of oils, such as peppermint, rosemary, coconut, castor, or olive oil. However, these remedies lack proven effectiveness.

Recently, there have been two breakthroughs in the treatment of hair loss. The first was the discovery of Avicennia marina, an extract derived from mangrove trees that contains Avicennin-C, a chemical that halts hair loss and promotes growth by inhibiting the release of androgens that cause hair loss. The substance was

tested on 50 participants who suffer from alopecia areata, and results indicated that it successfully stopped hair loss and promoted hair regrowth. However, this extract must be tested more frequently before it can be approved as a drug. The second breakthrough was achieved by scientists at Riken, a research in-

stitute based in Japan. They discovered that stem cells—cells that have yet to differentiate—could be used to develop hair follicles. These hair follicles are unique because they can regrow hair when it falls out, ensuring that every fallen strand is replaced by a new one. They grew the cells in a NFFSE medium, a type of growth medium that includes collagen, and found that this yielded the highest stem cell amplification rate, or regenerative success. In the study, they found that [80 percent](#) of follicles were able to regenerate in a cyclical fashion, suggesting that hair regeneration is an imminent reality. Though this method must also pass clinical trials before it can be approved, its results so far have been more than promising.

Mankind may soon be able to overcome one of its greatest inconveniences. Though it is one thing to choose a clean-shaven head or shed a few hairs a day, it is an entirely different story to be a victim of excessive hair loss. Thankfully, this affliction may soon see a permanent end as new remedies become commercially available, replacing current methods that have questionable efficacy or serious side effects. While hair loss is generally not a concern until later in one’s life, it never hurts to take preventative measures early. So, perhaps take up some healthy practices, such as regular hair washing or eating a healthy diet, and stop stressing about that exam or project you may have. Give yourself and your hair a break.

# Musk's SpaceX vs. Bezos's Blue Origin: The Billionaire Space Race

By ARYANA SINGH

In the first week of 2021, founder and CEO of Tesla and SpaceX Elon Musk surpassed Amazon founder Jeff Bezos as the richest man in the world at a net worth of \$185 billion. Since then, the top spot has fluctuated [between the two](#).

Coincidentally enough, Bezos abruptly stepped down as CEO of Amazon on February 2. In [a letter](#) to Amazon employees, Bezos stated that as a result of his decision, “[I will] have the time and energy I need to focus on [...] my other passions.” Similar to Musk, Bezos has his own space company, Blue Origin. It seems as if Bezos, after seeing his opponent's success, wishes to challenge Musk's ability by turning his attention to Blue Origin. Assessing each company's goals in the upcoming years shows that the two billionaires are ready to engage in a space race.

Though it is not discussed as much as SpaceX, Blue Origin has its own stark ambitions. Bezos founded Blue Origin in 2000, two years before Musk founded SpaceX. Though not many people have heard about it, Blue Origin has signed [several contracts](#) with NASA allowing them new launch permits. Having stepped down from Amazon, Bezos now has the time to focus on launching new

rockets into space.

As a student, Bezos dreamed of building huge space colonies and specifically had an interest in physicist Gerard O'Neill's [space colony concepts](#). In O'Neill's concepts, colonies were made out of materials almost exclusively found in space. The cylindrical space colonies would rotate to create the feeling of gravity and Earth-like conditions. In Bezos's high school [valedictorian speech](#), the Miami Herald recapped, “[Bezos] wants to build space hotels, amusement parks, yachts, and colonies for two or three million people orbiting around the earth [...] The whole idea is to preserve the earth [...] the final objective is to get all people off the earth and see it turned into a huge national park.” With this desire in mind, Bezos founded Blue Origin and sought to reduce the cost of space travel.

Blue Origin is currently working on a rocket set to debut in 2021 called New Glenn that will have reusable boosters to lower the cost of launches. The boosters, which help propel a spacecraft into space, would ideally return to Earth for reuse. Blue Origin is also planning to create a rocket called New Armstrong that would be completely reusable, meaning the entire rocket system could be salvaged and used again. It has been speculated that the New Armstrong rocket will be designed

for deep space travel, such as to the Moon or even Mars. For now, Blue Origin's main focus is a fully reusable rocket system named New Shepard, which has successfully landed on the ground multiple times. However, unlike the proposed New Armstrong, New Shepard is only designed for sub-orbital flight and, therefore, does not have the power to achieve orbit around Earth. Additionally, Blue Origin plans to help develop [a lunar lander](#) for NASA's upcoming Artemis mission that aims to get humans back on the moon by 2024.

Considering how much the company still has to accomplish, it is no wonder that Bezos adjusted his devotion. It is clear that Bezos has not put much effort into Blue Origin, considering the company's few launches thus far. In the last two years, SpaceX had 21 launches and became the first private company to successfully launch a rocket into space, while Blue Origin had far fewer launches, most of which were suborbital flights. SpaceX had contracts with NASA far before Blue Origin did, such as the [manned Dragon mission](#) to the International Space Station (ISS) in the summer of 2020.

As for their private ventures, SpaceX developed the [first reusable rocket](#), called Falcon 9, that had reusable boosters, saving millions of dollars per launch. Falcon

Heavy, which consists of three Falcon 9 cores, became the most powerful rocket in the world and could carry more than twice the amount of the next biggest rocket. In fact, a Falcon Heavy rocket equipped with previously used boosters once [sent a Tesla Roadster](#) heading towards Mars. After the car was on its way, the boosters safely landed back on Earth, proving Falcon Heavy's ability to send heavy payloads. Additionally, the company is working to create a fully reusable rocket—Starship SN9—and fuel will be the only significant cost. Unfortunately, in the past couple of months, two test launches ended in explosions upon landing, inciting criticism that the company is moving too fast.

Musk also has large aspirations. Unlike Bezos, Musk wants to establish a self-sustaining city on Mars, [stating](#), “When you'd land [on Mars], you hydrate the [dry nutrient] gel [with seeds] and you have a little greenhouse on Mars.” SpaceX's current plan for a Mars mission is to launch a manned Starship into orbit. A few “tanker” Starships would also launch and meet the manned Starship in orbit to refill its fuel tanks. Afterward, the tankers would return to Earth as the manned Starship begins its voyage to Mars. Musk hopes that the Starship will carry [at most 100 people](#) at a time,

compared to the current four that are sent to the ISS at a time. Starship could also be used for a [manned mission to the Moon](#) in 2023 to prove its ability to make deep space trips. Musk also mentioned that, since the Starship is reusable, the round-trip ticket could cost around \$100,000 to \$500,000, allowing average citizens to pack their bags and move to Mars. The company expects to start [creating a city](#) on Mars in the 2050s and Musk even hopes to terraform Mars using greenhouse gases in the 2100s to make it more Earth-like.

Both billionaires share the same wish: to make space travel cheaper and more accessible to the general public—but in different ways. Both companies have focused on creating reusable rockets that will drastically lower the cost of each launch, as NASA currently spends an [average of \\$152 million](#) per launch because a new rocket has to be assembled each time. Soon, we will all live in a reality where riding rockets to space is just as common as riding planes, and we'll have companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin to thank for our progress. The ongoing battle between the two is a tight one. Perhaps the competition, resembling a space race, will encourage companies alike to seek new ideas for the greater of humankind. Only time will tell.

## What Would Happen if the Earth Spun in the Opposite Direction?

By DONGNI (HELLEN) LUO

Approximately 4.5 billion years ago, a molecular cloud of disturbed gas and dust began to collapse inward as the force of gravity pulled everything together, forming the solar nebula. At the center of this huge rotating disk, particles of gas and dust accreted into a dense ball of gas—the pre-stellar core of the Sun. When the core gradually reached a temperature of 10 million Kelvin and was hot enough to generate energy through nuclear fusion, the Sun contracted until it arrived at a state of hydrostatic equilibrium and officially became a main-sequence star. Consequently, leftover particles in the outer rings began to clump up into larger particles, in which solar winds blew away the lighter materials and left only the heavy, rocky ones to transform into smaller terrestrial planets, namely Earth. Ever since, our earth has been rotating on its axis in the same prograde direction as the Sun, from west to east, completing a full rotation every [23.9 hours](#) at a speed of 1,670 kilometers (1,040 miles) an hour.

Venus is the only planet in the solar system that rotates backwards, though Uranus rotates at an extreme angle of [98 degrees](#). Scientists hypothesize that Uranus's unusual rotation is due to a massive collision with another celestial object, such as an asteroid, that disturbed its original rotation. Meanwhile, other scientists believe that instead of a single collision, the sideways spin is likely to be caused by several smaller crashes that knocked the planet on its side. Regardless, it would also most likely require a significant asteroid impact or a number of mini-bumps for Earth to start rotating in the opposite direction. “That event itself would [be] disastrous,” astronomy and astrophysics professor from Penn State University Kevin Luhman

said. However, let's say we take a remote controller and magically reverse the rotation without experiencing dramatic calamity. What exactly would happen if the Earth began to spin in the opposite direction?

One of the most consequential effects of the Earth's axial rotation is the Coriolis effect, which is largely responsible for the deflecting pattern of wind motion and air circulation to the right in the Northern Hemisphere and to the left in the Southern Hemisphere. If the Earth were to spin backward, the pattern of the Coriolis effect would be upended such that the entire climate system of our planet would be disturbed. BBC meteorologist [Peter Gibbs](#) explains, “The Coriolis effect transfers the spin of the Earth into the circular motion of winds around a weather system. [...] Reverse the rotation of the Earth and you put the storms into reverse too.”

The reverse in the spin of the Earth would indicate a reverse in the directions of trade winds such that the ones normally blowing from the northeast will now come from the northwest. With reversed directions, westbound flights would suddenly be much shorter than eastbound flights. This change could also reverse the direction of natural disasters, including typhoons and hurricanes. For instance, a cyclonic rotation would no longer spin counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere or clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere, causing the location of storms and affected areas to change on a global scale.

A group of scientists led

by Florian Ziemer conducted a [simulation](#) at the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology in Hamburg, Germany to model the effects of the Earth spinning backward by fast-forwarding the virtual calendar of the model up to 7,000 years in the future. They found that the dissolved oxygen levels in the

tems. An excessive number of cyanobacterial blooms could use up even more oxygen and block out sunlight for organisms that reside below the water surface, causing a major environmental problem that would disrupt the balance of aquatic life.

Besides the Coriolis effect and biological activities, the normal rotation of the Earth plays an important role in distributing the location

of carbon dioxide emissions—one of the main greenhouse gases—are undoubtedly the foremost contributing factor to accelerating global warming. Since plants use carbon dioxide as one of their reactants to produce carbohydrates through photosynthesis, more plants would absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Therefore, if the Earth were to spin backwards, the effects of climate change and global warming would decrease as terrestrial ecosystems would now allow more plant life to emerge.

In that case, the reversed spin of our planet may not be as catastrophic as it sounds. Research studies on our planet's rotational direction have provoked a considerable number of debates and discussions on whether a backward-spinning Earth would be a better place to live than our present Earth. Though studies have shown that a backward-spinning Earth will be less affected by global warming, we should avoid relying on these hypothetical phenomena unless they result from a much more costly and disastrous event; instead, we should search for solutions that are within the range of our abilities and develop plans accordingly to resolve the climate change crisis.

Nevertheless, a non-rotating Earth would actually cause severe and undesirable consequences. Earth's spin is responsible for generating the magnetic field that surrounds our planet, which provides us protection against the harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Without the magnetic field, organisms would be bombarded with radiation and the atmosphere would be blown away by solar winds. As long as the Earth does not stop rotating, the prospect of a backward-spinning Earth allows scientists to explore the different aspects of our planet's potential and reach a new level of understanding of Earth as a whole.



Ka Seng Soo / The Spectator

north-Indian Ocean would dramatically decrease as the depth of the water column increases. This unusual phenomenon is mainly caused by the interplay of circulation and high biological production in that specific region, forcing many species of microorganisms to consume nitrates instead of oxygen. Cyanobacteria, however, do not necessarily need nitrates for survival, allowing them to thrive in areas with low levels of nitrate. As a result, cyanobacteria would become the dominant biological producers in many marine ecosys-

tems. In fact, Earth would become a greener planet if its rotation were in the opposite retrograde direction. Deserts would [shrink](#) from 42 million square kilometers to 31 million kilometers. Additionally,

# Arts and Entertainment

## MUSIC

## Making Rainbows Out of Something Painful

By ADELE BOIS

For Arlo Parks, music is about finding hope in dismal places—both the ups and downs that come with love, pain, and depression. “I think conversations are opening...the fact that it’s becoming easier to speak one’s truth is really comforting and positive to me,” she discussed with [NPR](#). At just 20, the London-based poet and singer has

already garnered critical acclaim, with her music receiving shout-outs from Billie Eilish, Michelle Obama, and Phoebe Bridgers, among many others.

Her willingness to confront topics such as mental health and addiction is apparent in her previous singles like “Black Dog” (2020), where she tries to support a friend with depression. “Let’s go to the corner store and buy some fruit,” she pleads. “I

would do anything to get you out your room.” In “Hurt” (2020), she recounts the tale of a mysterious “Charlie,” who “drank ‘til his eyes burned...with pain built into his body...” and reassures him that “it won’t hurt so much forever.” Sometimes, adolescence can be difficult, and in “Super Sad Generation” (2019), Parks speaks for all of us when she admits that “we’re just a super sad generation, killing time and losing our paychecks.” No matter the issue, Parks feels like a friend, bringing you fruit, support, and unconditional love.

This pattern is followed in her most recent album, “Collapsed in Sunbeams,” which was released on January 29. With songs titled “Hope” and “Too Good,” listeners are sure to feel Parks’s familiar yet somehow universal message of optimism. “Collapsed in Sunbeams” is a journal—a portrait of adulthood, romance, and isolation, told through spoken words and soft, neo-soul beats.

What makes Parks’s album stand out is her intimacy. Though she sings with the perspective of an outsider on tracks like “Caroline,” which is about a couple she saw while waiting for the bus, it still feels like we are caught up in their story. Parks touches on these strangers’ relationship and how, suddenly, what seems beau-

tiful can easily sour. “Caroline is an exercise in people-watching and seeing situations unfold without context,” Parks [said](#) of the despairing tune. Songs like “Caroline” highlight Parks’s talent in storytelling, recounting personal anecdotes with passion and emotion.

Parks got her start as a poet and a writer; as a teen, she would create fantasy worlds because she struggled with shyness and identity in her real one. “I’m a Black kid who can’t dance for [EXPLICIT], listens to emo music, and currently has a crush on some girl in my Spanish class,” she [said](#) of her teen years. Now “Collapsed in Sunbeams” is Parks’s metamorphosis, an evolution from her reserved adolescence to a bold new sense of self within her songwriting and storytelling.

Though “Collapsed” is flawless in its lyricism and depth, it can occasionally feel monotonous. The beats are light and cheery, with floaty keyboards and methodic drum cracks. Still, each phrase Parks delivers hints at a possibility of something less sweet, something to match the topic of her singing. Each track eventually finds itself somewhat glacial, continuing this album’s sentiment of observing from afar. Despite the sweetness of Parks’s sounds, the lyrics are ul-

timately what make this album meaningful. Through catchy, confident references to pop culture and verses of acceptance, “Collapsed in Sunbeams” is a warm blanket of friendship and welcome.

Throughout the album, Parks also covers songs by popular artists, like “Ivy” by Frank Ocean, “Moon Song” by Phoebe Bridgers, “Bags” by Clairo, and “Baby Blue” by King Krule. Her take on these favorites, what she calls a “lo-fi lounge,” feels like she’s singing in her room, a private performance for millions of listeners, but also only for you. And Parks does this so well. Everything she posts about on Instagram, tweets, or says in an interview feels so personalized it’s almost like she knows each and every fan. During a time like this, intimacy feels strange, but somehow it’s easy to be swept up in her bubble.

Like Parks sings in “Portra 400,” she is constantly “making rainbows out of something painful.” Whether it’s through her omniscient storytelling or the way she approaches taboo topics with grace and prose, Arlo Parks is certainly writing for the present, and creating a world where we celebrate every moment of life and feel comfortable approaching pain.



Cindy Yang / The Spectator

## FILM

## “The White Tiger”: A Rags-to-Riches Reality Check

By KENISHA MAHAJAN

Legendary cartoonist Matt G.Growing up, many of us are surrounded by unrealistic rags-to-riches stories that aim to instill in us the all-American values of hard work, individualism, and self-sufficiency. However, the “American Dream” sold by these tales is seldom in line with reality. Netflix’s adaptation of Aravind Adiga’s award-winning novel “The White Tiger” explores a kind of success story rarely told in our culture.

When the audience first meets Balram Halwai (Adarsh Gourav), he’s a promising young student. One day, a teacher tells him that he is a “white tiger,” a once-in-a-generation phenomenon. But Balram knows that isn’t likely. Comparing the caste system to a rooster coop, Balram narrates that every person knows their fate, yet doesn’t rebel, as they not only accept, but embrace their destiny.

Balram’s innocent charm lands him his dream job with a wealthy village owner known as “The Stork” (Mahesh Manjrekar), and he quickly wins the favor of his son, Ashok (Rajkumar Rao). Ashok was educated in the U.S. where he met his vivacious New York-raised wife, Pinky (Priyanka Chopra). They reject the way others treat Balram and form a close friendship with him. However, when Ashok’s security is threatened, Balram quickly becomes the family’s scapegoat. Betrayed by his employers, Balram’s staunch loyalty erupts into rage, and this hatred for the rich paves the way for his success.

“The White Tiger” explores India’s caste system—and, more generally, class struggle—by depicting one man’s vicious rags-to-riches story. The film works to counteract the unrealistic nar-

rative perpetuated by other success stories: the harder you work, the more success will come to you. Just as Balram says, “for the poor, there are only two ways to get to the top, crime or politics.” “The White Tiger” uses one story to highlight issues with capitalism, the caste system, economic mobility, wealth inequality, privilege, and more. Through this cuttingly critical narrative, the film achieves a kind of general applicability seen in similar nuanced and class-focused works like “Parasite” (2019) and “Knives Out” (2019).

The organization and narration of the film accomplish an almost intentional familiarity, which is necessary to establish the aforementioned sense of universality in such a societally specific story. The flashback-style narration of the film is quite elementary, but an experimental storytelling format would have risked leaving audiences without the historic and cultural context to fully understand its conflict. The writing helps bridge the gap between the complex subject matter and unfamiliar viewers. However, since the film is aimed at Western audiences, the narration can come off as patronizing at times. Regardless, the writing builds the characters—especially the main three—efficiently while advancing the story at a comfortable pace. The film is split into two halves: the heavy character development in the first half of the film enables the story in the second to progress more quickly without feeling rushed or incomplete. The writing and pacing of the film allow for the beautiful yet troubled world built in its introduction to easily surrender to building doom-and-gloom as the plot progresses.

The dichotomy between the more light-hearted and darker

elements of “The White Tiger” is one of the most remarkable aspects of the film, and characteristic of its director and writer Ramin Bahrani. Bahrani consistently explores the torturous paradox that is the “American

romanticization of poverty—a pitfall many filmmakers fall prey to.

In front of the cameras, one of the reasons “The White Tiger” works so well is because of Gourav’s phenomenal act-

a powerful, yet easy-to-root-for character, “The White Tiger” is able to dive into the harsh truths of the caste system.

Rao’s performance as the Stork’s son introduces audiences to a modern view of the caste system. Ashok disapproves of the way Balram is treated, insisting that Balram not call him “sir” and think of him as a friend, not a master. However, Ashok is still accepting of his family’s corrupt practices and expects the quiet obedience of Balram that others do. Pinky, on the other hand, is sincerely kind to Balram. Raised and educated in America, Pinky fails to understand Balram’s desire to serve a family that treats him with no dignity. She not only rejects Balram’s servitude, but does so publicly, and gives Balram hope that he is destined for something greater. Rao and Chopra’s performances prove why passive support and silent rejection of these flawed institutions are not enough. While many people oppose the Indian caste system—or, more generally, rigid class divides—merely shaking your head at these establishments accomplishes nothing. While neither Ashok nor Pinky are exemplary agents of change, their characters and the repercussions of their actions prove why taking action is necessary to fight injustice.

Throughout the film, Balram talks about the two sides of India, claiming that “India is two countries in one, an India of light and an India of darkness.” “The White Tiger” accurately depicts this darkness, resulting in a powerful, grimy, and sometimes unnerving tale of class struggle. The film demonstrates that this “darkness” is not limited to one system in one country, rather it transcends borders and seeps into our everyday lives.



Ismath Maksura / The Spectator

Dream,” delivering provocative messages with every one of his films. “The White Tiger” is a perfect fit for Bahrani, as it echoes the ideas he has been examining his whole career and adds a new dimension to his exploration of class struggle: further than the “what” and “why” behind poverty, Bahrani aims to redefine audiences’ perception of success. Importantly, Bahrani avoids the

ing as Balram Halwai. Though it’s Gourav’s debut as a leading man, he does a wonderful job depicting Balram’s two-sided nature and his internal conflict throughout the film, caused by the contrast between his innocent servility and his hunger for success. As the movie continues, Balram’s willing, wide-eyed servitude gives way to a darker, more subversive narrative. By creating

## Arts and Entertainment

## MUSIC

## Celebrating 50 Years of These Groundbreaking Rock Albums

By JAEIN KU

The 1970s was an era of innovation and experimentation within music, with an explosion of creativity that enabled soul, R&B, disco, punk, country rock, and electric rock to carve their places in the music world. During the first half of the decade, rock bands such as Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath were at the height of their international fame as they released their most popular and influential albums. This year marks the 50th anniversary of several of these classic rock albums, and their impact on history and music is undeniable.

## “Led Zeppelin IV” by Led Zeppelin

Led Zeppelin’s untitled fourth album is arguably the greatest rock album ever made, reshaping the band’s sound and legacy forever with its phenomenal genre fusion. The album impeccably defined the style of ‘70s hard rock while incorporating heavy metal, folk, pure rock & roll, and the blues throughout its eight tracks. To spite critics questioning the legitimacy of the band, the cover art does not feature an official title or the band’s name. Yet, the album is undoubtedly their most popular, selling over 35 million copies. The most notable track in this timeless album is the ubiquitous “Stairway

to Heaven,” an eight minute song with mystical lyrics, catchy guitar riffs, and a breathtaking build-up. The song introduced elements into music that were previously unheard, such as a transition from acoustic to electric instrumentation as the song progressed. From the album’s explosive opening track “Black Dog” to sludged-filled “When the Levee Breaks,” “Led Zeppelin IV” does not fail to remain a prominent landmark in rock.

## “Master of Reality” by Black Sabbath

Through their third studio album, “Master of Reality,” Black Sabbath released the band’s most vital work by creating stoner rock and doom metal. Doom

the Grave,” “Into the Void,” and “Lord of This World” were tuned down three semitones, creating the album’s atmosphere of depressive dread. Furthermore, the most obvious precursor for the stoner metal genre comes from “Sweet Leaf,” which is started by Iommi’s cough, the result of a joint handed to him by Ozzy Osbourne in the midst of recording. This accidental stumble into new music territory inspired many modern bands and artists of rock and metal such as Metallica, Electric Wizard, and Matt Pike, who now attribute their sound and popularity to this album.

## “Hunky Dory” by David Bowie

“Hunky Dory” is widely regarded as one of David Bowie’s finest achievements for its vast array of musical styles tied under a theme of ambiguous sexuality. With the release of “Hunky Dory,” Bowie took a radical change from his previous hard rock and metal style to challenge tradition and reinvent himself with a coy blend of folk, pop, and rock. Some of his most timeless works such as “Life on Mars?” and “Changes” are found in this album, making “Hunky Dory” a true rock classic. Furthermore, this album marked the beginning of Bowie’s role as a preeminent glitter rock performer. Glitter rock is more energetic and playful than other rock subgenres, and its musicians wear outrageous

costumes, makeup, and hairstyles. David Bowie’s transition did not go unnoticed, as it prompted a widespread shift from hard rock and metal to glitter rock that influenced groups such as Buzzcocks, Sex Pistols, Clash, Devo, and more.

## “Killer” by Alice Cooper

With the album “Killer,” Alice Cooper became one of the world’s top rock bands and concert attractions. Full of irresistible pop melodies and punchy hard rock, singles “Under My Wheels” and “Be My Lover” both landed on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart. Each song has a unique feel, yet is united under a cohesive theme: nearly every song is about a killer. “Under My Wheels” is about a man who fantasizes about running over his nagging girlfriend with a car, while “Halo of Flies” is dedicated to Jim Morrison, a singer in the rock band L.A. Woman who died four months prior to the album’s release but also tells the story of a serial killer in the Wild West era. “Killer” is about a killer asking to be granted justice, and “Dead Babies” is an anti-parental abuse warning in which parents kill their child through their own neglect. In “Dead Babies,” for example, the band’s theatrics heavily dealt with macabre, with baby dolls being stabbed and tortured repeatedly. The grating subject compelled some grown-ups to despise the album and the band itself, but the group’s heavy rock style both inspired and astonished many teens throughout the years.



Joanna Meng / The Spectator

metal, the extreme subgenre of heavy metal, was the byproduct of Tony Iommi, who tuned his guitar down so that it would be easier for him to play with injured fingers. As a result, tracks such as “Children of

## FILM

## “Ma Rainey’s” Enduring Impact

By YASMINE CHOKRANE

Last year, Chadwick Boseman’s death cut deep into the collective consciousness. Many celebrities pass away each year—and each one is certainly a tragedy—but his death was felt profoundly on an enormous scale. On the day of his passing, Instagram stories and news channels were flooded with images of mourning, articulations of grief, and a deep appreciation for his cultural resonance.

Boseman was known for films in which he played venerated Black figures: the first Black Major League Baseball player Jackie Robinson in “42” (2013), the first Black Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in “Marshall” (2017), and the “godfather of soul” James Brown in “Get on Up” (2014). And while the effort and effect of all of his works are undeniable, there is no role he is better known for than the celebrated Black Panther within the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” (2020) is the last film he ever worked on, but its reverberating impact is in-line with the rest of Boseman’s work. The film, produced by Denzel Washington, Todd Black, and Dany Wolf, is adapted from the play of the same name by playwright August Wilson. Set in 1927 Chicago, “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” tells the story of two blues musicians, the real mother of blues herself, Ma Rainey (Viola Davis), and fictional Levee Green (Chadwick Boseman), an impetuous trumpet player with unrivaled ambition.

But conflict pervades the film, as beyond Green and Rainey, there is the strain between the Black

musicians and white producers. The Black musicians struggle to receive the respect and compensation they rightfully deserve for their music, while the white producers fail to confront their own prejudices.

In “Ma Rainey,” we watch these different dynamics come to a cymbal-crashing, trumpet-tweeting climax in their sweaty and sombre recording session. The confined space allows for an intense interrogation of the characters’ motivations. When Rainey demands a Coca Cola from her producer Sturdyvant, we begin to understand why she is unwilling to compromise with the producers about her accommodations during the recording session. Listening to Toledo (Glynn Turman) and Cutler (Colman Domingo)—two of Rainey’s jazz players—write off Green’s ambition, we get an internalized understanding of the lack of social mobility they share. And when we endure Green’s monologue in which he curses God, we empathize with the hopelessness and desperation he feels.

It’s no surprise that many critics were taken by the conversations between the characters. Wilson is known for his musical dialogue, with some calling it poetry. As Bob Mondello reports in [an episode of NPR](#), Wilson’s “characters speak their stories in lyrical, eloquent, bluesy riffs.” Wilson achieved this quality in his dialogue through his musical influences, the greatest being the “four Bs” as he describes in a [1999 interview](#) with The Paris Review—“the primary one being the blues, then Borges, Baraka, and Bearden.”

By drawing from a variety of

artistic mediums—namely music, literature, and the fine arts—Wilson has come to be known as the “theater’s poet of Black America.” “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” is one of his 10 critically-acclaimed plays, which have been collectively called “The Pittsburgh Cycle.” The series chronicles the Black experience throughout the twentieth century, with each play being set in a distinct decade. The other factor uniting them is the setting, with each play taking place in Wilson’s home city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—with the exception of “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.”

Beyond a few establishing shots, however, it’d be incredibly difficult to guess where the story takes place, as the film circulates two main indoor spaces. The sparse number of sets gives some indication that the movie is adapted from the theater. There are three sets to be exact: the recording studio, the basement, and the surrounding Chicago—images of which are mostly used to create a sense of setting. The majority of the drama happens within the first two rooms, and the lack of reliance on the surrounding allows the dialogue to intensify, disengaging the senses of the audience and giving the actors a chance to shine.

Every one of Wilson’s words is made impactful by the actors who speak them. Davis is a known powerhouse, and in this film she proves no different. In the confident disposition she adopts and the disdain she holds in her eyes, the audience gets the impression of Rainey, a woman who is jaded by the lifetime of disrespect she’s received.

“They don’t care nothing about me,” she asserts. “All they

want is my voice.”

But the real standout in this film is Boseman, who unflinchingly thrusts himself into the role of Green. From the way he fidgets, to the smirk he carries, to the way he screams—leaving his soul on the basement floor—we get an image of a man who’s not only looking to hum along to the tune of 1920s America but compose it too. He tries to combat the difficulties of being a Black man in the music industry with a recklessness marred by tragedy. And even though Green is fictional, his narrative resembles those of so many other real and talented Black musicians who were abused, exploited, and abandoned by the music industry they helped define.

And he grasps the harsh reality of his struggle, as he describes his situation to Cutler: “I ain’t had nothing but bad luck all my life. Couldn’t get no worse. What the [EXPLETIVE] I care about some bad luck?”

It’s, of course, not bad luck Green is a victim of, but the consequences of systemic racism and prejudice. It is through the realities of these individual characters—Rainey, Green, and Toledo—that we’re able to construct a larger image of the repercussions of this system. And it’s the intimacy that’s fostered in these snapshots that contributes to an empathy that audience carries with them—whether it’s after they close the Netflix tab or leave the physical theater.

However the story comes to you, the importance of Wilson’s narratives is underscored: by raising questions of identity, racial and otherwise, he articulates an inherited cultural legacy, crafting his own along the way.

## PLAYLIST

## Curled Up, Fully Clothed in a Freezing Cold Shower

By THE ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT DEPARTMENT

You know the feeling! It’s 4:00 a.m., the boiler won’t work, and it’s just too much work to get undressed, take a shower, get re-clothed, and then go to bed. Here are some songs for when you just wanna curl up on that weird, grippy shower mat and freeze yourself halfway to death.

*Little Dark Age*  
MGMT  
Electronic Alternative Indie

*worldstar money (interlude)*  
Joji  
R&B

*No Surprises*  
Radiohead  
Alternative Rock

*Iris*  
Goo Goo Dolls  
Rock

*Reptile*  
The Church  
Psychedelic Rock

*Polarbear!*  
Strawberry Milk Cult  
Indie

*Self Control*  
Frank Ocean  
Alternative R&B

*Creator, Destroyer*  
Angel Olsen  
Neo-folk

*Falling*  
Harry Styles  
Pop

*Space Song*  
Beach House  
Alternative Indie

*Rainbow Connection*  
Kermit the Frog  
Country

*Bad Nems*  
Kanye West  
Electronic Hip-hop

# Arts and Entertainment

## FASHION

By JULIA PANAS

Many believed that quarantine would kill the fashion industry, yet young people are proving that time in isolation can foster a period of self-growth—and closet growth. As people explore their identities away from the prying eyes of social norms, they begin to explore different aesthetics and post their fashion inspirations online, leading to the rise of many popular trends, namely Cottagecore.

Cottagecore is part of a group of fantasy-based styles which emerged in 2020. As people were forced to stay indoors during quarantine, fashion trends became increasingly escapist, drawing inspiration from



Mandy Li / The Spectator

older time periods and make-believe worlds. Other styles in this category include a gothic aesthetic inspired by vampires, a modern bohemian take on woodland fairies, and—with the recent popularity of the Netflix series “Bridgerton” (2020)—an opulent style reminiscent of medieval royalty.

The aesthetic of Cottagecore is best represented by the backdrop of a forest or meadow in a quaint home and a lifestyle where you garden, craft, go on picnics, and pick flowers. It emphasizes a connection with nature and models the old English countryside look, with elements inspired by Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales. The clothing is flowing and easy-to-wear, made with pale colors and delicate pat-

terns, and features details such as eyelet lace and embroidery.

It's impossible to talk about Cottagecore without mentioning one of the most famous garments of the trend: the [Strawberry Midi Dress by Lirika Matoshi](#). You may remember this dress popping up on your Instagram feed last summer; to say the least, it took the social media world by storm, populating the homepages of influencers, TikTok videos, Pinterest inspiration boards, and the “shop” tab on Instagram. The reason it became so popular is precisely because of the already well-established popularity of Cottagecore. The midi length, lightweight tulle fabric, and full skirt make it ideal for running in a field of flowers, while the kitsch glittery strawberry pattern and pale pink color embody a fun-loving innocence. The puffed sleeves can't help but remind the wearer of pre-war European countryside aesthetics, and the V-neck is a perfect balance of innocent, flirty, and ro-

mantic. The ribbons around the bodice can also be used to adjust the waist, so the garment creates an attractive hourglass silhouette on every body type. Finally, since the sizing is inclusive (available in XS to XXXL), anyone can adopt the Strawberry Dress fantasy.

The Strawberry Dress is both a perfect example of the cottagecore aesthetic as well as an influential garment that further proliferated the trend. But there are many other ways to implement cottagecore into your daily wear other than ordering this expensive gown. To start, look for pieces with romantic details like babydoll waists, large puffed sleeves, ribbons, ruffles, delicate prints, and natural materials like linen and cotton. For the color palette, shop for soft pastels (pale pink, blue, and yellow) as well as earthy tones (tan, brown, and dark green). Some specific items you can start off with are a baby-doll dress, a top with a fitted bodice and large sleeves, a below-the-knee flowing midi

skirt in a floral pattern, and white lace socks.

You can even alter your own clothes to fit the aesthetic. For example, try embroidering flowers onto a simple blouse or tying a ribbon around the waist of a free-flowing dress to create a large bow in the back.

Finally, remember that shoes and accessories can make a big impact on the look. Soft brown leather boots, Mary Janes, and espadrilles all work with cottagecore. For the accessories, pair your outfits with basket-weave bags and style your hair with fresh flowers or scarves tied as headbands to achieve that romantic picnic feel.

Cottagecore proves that no matter what's going on in the world around you, fashion can always be your means of escape. So go ahead and drink tea in floral teacups, buy one too many plants, bake your own bread, and dry flowers you picked yourself. Live your fantasy.

## FILM

By ASA MUHAMMAD

Highly anticipated and well worth the wait, “Judas and the Black Messiah” has finally arrived. The story is as educational as it is entertaining, providing insights into the Black Panthers and why they failed.

The Black Panther Party was a political party founded in 1966 in Oakland, California. The party focused on Black pride and liberation, alongside its communist influences. With one of the prime tenets of the Black Panthers' platform being Black armament and their open support for Marxism in Cold War era United States, the party was the subject of government scrutiny from their inception.

This scrutiny led to malfeasance in the form of J. Edgar Hoover's counterintelligence program. The program resulted in numerous cases of unlawful surveillance, funding domestic paramilitary organizations, engineering smear campaigns, and, most relevantly, performing assassinations. One of their most infamous assassinations was that of Fred Hampton, the subject of this Home Box Office hit.

“Judas” follows William O'Neal (played by LaKeith Stanfield), an initially reluctant FBI informant tasked with disbanding the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party after being caught stealing a cherry red convertible. Opposite O'Neal is Fred Hampton (Daniel Kaluuya), the chairman of the Chicago chapter. As the film progresses, O'Neal is able to see the good that the Panthers are capable of, but not without also experiencing the violent conflict between the Panthers and the government. O'Neal grows more conflicted as his ties to the Panthers deepen, and begins to question whether he's really on justice's side.

Being a historical drama, “Judas” is bound to have at least a few historical inaccuracies. The majority come from the film's penchant for the dramatic,

especially with the story of Bill O'Neal. O'Neal is given a fairly cliché “deep cover” plotline, with a harrowing origin story, violent interrogations on his loyalty, and lavish and discreet rendezvous with his handler. While seeing LaKeith Stanfield dodge knives through the roof of a car and be interrogated with his own gun is fun, such moments also detract from the plausibility of the story, which is a problem when retelling such a tragic event.

All three of O'Neal's more “cinematic” moments, while dramatized, function to develop his character. LaKeith Stanfield brings great depth to Bill O'Neal, using the subtleties of his own body to convey the nuances of O'Neal's character. He is able to capture the joy in O'Neal's face as he picks Hampton up from prison, the admiration he has for FBI agent Roy Mitchell, and the conviction he holds during Hampton's speeches. With all of O'Neal's emotions, there's another hiding just below the surface. In his pride lies guilt, in his anger hides desperation, and in his fear lies exhilaration. Stanfield does an excellent job conveying the toll his double life is taking, but also the excitement O'Neal experiences when he's doing his “spy” work. One moment, in particular, stands out: O'Neal is faced with the story of what happened to another undercover officer, and just as soon as the dread sets into his face, it's replaced with intrigue, then the embellished bravado of a police informant, and finally, relief and astonishment at his own performance.

Daniel Kaluuya's performance as Hampton, while similarly impressive, is very different. Hampton's character is that of an earnest leader and is portrayed to be as charismatic as O'Neal, though without the surrounding suspicion. Kaluuya is able to deliver impassioned speeches with locomotive locution while also capturing the same intensity of resolve and

belief with almost no words at all. His struggle is also that of a leader, needing to balance the needs of the people with the needs of himself and his family. He's able to convey tenderness in interactions with his family, but his actions are always conceived with the movement in mind. During his time in prison, he shows worry for how his friends and family are coping, but upon his release, his objective is to get straight to work, even traveling directly from the jailhouse to an office he thought had burned down. Hampton's return evokes a sentimentality within himself whilst reinvigorating his resolve. Kaluuya's eyes perfectly express his love and the relief of knowing everything was all right in his absence.

Hampton's authority is only as strong as his supports, and his main support is Deborah Johnson, played by Dominique Fishback. Johnson is Hampton's speech-writer turned lover, and her support for the cause is just as strong as her love for her family. While being deeply involved with the Panthers, her pregnancy acts as a constraint on her relationship with Hampton. For every emblazoned speech he gives on how his body belongs to the revolution, every call to arms, Johnson is forced to consider the possibility of Hampton dying “a revolutionary death” and her child growing up without a father. Fishback is able to convey support and pride, but also organically incorporate the worry that can overtake both. The

performance is both powerful and subdued enough to serve the purposes of the story while being accurate enough to please the real Deborah Johnson (now Akua Njeri).

In regard to accuracy, director Shaka King and screenwriters Kenny and Keith Lucas went to great lengths to ensure the majority of the film was as historical as possible while maintaining its dramatic effect. One of the main ways they achieve this accuracy is by portraying the Panthers in a realistic light rather than as paragons of virtue or a grassroots terrorist organization. The film depicts both the good and the bad of the Panthers, and the conflicts they endured with police and with each other. Two missions of the Panthers highlighted in the film are their “Free Breakfast for School Children” program and the development of their community healthcare clinic. The inclusion of these community organizations is juxtaposed with multiple shootouts and the tense retelling of the kidnapping and torture of Alex Rackley. The inclusion of these stories not only serves to accurately portray the complex nature of the organization, but also develops the internal conflict within Bill O'Neal, so the audience can understand his actions.

While the story is brought to life by its actors, it's told through the lens of the camera, and “Judas and the Black Messiah” is beautifully shot. Cinematographer Sean Bobbitt captures viv-

id night shots with stunning visibility (where intended) and deep colors, contrasted with brightly lit sets that very directly set the tone. He also develops visual motifs for characters and affiliations using color, surrounding the Panthers with green and government officials with cold lighting and brown tones. Another consideration was setting the time period, and Bobbitt does a great job of recreating the angles of archival footage to help cement the historic nature of the film.

While these angles are used in the film, they're also intercut with actual re-shot archival footage at pivotal moments of the story, often referring to LaKeith Stanfield's recreation of William O'Neal's “Eyes on the Prize 2” interview or Daniel Kaluuya's recreated speeches as a way to transition between scenes. These cuts help frame the film as a piece of history rather than a work of fiction, something especially important considering how easy it is to detach a film as engaging as “Judas” from its source material: reality.

In addition to cinematography, the world of 1960s Chicago is brought to life by music. To supplement the original score, scenes are often set to soulful hits like Roland Kirk's “The Inflated Tear” and The Jhameels' “I've Cried.” The music sets not only the time period but the perspective of the film, creating a cultural revolution using the voices of that culture. The music, while setting the tone for a scene, contributes to the aesthetic of the movie as a whole.

The film ends with pictures of Akua Njeri and her—now adult—child. These images remind us that this story, while historic, is not over. These images aren't a call to arms but when juxtaposed with the original Eyes on the Prize interview, they do raise the question: When your needs are against those of the many, will you be proud of the choice you've made?

## The Black Panthers' Last Supper



Susanah Ahn / The Spectator



# Arts and Entertainment

## MUSIC

### Daft Punk's 28 Years of Doin' It Right

By DEXTER WELLS

Electronic music duo Daft Punk has innovated and influenced for nearly three decades. Its two members, Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter, met at their Parisian secondary school in 1987. The friendship was music-centric from its beginning, as they recorded tracks together, and in 1992, formed a trio called "Darlin'" with an additional guitarist. A critic for a British music magazine dismissed a performance by Darlin' as a "daft punky thrash," and the remark became the name of the duo formed in 1993 by Bangalter and Homem-Christo once Darlin' disbanded.

After giving a label executive a demo tape at a 1993 rave, the duo released their debut single "The New Wave" (1994), followed by "Da Funk" (1995), which gave the group their first taste of commercial success. In 1997, Daft Punk released their debut album, "Homework," featuring both "Da Funk" and the final mix

of "The New Wave" (with the title changed to "Alive"). "Homework" was characterized by the popular European electronic music style of big beat and produced using such hardware as drum machines and synthesized bass. The most successful single from the album was "Around the World," an infectious tune of pumping synths, a four-on-the-floor drum beat, and a three-word hook (the song's title) chanted repeatedly, with vocals processed through a vocoder.

The second studio album released by Daft Punk, "Discovery" (2001), saw even greater success and featured the hit sure to be recognized by anyone with a pulse: "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger." "Face to Face" and "Digital Love" also charted in the U.K. and the U.S., but Daft Punk's lasting legacy is represented best by "Harder," a song which has aged magnificently, and was even sampled by Kanye West on his album "Graduation" (2007).

Their 2005 album "Human After All" received mixed re-

views, due to seemingly hasty recording, and is arguably the least memorable studio album produced by the duo. Still, hits like "Robot Rock" and "Technologic" charted and are examples of Daft Punk's best work to date. Additionally, "Human After All" led to the live album (performed in Paris) "Alive 2007," which won the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Electronic/Dance Album. "Alive" is superbly energetic—a live album at its best—featuring talented mixing, on-stage synths and effects, and undeniable groove from start to finish.

Daft Punk didn't release any studio albums between 2005 and 2013, but they did compose the score for "Tron: Legacy" (2010). The soundtrack is a dramatic medley of classical and electronic music tailored perfectly for the film it accompanied. It was acclaimed by music lovers despite the film's lukewarm reception and even received a Grammy nomination.

In 2013, Daft Punk released what would be their fourth and

final studio album, "Random Access Memories." The album is a showcase of their skills and musical range—they aren't just music for European clubs, and never have been. They are electronic, orchestral, pop, disco, heartbreaking, inspiring, and so, so danceable. The duo dedicates a track to an inspiration of their own, Italian record producer and composer Giorgio Moroder, who is regarded as the pioneer of European electronic dance and disco music. The album's biggest hit, "Get Lucky" (featuring Pharrell Williams), broke into mainstream pop radio after its release and became quadruple-platinum certified in the United States. The single also won Best Record as well as Best Pop Duo/Group Performance at the 2014 Grammy Awards.

From its inception, Daft Punk has carved out for itself nothing short of an iconic legacy from their singular innovation within electronic music to their unmistakable robot helmets and vocoded vocals. Daft Punk was

distinctly digital from their debut, but they have since succeeded in redefining the genre. As their activity in the world of music comes to an end, we should celebrate their discography and all the gems they've left us—truly a lifetime's worth of dance and groove. Their retirement, announced the morning of February 22, 2021, saddened fans and the general music-loving public alike. A YouTube video titled "Epilogue" concluded the final chapter of their story, featuring repurposed footage from their 2006 science-fiction film "Electroma," and music from their song "Touch." The 2013 track, balladic and moving, may have been the perfect soundtrack to their retirement video. The composition of synth, strings, and vocals produces a powerful, seamless masterpiece, demonstrative of Daft Punk's unparalleled artistry. An emotional swelling of strings complements the choral refrain that closes out the video: "Hold on, if love is the answer, you're home."

## TELEVISION

By AGATHA EDWARDS

Even if you don't know much about football, there are plenty of reasons to watch the Super Bowl: the halftime show, spending time with family, the food, and, most importantly, the commercials. Every year, the Super Bowl features some strange commercial breaks between the action, and this year was no different. A large range of topics was covered this year, from cars to food to insurance and so much more! However, were they all worth the multi-million dollar investment?

### The Good

1. [All-electric Cadillac's hands-free is perfect for Timothée Chalamet's "Edgar Scissorhands"](#)

In this commercial, a boy played by Timothée Chalamet is ridiculed for his sharp, scissor-like fingers but is finally able to drive thanks to Cadillac's hands-free car. It is hilarious to see Chalamet attempt things like football, cooking, and school with his scissor hands. The acting is on point, and the costume design resembles the classic Edward Scissorhands look

perfectly. Seeing Chalamet transform from a sad, lonely freak to a licensed driver is heartwarming yet comedic.

2. [Doordash delivers everywhere, including Sesame Street](#)

This unique ad features singer Daveed Diggs traveling around Sesame Street with Big Bird and visiting several local eateries to promote the food delivery service Doordash. In addition to the impressive graphics and diverse selection of restaurants featured, this commercial will take you back to childhood and get you humming along to its infectious tune. The wide range of sets, like a burger stand, corner store, noodle kitchen, and empanada booth, paired with the vibrant palette of Sesame Street, create a smile-inducing visual experience.

3. [Statefarm finds stand-ins for Rodgers and Mahomes](#)

Even if you're not well-versed in football, you've probably heard the names Aaron Rodgers and Patrick Mahomes. It was a delight to see the iconic players featured in this commercial alongside Paul Rudd, Drake, and the legendary Jake from StateFarm. In this com-

mercial, Mahomes, Rodgers, and Jake are introduced to Rudd and Drake in a store. The variety of celebrities makes this commercial special, especially when Drake attempts to rap the State Farm motto. This commercial will surely put a smile on your face, but try not to cringe when Rudd attempts to throw a football.

4. [Toyota: See 13-time Paralympic gold medalist Jessica Long's story](#)

A little different from other commercials, Toyota's advertisement tells the story of Paralympic gold medal-winning swimmer Jessica Long and her journey to success. Her story is accented with clips of a girl growing older and swimming to mimic Long's journey. It is heartwarming, inspiring, and tear-jerking. Despite not having legs, Long was able to find so much joy, success, and hope in a sport she loves. Though the commercial was for Toyota (the partner of Team USA for the Paralympics) the brand came second to the story it told.

### The... Not So Good

1. [Michael B. Jordan is Alexa by Amazon](#)

This commercial features Michael B. Jordan as Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa for a day. A swooning woman is awed by Jordan's presence while her jealous husband doesn't approve. Instead of being funny, the ad comes off as cringy and at times creepy. Jordan's artificially blue eyes and obedient voice are off-putting rather than soothing.

It is also hard to not pity the husband, to whom the woman pays no attention, defeating the whole premise of the commercial. Though the idea behind the ad seems hilarious, the execution fell flat.

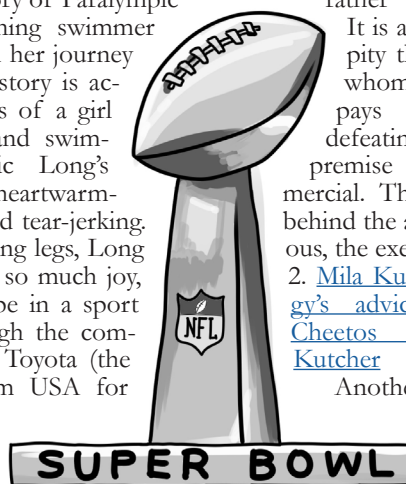
2. [Mila Kunis takes Shaggy's advice on hiding Cheetos from Ashton Kutcher](#)

Another slew of celebrity cameos, this ad centers around Mila

Kunis constantly eating Cheetos in various rooms of her home. Her husband, Ashton Kutcher, suspects that she is the culprit, but Kunis takes Shaggy's advice to deny his claims. While Shaggy's silky purple costume looks great and the Cheetos themselves look flavorful and crunchy, the whole skit just isn't very funny. Not only is the ad annoyingly unrealistic, it's also ineffective. Unless you're already a fan of Cheetos, you won't want to grab a bag after watching this ad.

3. [Oatly is like milk, but made for humans](#)

There's not much to say about this commercial. It's just a 16-second song sung by the CEO of Oatly, a plant-based milk company, while sitting in a barren field. The singing is off-key, the lyrics are too simple (just the words "wow, wow, no cow"), and the setting is slightly comedic at best. The commercial doesn't say anything about the nutritional benefits or even if the milk tastes good. After seeing this commercial, the only people who'll want to buy this milk are hard-core vegans.



Yaqi Zeng / The Spectator

## TELEVISION

### The Best Super Bowl LV Commercials

## FILM

By LIANNE OHAYON

About a year ago, audiences were underwhelmed by "To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You." Though the movie gave us reasons to smile and believe in love again, it also fell flat in many ways, with rushed romantic arcs and inconsistency across the board. Still, fans were optimistic about the third chapter in the series, "To All the Boys: Always and Forever," which hoped to revive some of the series's initial success. Thankfully, "Always and Forever" was able to deliver on continuity, relatability, and romance, despite having some painfully awkward scenes and occasionally clichéd dialogue.

"Always and Forever" brings us back to pre-COVID-19 times, after now-senior Lara Jean Covey (Lana Condor) returns from her

spring break abroad to one of the most stressful times in a high schooler's life: college acceptance season. Having already planned out a future with her boyfriend, Peter Kavinsky (Noah Centineo), she assumed that they would be the high school couple that lasts through college. But Lara Jean quickly learns that most things do not go according to plan. Throughout the movie, she discovers her true passions and deals with the sometimes unwelcome inevitability of growing up.

The movie is the closing chapter to Covey and Kavinsky's sweet story, and it does a great job of providing a satisfying conclusion to the trilogy as a whole. Many of the scenes in the movie circle back to the first movie in the series, "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" (2018), returning to its roots of self discovery and finding true

love. The best thing about this film is how it relates to and works with the themes and plotlines of its predecessors. The first movie took us through the first steps in Lara Jean and Peter's relationship, after Lara Jean's sister, Kitty (Anna Carthart), sent out the private love letters she wrote to five guys (including Peter) to give her a shot at love. The second brought us back to those letters Kitty sent, as one recipient came back to town, John Ambrose McClaren (Jordan Fisher). One year after the release of the second movie in this trilogy, in a world that is so alien, viewers are yearning for familiarity.

Those original emotions that made us swoon over Peter and resonate with Lara Jean flood back as soon as the play button is clicked. Watching Lara Jean give Peter the box that contained the original letters that she sent in the

first movie and hearing the same song ("I Like Me Better" by Lauv) play when the grade took a senior trip to New York City that was played in "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" on a ski trip was an instant connection between the past and present. The small details were integrated well throughout the film, and having callbacks to appeal to emotion brought a level of nostalgia, despite the new themes incorporated in the plot.

"Always and Forever" also tackles many lessons that come with growing up and involves significantly more realistic situations than those in the previous films. Conversations about both parties not rushing to lose their virginity, respecting boundaries, lack of communication, and encouraging one another to go after their goals throughout college and beyond added a level of relatability

not present in the more dramatic storylines of the previous movies in the series. Dealing with rejection and making difficult but important choices are things everyone has to face, and it's these more relatable moments that this film highlights. Having uncomfortable conversations is what it means to grow up, and "Always and Forever" does a spectacular job incorporating those themes into its previously over-the-top depiction of high school life. No more glorified "second love interest comes into the picture" trope, fake relationships, or overly toxic peers. Grounded conflict makes it more immersive for the audience and allows them to resonate with the film.

In the cultural sphere, it is

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# Arts and Entertainment

## FILM

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important to note how groundbreaking the “To All the Boys” series was as the first romantic comedy with an Asian-American lead. With so much anti-Asian sentiment apparent especially today, the series provides hope for advancements in diversity within the film industry. Lara Jean’s Korean background is more prevalent in this movie than the ones prior, but still doesn’t go very much in depth about her heritage and history. Though it was not the point of the film, it was still refreshing to see a bit more of Lara Jean’s culture come in throughout the movie.

All three films are adapted from Jenny Han’s books by the same names, giving both the director, Michael Fimognari, and the screenwriter, Katie Lovejoy, a structure and plot details already laid out to follow. As is common when creating a film from a book series, many details were revised or omitted. The largest change

is probably in the way colleges were looked at, mostly due to the setting of the movie—the book

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alterations to the plot do make sense conceptually. The threat of the young couple being so far away from each other is the core of the plot and the source of conflict in many scenes. Also, for a fleeting moment, Peter’s relationship with his father is revisited, contrary to the book. A welcome change to the plot, it showed Peter’s maturity and growth as a character. So, though viewers who read the books would prefer no cuts to be made, there was a clear reason for them.

Alas, nostalgia alone can’t cover up the flaws in this movie. The biggest fault in both “Always and Forever” and “P.S. I Still Love You” were the overly mushy interactions. Some moments were incredibly predictable and overdone. Yes, in a rom-com, clichés are bound to happen, but there were some lines that were far too mushy, especially compared to the more subtle dialogue that showed the emotional development of both protagonists. Certain scenes had eloquent, believable conversation, while others were awkward

and embarrassing to watch. This is also apparent in some actions taken by the characters; though most of the central plot points were realistic, others were jarring and deviated from the characters’ original traits. Regardless, both Centineo and Condor proved to be the world that they’ve still got it as their chemistry maintained its strength throughout the film.

“To All the Boys: Always and Forever” gives viewers, who have waited years to see where Lara Jean Covey and Peter Kavinsky’s relationship will go, a satisfying and thorough ending, especially for a romantic comedy. After three movies, you’d think that audiences would be tired of this blossoming relationship, but the opposite has proven true. Being encapsulated in this story makes the public want to know so much more, and the biggest question is: what’s next? Where does our couple that we’ve watched and thought about for so long go from here? There are no more books to write off of, no more stories to tell. So from now on, that is up to us.



Chloe Huang / The Spectator

takes place in Virginia while the movies take place in Portland, Or-

relationship. Thinking through a rom-com lens, some of these

## MUSIC

By KENISHA MAHAJAN

This year’s Super Bowl was unorthodox, to say the least, but unorthodoxy is nothing new to The Weeknd (Abel Tesfaye).

For an artist that built a career off the mysterious allure of his persona, the dazzle and glamour of the concept of a halftime show could not be more different from The Weeknd (Abel Tesfaye)’s brand of dark, raw R&B. It’s likely that for this very reason, The Weeknd took his performance in a different direction from his predecessors. Stepping away from the excess and extravagance of most halftime shows, The Weeknd took his 13 minutes in the limelight to tell an intricate, vulnerable story.

The show opened with a Las Vegas-inspired neon set—an homage to his latest album “After Hours.” As the camera panned out from the extravagant cityscape he had constructed and down to the stands of the Ray-

mond James Stadium, the set split in two, and The Weeknd walked on stage.

Backed by a gospel-meets-terminator style choir, The Weeknd kicked the show off with his 2016 smash hit “Starboy” (featuring Daft Punk) followed by “The Hills,” a deeper, moodier cut. He then disappeared into a maze of mirrors and lights reminiscent of the “Heartless” music video. Surrounded by a crowd of dancers with face bandages, The Weeknd burst into his poppy, chart-topping “Can’t Feel My Face” (2015). While the maze was a bit disorienting for viewers at home, it utilized the backstage of the performance space in a way audiences hadn’t seen before. As he ascended to the top of the bleachers, another iconic collaboration with Daft Punk, “I Feel It Coming” (2016) played in the background. Arguably the most memorable visual from the show, The Weeknd stood atop the stands, backed by the vast stadium and an array of

fireworks. After his synth-heavy “Save Your Tears” (2021) performance, the tone shifted as he moved back in front of the choir to perform his Grammy-winning ballad from the “Fifty Shades of Grey” franchise, “Earned It.”

The performance fully delivered the seductive charm audiences have come to expect of the artist. The bright spotlight focused the audience’s attention on The Weeknd while the dramatic instrumentals complemented his vocals. At the end of the performance, he made his way down to the field playing his throwback hit “House of Balloons” (2012). Just as seamless as his transition to superstardom, the music quickly shifted to the all too familiar tune of “Blinding Lights” (2021), the biggest chart hit of the century. Surrounded by an army of dancers dressed in costumes identical to his, the Weeknd maintained eye contact with the camera amidst the chaos of a well-deserved climax in the

performance. Even though the Weeknd abandoned the elaborate choreography of most Halftime shows, his superb delivery of the song made for a dynamic and engaging performance. The last line of the song was met with a roar of cheers from the audience as he stretched his arms out to bask in the applause.

After a year filled with worry and tragedy perpetrated by the coronavirus, the Weeknd offered us a few minutes of escape at home. From his bejeweled red blazer to the Diana Ross-inspired spectator shoes, the attention to detail was present in every aspect of the show. What set this show apart, aside from the peculiar conditions surrounding it, was that it was undeniably The Weeknd’s doing. Halftime shows can easily get repetitive, giving audiences the same overplayed pop songs and generic dance moves. Not only did the Weeknd’s halftime show stand out in terms of production and genre, but it told a story:

like he said during his NFL [press conference](#), “It’s a very cohesive story I’ve been telling throughout this era and throughout this year.” His performance stayed true to this promise.

Another way The Weeknd strayed from the norms of a Halftime show was the absence of a guest performer. From his longtime collaborator Daft Punk, to his “Love Me Harder” (2014) duet partner Ariana Grande, there were a lot of great picks for possible guests. It’s undeniable that The Weeknd is an accomplished and talented artist, but bringing on another performer would have allowed for a more lively dynamic.

At this year’s Super Bowl, The Weeknd broke from the traditional expectations of the Halftime Show. While restricted by COVID safety protocol, he managed to put on a great performance with stunning visuals, wonderful vocals, and—most uniquely—a remarkable story.

## Super Bowl LV Halftime: A Break from Tradition

## FILM

By ROXY PERAZZO

With beautiful shots, a great soundtrack, a talented cast, and a unique concept, Sam Levinson’s “Malcolm & Marie” was on track to be one of the best movies of 2021. So, what happened?

“Malcolm & Marie” begins with Marie Jones (Zendaya) and Malcolm Elliott (John David Washington) returning home from the premiere of Malcolm’s film “Imani.” As Malcolm talks about the people at the premiere and the film’s reception, it quickly becomes apparent that Marie is upset about something. Her apathetic responses to his conversation lead to the original premise of their fight: Malcolm didn’t thank her during his speech. From there, the situation devolves and their argument morphs into a battle over addiction, ungratefulness, movies, and more.

While “Malcolm & Marie” was definitely a film I wanted to enjoy, I found myself needing to watch it in multiple sittings. Several parts of the fight seemed very repeti-

tive, which was intentional, but ineffective in producing a compelling story. They argue, come to an agreement, get affectionate, begin arguing again, and the cycle repeats. “Malcolm & Marie” felt very close to being something great, but the dialogue wasn’t engaging enough to achieve that. There simply aren’t enough topics for them to argue about, and the long speeches Malcolm and Marie deliver throughout the film were difficult to get through. This trend continues right up until the end of the film. There were several points where the movie meets a natural stopping point, only for another drawn out scene to follow. The story is well thought out and the arguments feel real, but the sheer length of the characters’ speeches dilutes any meaning that could have driven either of their points home.

Another shortcoming of the film lies in the actors’ performances. Washington comes off as very passionate, while Zendaya switches between passion and in-

difference. Malcolm spends the argument speaking without really thinking, often taking it too far, while Marie reserves her energy for points that have a big impact on him. By giving Malcolm seemingly many more lines than Marie, the film feels unbalanced and makes Marie feel like a less valuable character. Their attitudes definitely play into the power dynamic of the

couple, fueled by their toxicity and age difference, but it feels unnatural on screen.

It was disappointing seeing “Malcolm & Marie” lose its direction over and over again. There were many heart-wrenching moments where the characters dig into each other’s flaws, saying horrible things they didn’t actually mean. Those moments are strong and could have made “Malcolm & Marie” a masterpiece, but so much of the movie doesn’t evoke these emotions and instead felt lazy and underwritten. Much of the characters’ rhetoric felt overly scripted and insincere, especially when compared to the most powerful scenes in the film.

That’s not to say that it can’t be looked back on fondly. “Malcolm & Marie” is definitely unlike other movies from the past few years. The movie is shot on black-and-white film, and the cinematography stands out. Though the film’s minimalism was a by-product of the pandemic, it adds

to its uniqueness; having just one setting furthers the trapped feeling of the couple’s relationship. The cinematic choices of director Sam Levinson and director of photography, Marcell Rév—both of whom worked on “Euphoria”—are wonderful, delivering a visually stunning film. The close shots on each character’s face as they speak feel personal, and the moving shots give the film motion in such a small set. The cinematography is the main reason to keep watching “Malcolm & Marie,” but it doesn’t compensate for the flawed storyline.

While “Malcolm & Marie” is definitely not a favorite, it’s still a bearable watch. The aesthetics of the film are pleasing and, though the story has its problems, it’s still an emotional piece with some raw moments that are sadly bogged down by layers of melodrama and played out writing. “Malcolm & Marie” is definitely a great movie for cinematography nerds out there but not if you’re looking for a remarkable story.



Sabrina Chen / The Spectator

## “Malcolm & Marie”: What Went Wrong?

These articles are works of fiction. All quotes are libel and slander.

## An Open Valentine's Day Reflection to My Sweetheart

By AARON WANG  
and KELLY YIP

Hello,

From the moment we were put into a breakout room, I knew that we were destined to be together. You turned on your camera for attendance, and that's when I noticed your sparkling eyes, accentuated by the deep, dark bags that hung below them. I felt my heart rate quicken—either as a result of your beautiful face or the three cups of coffee I chugged down prior to class. I would like to think the former.

Perhaps you've noticed me before? We were in a breakout room together that one Tuesday morning. I think we were discussing chemistry, but all I had in mind was the chemistry between us. You and I remained for the final 60 seconds of the call, pretending to be productive. But to be honest, I just stared at your face, neck, parched

morning lips, and hunched back when you turned around to yell at your siblings to get out (I wish I were them). You were...perfect.

Remember when we annotated the same paragraph on Perusall? I was your first upvote by the way. Oh, and also the time where I purposely misspelled "ay lov yu" on Jamboard just so I could watch you type "I love you" back to me. Sometimes I raise my hand during class right after you raise yours, not to participate but rather to imagine I'm holding your hand in mine. Mind you, my participation grade has dropped a whole 10 points for doing this, but in the end, it is all worth it in the name of love. And just a few weeks ago, when we signed up for that extra credit opportunity on Google Sheets, my name was right below yours!

Don't forget that one time when you screen-shared during the breakout room. I noticed you had left an e-mail tab in the upper

left corner that read stuywriting-center1@gmail.com. So, I sent a hundred love letters disguised as essays to the writing center, with the hope that one of them would be edited by you. Sure enough, you, the diamond in the rough of all the other insignificant writing center editors, finally edited my 99th essay. You commented, "Overall, I don't understand what your piece is about because you didn't attach a prompt. Frankly, I'm quite confused by your paragraph structure, and you had many grammatical errors too." Thirty words I shall treasure for the rest of my life.

And then, on Valentine's Day, I received an e-mail notification from valentines@stuyso.org saying I received a love letter. It said, "Love you fam!" I could only presume that this was from you, my one and only. Oh, how I had been waiting for this joyous day! Your diction made my heart flutter. It's

amazing how such a short and simple phrase could evoke such profound emotions. I didn't know you considered me family!

Anyhow, I took this as a sign that you reciprocated the same feelings I had toward you. I replied back to you through the platform with my contact information and a prompt for your address so that I may visit you. But weeks have passed since Valentine's, and I have yet to receive your response. Are you in danger, my love? Wherefore art thou? Unless, this is a test of my will to love, in which case I shall persevere like an eternal flame dancing on the wick of a candle (that is my love).

In the meantime, I've been following all your siblings and relatives on social media, as per my position in your family. I found your sister Beatrice on Instagram, and I sent her a few messages saying she was my sister-in-law. Could you tell her to unblock me, please?

It's really ruining our bonding. I also found your parents on Facebook. Aw, you look just like them! You have your father's eyes! I was scrolling through their profiles, and I found so many family pictures. The thought of joining such a loving family was so heartwarming to me that I took the liberty of photoshopping myself into your group photo at the beach.

Ultimately, I respect your bowndries, bodries, and bowanorees? I don't know what that word means but I've heard people in serious relationships use it. That being said, it's been almost three weeks since you've last contacted me, and I am beginning to feel very lonely :( I'm starting to wonder if you really consider me family? Only you can mend my broken heart.

Eagerly anticipating your response,

Your beloved <3

## Is This Coronavirus Thing Getting Old?

By ETHAN LAM

Since its worldwide debut in December 2019, one viral Chinese sensation has become a hot topic internationally, especially in the U.S. However, as it becomes more and more talked about, many have grown fatigued by the thousands of discussions and BuzzFeed articles regarding the subject.

"Really, it was cool at first, but it was obvious that there was pretty much no long-term appeal to it. It was mainly popular due

to trends and media coverage," resident Spectator commentator Journeyman Barnacle says. "It's a fad that I'm frankly tired of. It's been done to death, so honestly, can we just get over it already?"

However, the new U.K. strain has seemed to revitalize public interest in the coronavirus, at least for the time being. But this may just be a false sign of a resurgence, says January Brickhead, another one of the Spectator's unpaid commentators. "This always happens. There will invari-

ably be subpar sequels and spin-offs made to capitalize on a trend. This is not indicative of a return to the heights of popularity it was once at."

However, some people are happy that the hype is dying down. "I'm glad because I've been following the coronavirus since it came out," states Jaman-dtoast Butterbread, a random person who hangs around the Humor department to talk about his opinion, despite the fact that no one cares. "I knew about it before

it was cool, and now 110 million people are following it, just because it's mainstream? It's disgusting how people will bandwagon just about anything."

The popularity of the coronavirus has certainly had a major impact on the cultural scene as a whole, sparking numerous imitators hoping to cash in on the success of the original. Last year, hantavirus was announced but failed to create the same widespread impact as did the coronavirus. More recently, Russia

unveiled the first human cases of the H5N8 bird flu, and many are claiming that it will be the next big thing, while others have criticized it for its unoriginality.

"I see at least one article about it every day in my newsfeed," Barnacle lamented. "I don't know why people are still so obsessed with it. Ultimately, it's a trend that needs to die."

Up next: Is the new South African strain of coronavirus finally the one that will give you sick superpowers?

## Disney Is Baloney for Hiding the Truth

By SANJANA YASNA

Love starts slithering behind you like a huge mamba snake. It first encircles your knees to trip you with the sensation of "falling in love," and then it wraps your whole body and leaps in for a vicious bite. The pain of the bite and the first wave of paralysis leave you in a feverish and electrified state analogous to the anxiety-inducing nature of beginning a relationship. Eventually, the peripheries of your vision blacken and cloud up as you place everything in your life but your loved one on the blotched sidelines. Finally, you'll suffer a state of severe lethargy, if not a coma, because marriage sucks your energy faster than does your crippling depression.

After all, if Disney princesses have "matches made in heaven," why does Disney exclude the tenuous conditions after marriage? Well, Disney has been cheating kids out of the harsh realities these princess couples face after they get over their cloud nine. My underfunded research team (Patreon link below the article!) and I have consulted a witch who gave us a magical mirror that lets us peer into the lives of these princesses, after or during their marriage, and luckily at the price of our college admissions chances instead of gold. We messengers of truth hope these outcomes

will discourage you teenagers from eloping and marrying without proper consideration.

### Cinderella:

The prince married Cinderella for her superficial beauty, so when Cinderella ages and no longer fits into her tight-laced corsets and ball gowns, her self-esteem vanishes. The worst blow comes when the prince suggests to Cinderella that she become a maid again so that the chores would make her lose weight. Ever since, Cinderella refuses to talk to her husband and calls herself "thick" instead of "fat," a "new kind of beauty." She renames herself "Thickerella," obviously ignoring her husband's pleas not to. Props to Thickerella, the mother of modern beauty standards that enable us to justify junk food debauchery.

### The Little Mermaid:

If you can sing beautifully, you can also sing horrifically. Ariel's wedding took place on a boat, but as soon as the cake was re-

vealed and exposed to the open, a seagull pooped on it. Devastated, Ariel let out an ear-grating scream. So many seagulls flopped down into the sea that the land-bound onlookers thought it was snowing and unknowingly cheered at the picturesque sight. Ariel and the prince had the world's fastest divorce. However, Ariel did manage to find her true love after the

clicked.

### Ricky of Tuft:

It turns out that it wasn't through magic that the princess saw Ricky as the most handsome man in the world, but rather through the hallucinogenic mushrooms Ricky constantly sneaked into his spouse's food. However, the truth gets out once they give birth to a hideous son. Ricky's wife doesn't file a divorce, but her disappointment in her son makes even Confucian missionaries visiting their kingdom concerned.

### Beauty and the Beast:

The Beast, after turning back to his prince form, is sadly unable to change some of his beastly habits. He randomly howls in his sleep, which often wakes up Belle. After much cajoling from Beauty, he finally attempts shaving his facial hair for the first time in decades. Unfortunately, he holds the razor at too lofty of an angle and sheds his skin like a true beast of the wild. Belle plays solitary piano while lamenting about the idiot she married.

### Rapunzel:

"As you can see, fellow busi-

nessmen," says the prince from his seat at the head of a long table with his finger pointed to a map with India at its center, "the British East India Company is impinging on the already fragile trading relations we established with India's textile industry. The Puerto Ricans aren't much of a concern—"

"Ooh, 'rica' means rich in Spanish! Let's get to know each other. I'm actually named after a cabbage," beams an overly-enthusiastic Rapunzel.

Having lived all her life in a secluded castle, Rapunzel is a rather uneducated princess. The prince has to constantly remind his guests of this fact to explain her inappropriate behavior.

There. It's undeniable that Disney is misleading millions of kids with the notion that love has "happily-ever-after" endings, and that's a problem because what we learn as kids subconsciously sticks with us for a long time. What if Disney's responsible for alarmingly high teenage pregnancy rates? What if it's responsible for child-trafficking because it suspiciously shows themes of marriage and captivity to a young audience? Regardless, Disney has hidden the upsetting side of love that you're now aware of. Don't take love lightly, be chaste, and only commit if you're an adult or a veteran of life's struggles.



Emily Young-Squire / The Spectator

# Humor

## Frog and Toad: Where are They Now?

By KRISTA PROTEASA

Iconic children's book characters Frog and Toad were once up to an endless number of shenanigans, but whatever happened to them? Have they simply stopped going on wild adventures and doing perfectly trivial things together? Well, they've both agreed to let me observe their current daily happenings from the comfort of their own couch, so these questions can be put to rest. Let's see what they're up to.

"Frog, I want to go outside," Toad said.

"Then go outside," Frog said.

"But I don't want to go outside unless you do."

"Toad, I swear, you always do this."

"Do what?"

"You know exactly what. You guilt-trip me to walk halfway around the block until you get too tired and decide you just want to stare at a pigeon instead. I tell you Toad, I'm honestly tired of it."

"Frog, you're scaring me."

"Good. I am sick of being pulled every which way just because you make me. I'm done."

Frog started to fold his clothes and place them in a suitcase.

"Frog, where are you going?"

"Anywhere but here."

Frog stormed out of their quaint New York City apartment and slammed the door. Toad began to cry.

Two hours passed before Frog came running through the very door he practically just slammed. Toad stopped crying.

"Frog!" Toad exclaimed. "Why did you come back?"

"We don't own umbrellas, and it's raining. I got my pants soaked." Frog admitted.

"Fair enough. Want to bake cookies with me? I know how much we both enjoy them," Toad

suggested.

"Of course. Your cookies always set me straight."

"But we're not strai—"

"Toad, what do you need for the cookies? Flour? Eggs?" Frog interrupted.

The pair then made a batch of the most scrumptious cookies they both have ever eaten.

"Toad, I'm sorry."

"For what, Frog?"

"Threatening to leave you when I had no intention of doing so. That was pretty cold of me to do."

"You're right. Thank you," Toad accepted the apology.

The next morning, Toad woke up with a fright.

"Frog, would you ever really leave?"

"Of course not, Toad. Who else would I plant seeds in the ground with?"

"Thank you, Frog."

"Toad, would you like to watch a movie on Disney+ with me?"

"I would love that, Frog. How about National Geographic?"

"Do you just want to see what Kermit and Miss Piggy have been doing after that?"

"You know me so well, Frog."

The two began to enjoy the film until Toad got a little suspicious at how intently Frog was paying attention to Kermit specifically. He decided to test his theory.

"Frog?"

"Mm?" Frog mumbled.

"Would you ever rob a bank with me?"

"Oh yeah sure, of course."

Frog managed to say.

"What about our neighbors? Would you ever rob them?"

"Oh, absolutely. You're so right, Toad."

"Frog!"

Frog threw the bowl of popcorn he was eating from in the air in fright.

"What?!"

"Why are you looking at Kermit like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like... t h a t."

"Toad, I have no idea what you are referring to. I am simply enjoying the cinematic genius

"Answer the question, Toad."

"Me..." Toad mumbled.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"ME! AH!" Toad practically screeched. Frog threw the bowl of popcorn up in the air once again.

"That's better. Now let us continue where we left off." Frog knew deep down in his heart Toad would never be Kermit, but one could certainly dream.



Nelli Rojas-Cessa / The Spectator

of puppets with personalities."

"Frog, you know Kermit makes me insecure. He's taller than me, slimmer than me, and funnier than me. Why are you looking at him like he's Lady Gaga at the Super Bowl?"

"Toad, you know I just really enjoy this particular movie. No need to get jealous. Look at it this way. Who am I sitting next to, you or Kermit?"

"I bet you wish I were Kermit..."

That evening, while the pair was sleeping, trouble ensued in the amphibian household.

Frog heard a knock at the door.

"Toad, is that you knocking on the door?"

"Frog, use your Cheeto-sized brain. I am literally right next to you. How would I be knocking at the door?"

"Jeez, all right, Toad. I'll go see who it is."

Frog opened the door to nothing but a note. It read, "I want cookies."

Frog returned to Toad in their bed.

"Toad, what kind of baloney are you pulling?"

"Frog, that note is clearly referring to cookies, not baloney. Gosh, you can't even read."

"Toad, I am asking you once again. What is the meaning behind this tomfoolery?"

"Now why should I tell you?"

"No clue, but this note is making me want cookies. Let's go get some."

Toad turned and smiled. He had to text his acquaintance a very heartfelt thank you later.

"That's just what I was thinking!" Toad exclaimed. He only rejoiced on the inside. Of course, he couldn't let Frog know that he, in fact, was behind the baloney and tomfoolery.

And so the pair went to their cabinet to rummage through the plethora of baked goods lining their shelves. They munched and munched and began to ponder the many ponderings one ponders when one is pondering.

"Frog, what do you think the purpose of life is?"

"I get you cookies and you still have questions? You ask too much of me."

The two chuckled and made their way to bed. Huh, so that's what they've been up to? The same routine as when I last kept up with them? Mundane tasks and the occasional fight? Oh, Frog and Toad. Some things never change. On the next episode of "Frog and Toad: Where are They Now?" I'll give you answers to your burning question: will they ever do anything else? Until next time, I'm an unnamed reporter, and you're watching this unnamed news channel. Now, sports.

## The Torturous Nature of Online Physical Education

By ARSHIA MAZUMDER

In the COVID-19 era, gym teachers across the country and at our own Stuyvesant High School had to quickly come up with an educational and engaging way to do physical education virtually. The fact of the matter is, they failed. Journalist John McJohnkins discussed the embarrassing nature of remote gym on the popular television show "Donate to Whatever We Tell You" including an interview with Stuyvesant student Sherryl Rin. The following text is an excerpt from a transcript of that episode.

\*A reporter, John McJohnkins, stands in front of an apartment building and knocks on the door.\*

**McJOHNKINS:** Let me paint you a picture. Children and teenagers all across New York City are forced to turn on their devices. They log in to some program, Zoom or Room or whatever, which turns their computers into security cameras. They are watched, like hawks, by their peers and by an adult who is pulled into this charade. The students are "encouraged" to participate, and by that, I mean if they don't participate, they won't

graduate. Almost in tears, they must jump around like chickens, panting, while they count: "One, two, three, four..." When they are finished, flushed and sweaty, the pain isn't over. They must repeat this multiple times and watch their peers follow the same fate. This continues for over half an hour every single week. Hi. I'm John McJohnkins, and I'm here to tell you about this horrible routine that students are forced into every day. They're already struggling during remote learning, having to learn and exert their knowledge with the parts of their brains that aren't fried. They are required to memorize obscure facts that likely won't help them in the future. They must stay up until sunrise chanting, like summoning a demon, until these facts are drilled into their minds. And after all of this, you'd think these kids would get a break, but no. They must sweat in their homes, while their uncles stare at them judgingly. When the teacher calls on them, the students have to glance awkwardly at their family members and implore them to stop chatting. What is this torture, you ask? Well, adults, parents, and dragons, listen closely, as this will shock you. It is remote high school physical education.

\*McJohnkins gasps.\*

I know, the horror. The horror! You must all be gaping at your television sets by now. Oh wait...you guys don't watch cable, right? What is this on? Hulu? Whatever. People, real adult people, actually thought that jumping around in front of a camera and squinting at a screen to read the screen-shared workout could replace happy kids running around a gymnasium. News flash: it doesn't. This is legitimate torture. I am now at the apartment door of a student at Stuyvesant High School. Her name is Sherryl Rin, and she is one of the victims of remote high school PE.

\*McJohnkins opens the door and enters the apartment.\*

Hello, Ms. Rin. You are Sherryl's mother, correct?

**MS. RIN:** Yes, yes, but please be quiet! Sherryl's in her gym class now.

**McJOHNKINS:** Aha! We are now going to witness for our very own eyes what happens during PE.

**MS. RIN:** No, no, you can't! She's...she's...counting, and if I make a noise, she'll be forced to banish herself from this dimension due to embarrassment!

**McJOHNKINS (whispering):** When we come back, we'll

have an exclusive interview with Sherryl Rin.

\*McJohnkins walks into the living room of 4R. Sherryl is sitting on the couch, sweating from the exercises, six feet away from McJohnkins, as he sits down on a chair.\*

**McJOHNKINS:** Welcome back to "Donate to Whatever We Tell You To!"

\*Applause\*

**McJOHNKINS:** As we said when we left off talking to Ms. Rin, this episode is about how online gym is literally just torture. I'm here with Sherryl, who seems to be having a mental breakdown on the couch.

**SHERRYL (scratching her eyeballs):** Make it stop. Make it stop!

**McJOHNKINS:** Make what stop, Sherryl?

**SHERRYL:** Every B 6-10 day I have to do push-ups, jumping jacks, and squats! Sixty-seven squats! And I mean, how am I expected to awkwardly punch forward in an imaginary boxing ring while trying to keep my head in frame so my teacher doesn't mark me absent? I have to get down real low! And everyone knows that my thighs can't handle that! Sometimes my neighbors from below come upstairs and complain about all

the ruckus I've been making. It's humiliating. My lifestyle is sitting on the couch and binge-watching "WandaVision," not doing planks! I'm a gelatinous blob, not Usain Bolt. Let me be a gelatinous blob!

\*Sherryl wipes a tear.\*

**McJOHNKINS:** I understand, Sherryl. The pain you have to go through once every four school days must be terrible.

\*Sherryl nods, then looks away.\*

**McJOHNKINS:** Viewers, as you can see, these children must suffer through this terrifying thing called exercise. If you donate to our "Free the Children" charity, you can help these poor kids. I mean, this practically falls under cruel and unusual punishment for...existing? For just \$5 a day, we will do glorious things to fight this atrocity, such as begging on our knees for the DOE to do something (looking at you, chancellor), and for the love of God, STOP MAKING THE STUDENTS COUNT! Please. We need your help to take a stand against forced child labor. This is a serious issue ravaging our country. There have to be better ways to exercise than... than this! Thank you for your time, and thank you for saving children from the torture of PE.

## Sports Editorial

## Should Championships Define Greatness?

By TAAE CHI AND SHAFIUL HAQUE

The Kansas City Chiefs faced the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in Super Bowl LV, one of the largest sports events in recent history, attracting 96.4 million viewers on February 7, 2021. But why do the finals gather so much attention compared to regular season matches? This idea isn't exclusive to football. The NBA Finals and the FIFA World Cup Final are also the most watched matches in their respective tournaments. Likely, such viewership is due to the anticipation behind which team will emerge victorious over the other and be declared the best of the season. For decades, most fans have believed that titles determine a player's greatness. They ignore the losing side, believing that players who won the trophy are greater than those who haven't. Is this really the case?

## Soccer

Since Barcelona FC's 4-1 defeat to Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League Round of 16, fans have drawn comparisons between soccer legend Lionel Messi and young star Kylian Mbappé. Though Messi has played far longer than Mbappé, some people believe that the latter's World Cup trophy, an award that Messi has yet to earn, speaks for itself. However, comparing trophies between two players is not a good way to determine who is superior, as they do not necessarily define a player's success. There are numerous players who are all time greats without having won many—or any—trophies for their teams. They showcase their abilities through their performances each match, displaying immaculate skill and achieving the best result that they can for their teams.

Tottenham Hotspur FC player Harry Kane is a prime example of such greatness. Kane is an established player at the international level for England and has

scored over 150 times by the age of only 27. He has won the Premier League Golden Boot award twice, and he was the top scorer of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Despite all of his personal accolades, Kane has yet to win a trophy for England or Tottenham.

Another player with a similar story is Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku. The 27-year-old has played for many clubs in his career, displaying his goal-scoring ability for each. He has 300 career goals to his name, many of them coming from the Premier League and Serie A. Lukaku also has many personal awards, including his appearance in the 2016-2017 Premier League Team of the Year, but surprisingly, he has no trophies with any of his clubs. All avid soccer fans know that both Kane and Lukaku are exceptional players, even with empty trophy cabinets.

People often wonder why great players choose to stay on teams where they will win few to no trophies. Whether it be due to the squad's team chemistry, happiness with their playing time, or adjustment to a city, most soccer athletes focus on doing the best they can with a club rather than joining another one just for the sake of trophies.

On the other hand, some players who have won many trophies for their clubs don't play an important role on their team. They are either used as backup players for the main squad or as fringe players in the circumstances of an injury. An important era of soccer that displays this type of squad hierarchy is Sir Alex Ferguson's reign at Manchester United from 1986 to 2013. During his 26-year career at Manchester, Ferguson won 38 trophies, including 13 Premier League titles, two Champions League titles, and five FA Cups. Ferguson achieved his success by nurturing young players into world-class athletes. Like most squads nowadays, to win trophies, the best players should play for the best chance at vic-

tory. And of course, there will always be players on a team who play a minor role in the actual game but get the trophy nonetheless. In Ferguson's reign, there were multiple players who won trophies with the club but failed to receive the same recognition as the star players of the squad, as they simply didn't contribute as much.

This distribution of attention doesn't mean that star players in a squad who lack titles are better than athletes who play minor roles for a title-winning team. The amount of trophies won should be a component in evaluating whether or not a player is great, but it shouldn't be the main factor. People tend to compare players based on their stats, such as goals, assists, passes, and unfortunately, trophies. However, the most important factor in deciding the legacy of a player is the impact made on the sport and team. Sure, a player can rack up titles while sitting on the bench almost every game, but does that really make a distinguished soccer player?

## Basketball

Steve Nash, Charles Barkley, and Karl Malone are just three of many former NBA players who retired without ever winning a ring. Because they never won a championship, the legacies of these players should not be compared to those of champions like Bill Russell, Kobe Bryant, or Michael Jordan, right?

Well, not exactly. Though it's true that some basketball experts and spectators view the legacies of the mentioned players as "tarnished" due to the absence of a ring, no one can deny their greatness, much less consider their careers failures. Nash was a two-time league MVP and an eight-time All-Star, and he retired as one of the greatest passers in NBA history. Barkley, often called "the Round Mound of Rebound" due to his extraordinary ability to gather boards, and Malone, nicknamed "the Mail-

man" because he always delivered in the post, were two of the most dominant power-forwards to ever play the game. Together, their combined accomplishments include three MVPs, 25 All-Star appearances, 16 All-NBA first team selections, and a mind-boggling 60,685 points combined throughout their careers.

Given all these accomplishments, it's foolish to think that these players failed to reach the status of NBA legends because they don't have any championship rings on their fingers. Most people would rank Nash higher on the all-time point guard list over players like Jason Kidd and Walt Frazier, despite these two players having multiple championships under their belts. Similarly, very few NBA fans would take Pau Gasol and Kevin McHale over Barkley and Malone, despite the former pair boasting a combined total of five rings compared to Barkley and Malone's zero.

The reason why championships don't matter as much as personal accolades in many cases is that not every championship is equal. The quality of teammates, the level of competition faced, each player's role on the team, and the ability of the team's coach to adjust and make game-winning strategies are just some of the factors that make the playing field uneven for NBA players. Given the varying levels of adversity different players face when trying to win a championship, it's unfair to rely solely on the number of rings to compare the players' legacies.

But is this claim the case when comparing the greatest players of all time? One of the most common arguments that always seems to arise in the classic Jordan vs. LeBron James debate is that Jordan is 6-0 in the NBA finals while James is just 4-6.

Given that Jordan and James are undoubtedly the two greatest players of all time, they should be regarded separately

from other NBA greats. In such a close and hotly disputed argument, every factor should be taken into consideration, championships included. However, this attention doesn't necessarily mean that championship records should be the number one criteria in this case; individual accolades and the overall impact these two players had on the game are more important considerations.

A great player is still a great player even if they don't have any rings. Statistics, MVP awards, All-Star selections, All-NBA selections, and Hall-of-Fame elections cannot be denied when measuring a player's greatness. However, to see such accomplished players like Nash, Malone, and Barkley retire without ever getting to hold a championship trophy in their arms is truly a shame. Likewise, it would be a shame to see the Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo finish his career without ever winning a championship. The same goes for Russell Westbrook, Chris Paul, and Derrick Rose. In the end, no one will deny their greatness, but one can only hope that a ring will accompany their Hall of Fame resumes.

At the end of the day, championships are only one part of an athlete's legacy. They may be the pinnacle of a player's career, but plenty of other factors weigh more heavily than championships when measuring a player's success. The arguments posed are not restricted to soccer and basketball. The same is true for most other sports leagues, including the NFL, MLB, and the NHL. It is important to note, however, that the case is different for more individualized sports such as tennis and boxing. Whatever the case may be, instead of comparing players with one another, we should sit back and enjoy watching a new generation of athletes dominate the sports so many people love around the globe.

## Football

## The Real MVP(s) of Super Bowl LV

By YOONAH CHANG

As Patrick Mahomes rolled out of the pocket on fourth down early in the fourth quarter, fans couldn't help but think that it must be déjà vu, seeing Mahomes scrambling for his life again. For what seemed like the umpteenth time that game, Mahomes once again escaped magically and after being tripped up, threw a pass while literally parallel to the ground, only for it to hit his receiver Darrel Williams in the face mask. For the duration of the game, Mahomes did as much as he could but received little help from his teammates. The highly anticipated matchup between Mahomes and six-time Super Bowl champ Tom Brady ended up being quite lopsided, with Brady's Tampa Bay Buccaneers coming out on top 31-9.

The Buccaneers arrived at the Super Bowl the hard way. As the wild card, they had to win

three playoff games in a row, all on the road. After beating the Washington Football Team in the Wild Card Round, the Bucs handled business against Drew Brees and the Saints, winning 30-20. In the NFC Championship, Brady used a couple of well-timed touchdowns to take down Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers to reach his 10th Super Bowl.

As the number one seed in the AFC, the Kansas City Chiefs had a first round bye and took care of business against the Cleveland Browns in the divisional round despite a late injury scare involving Mahomes. In the AFC Championship, the Chiefs shut down one of the hottest offenses in football in the Buffalo Bills and routed them en route to their second straight Super Bowl.

Mahomes, who was looking for his second consecutive title in his already illustrious young career, entered Sunday's game

with an injured toe and a depleted offensive line due to injuries. However, the Chiefs were still the favorites, in large part due to their fire-powered offense which hadn't been held to under 17 points once all season. The Chiefs came into the playoffs having lost just one game (not counting week 17 when they rested all their starters), including a 27-24 victory over Tampa Bay in week 12.

Kansas City started out hot, scoring the first points of the game on a Harrison Butker field goal. But field goals would be all this high powered offense would get for the entire game, as the real MVPs turned out to be the Buccaneers' defense, which had Mahomes constantly scrambling for his life. Buccaneers running back Leonard Fournette and wide receiver Antonio Brown capitalized on multiple flags by the Chiefs in the first half, giving Brady the chance to throw the first touch-

down to tight-end and familiar face Rob Gronkowski. A couple significant Chiefs' flags later, Brady found Gronkowski again in the endzone for a 17-yard touchdown with six minutes left to go in the first half. After the Chiefs drove down the field and kicked a field goal, Brady got the ball back and promptly executed a two-minute drill, finding Brown for another touchdown, which gave the Buccaneers a comfortable 15-point lead by the time The Weeknd took the stage.

The second half was more of the same for both Tampa and the Chiefs. Tampa Bay's defense continued getting to Mahomes, pressuring the quarterback 29 times by the end of the game and forcing Mahomes to run around an astonishing 497 yards in escape of the Bucs pass rush. The multitude of four-man rushes disrupted the Chiefs' previously unstoppable offense, and they didn't even

score a touchdown.

But while the Bucs' defense was certainly the story of the game, there's a reason why Brady was named MVP. Coming into the Super Bowl as the underdog, the tenured quarterback's age-defying performance was simply classic Brady. Despite throwing fewer total yards than Mahomes, Brady was much more efficient and played a mostly flawless game that left little hope for Mahomes and his Chiefs. Brady's performance in the Super Bowl, as well as during most of the season, also ended a pre-Super Bowl debate among some who wondered who was more important in the New England Patriots' prior six Super Bowl victories: the head coach Bill Belichick or the star quarterback Brady. After leading a team that had only one winning season in the prior nine years, to victory in the Super Bowl, that particular debate has been put to bed.

# Sports

## X Games

### Getting X-Treme at the Winter X Games

*continued from page 24*

strongly throughout the competition. Anderson came out on top in the women's snowboard slopestyle, throwing down a cab double 9 right off the bat, and secured her seventh career gold medal in the event. She won her first gold medal in the women's snowboard big air event as well, which featured every 2018 Olympic medalist. Anderson was also the first woman to ever compete in the snowboard Knuckle Huck event. She now holds 19 career Winter X Games medals, leaving her one away from tying Mark McMorris's record of 20 total X Games medals.

Another notable story was Chloe Kim's return to competition. After taking time off to focus on her freshman year at Princeton, Kim's return to competition was highly anticipated. It's safe to say that she lived up to the hype. Taking home gold in the women's snowboard halfpipe, Kim received her fifth Aspen title in the event since her X Games debut when she was only 14 years old. Kim now has eight X Games medals to her name.

This year's X Games were also supposed to mark White's return to competitive snowboarding for the first time since the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. The expected showdown between White and Scotty James, both Olympic medalists,

on the snowboard superpipe unfortunately did not happen, as White was kept out with a knee injury. With White out of the picture, James took home the silver medal while Japan's Yuto Totsuka claimed the first gold medal of his career.

One of the most impressive events of the X Games was the men's snowboard big air, the highest-scoring big air competition ever. Marcus Kleveland took home the gold with a composite score of 96/100 after executing two nearly-flawless 1800 jumps, both the four-inversion, five-rotation quad cork 1800 with an Indy grab and a frontside switch 1800 spin. If this execution wasn't surprising enough, by the end of the

night, every athlete who ranked in the top five had landed at least one 1800 jump. Sven Thorgren and Mons Røisland, silver and bronze medalists, respectively, both landed 1800s they had never tried in competition before. Chris Corning landed his first quad cork 1800, as well as another flat spin 1800. Most notably, Tareku Otsuka landed the world's first-ever front quad cork 1800, en route to placing fifth in the event.

Several athletes across the X Games executed similarly astonishing jumps. In the women's ski big air event, gold medalist Mathilde Gremaud landed the first 1440 jump ever in women's competition. Nico Porteous landed two 1620s back-to-back,

securing the gold medal in the men's ski superpipe. In men's ski big air, Andri Ragetti won the event after managing to land an unprecedented triple cork 1980. In the same event, bronze medalist Alex Hall performed remarkably well with several 1800 jumps.

Though the pandemic did affect the overall atmosphere of the competition, the competing athletes still went above and beyond, delivering trick after trick. Overall, while maintaining COVID guidelines, this year's X Games kicked off the winter season smoothly, showcasing many fan-favorite athletes and highlighting major breakout stars who will surely make noise in the seasons to come.

## Sports Editorial

### Brady vs. James, Off the Field

By MAX SCHNEIDER

The world marveled as Tom Brady won his seventh Super Bowl on February 7, 2021, a mind-boggling 10th appearance in the big game. His dominance is unparalleled in modern football, and it has become clear that he is the greatest ever to play the game.

The next night, LeBron James logged a triple-double in an overtime win against the Oklahoma City Thunder. It moved James's Lakers to 19-6, second in the Western Conference of the NBA. The Lakers are the Las Vegas favorites not only to reach the NBA Finals, but also to win them. If they do, it would be James's fifth win in 11 appearances. It would also crown him as one of, if not, the greatest basketball players to ever grace the court.

It is no question that Brady and James are some of the most dominant athletes of our time. They have garnered insane amounts of influence and money throughout their careers. Such success begs the big question: what have they done for their community, and could they be doing more?

#### LeBron James

Soon after he was originally drafted, James started the LeBron James Family Foundation, which remains the pinnacle of his charitable efforts. According to [their website](#), "The LeBron James Family Foundation invests its time, resources, and passion into creating generational change for the kids and families of James's hometown in Akron, Ohio through a focus on education and co-curricular educational initiatives."

This initiative is a reflection of James's own childhood. Born in Akron to a 16-year-old single mother, he grew up without much stability at home. They moved up to six times when James was in fourth grade, and he missed almost 100 days of school that same year. This situation changed when he met Bruce Kelker, the local football coach, who let James and his mother move in with him and taught James how to play

football. Later that year, James moved again, this time to the home of Frank Walker, his local basketball coach. Walker enrolled him in school, made sure he went every day, and started facilitating his love for basketball. This structure gave him the discipline to not only become an NBA superstar, but also turn into the savvy businessman that he has become.

Today, James's foundation works with 1,500 kids ages eight to 18. Its efforts all start with his I Promise School, which has long hours and works to create well-rounded children with the tools to succeed. Additionally, the foundation has implemented a support system to ensure that all students have stable home environments. The crown jewel of this structure is the I Promise Village. The village gives homes to students' families facing homelessness, domestic violence, and other circumstances. It also helps families create a recovery plan, and most importantly, keeps children in school. During COVID-19, the foundation's work has expanded. It has started providing food to families in the program, ensuring that the students can still thrive despite their circumstances. Lastly, the program has worked with Akron University and Kent State University to provide the students with full scholarships that will allow them to get educated, get good jobs, and raise children to do the same. James wants to leave his hometown in better shape than he found it, and he is certainly delivering.

The foundation has also left its mark through grants to different programs, including several that are very important to James. According to the foundation's 990 forms (required tax forms that show how non-profits allotted their money), from 2015 to 2018 ([latest available](#)), he has given over \$400 thousand to his alma mater, St. Vincent-St. Mary High School. He has also given over \$1 million to Akron public schools, provided funding for a recreational basketball league, and made several other grants.

James has also tried to make an impact on a larger scale. He

has made massive donations to the Boys and Girls Club of America, After-School All-Stars, the Children's Defense Fund, and ONEXONE as well. His dedication to helping children reach their full potential is clear and has spanned his whole career. His biggest donation was a \$2.5 million donation to the National Museum of African American History to fund an exhibit on Muhammad Ali. "Muhammad Ali is such a cornerstone of me as an athlete because of what he represented not only in the ring as a champion but more outside the ring—what he stood for, what he spoke for, his demeanor," James told [USA TODAY Sports](#). The Ali exhibit aims to educate America about Ali's legacy not only in the ring, but also with his extensive work for social justice.

Regarding his own relationship with social justice, James's effort is immense, as he is a huge advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement. His support came to the forefront after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. When the NBA wanted to resume the season, James, along with several others, ensured the focus remained on social equality both by putting social justice slogans on jerseys and the court and kneeling before games. James also focused his interviews on social justice and has continued to ensure the conversation moves forward. He has also tried to make a difference politically, campaigning in support of candidates he supported in the last four presidential elections and encouraging his supporters to vote through his organization More Than a Vote.

#### Tom Brady

Brady has two main charity efforts, the Change the World Foundation Trust and the TB12 foundation. Founded in 2006, the Change the World Foundation Trust makes grants to other organizations, primarily ones important to Brady. Similar to James's 990 forms, the trust's 990s indicate how much and to where they have donated. From 2015 to 2018 ([latest available](#)), the fund has made

roughly \$1.2 million in grants. From this sum, \$300 thousand was given to the JBV Charitable fund, \$100 thousand was given to Hurricane Harvey Relief, and \$100 thousand was given to the TB12 foundation. Additionally, a total of about \$160 thousand was given to Brady's private alma mater high school, Junipero Serra, and his children's private schools. The rest of the money is made up of donations to other charities, usually in the range of \$10 thousand to \$50 thousand. On the surface, this range may seem like a large amount of money for Brady to donate. However, Brady has only actually given \$490 thousand to the trust. The vast majority of the trust, upwards of 80 percent, comes from Best Buddies International, for which Brady is a volunteer. Their donations have totaled \$7.5 million, and they plan on donating an additional \$500 thousand annually.

This relationship is bizarre, to say the least. While it is not unusual for charities to give money to each other, this arrangement is special. Not only does Best Buddies make up more of Brady's funding than anyone, but their donation of \$500 thousand is also more than their donations to any other foundation. For example, their 2015 donation was a staggering 2.5 times larger than their second biggest donation, which was to the ill-fated Kevin Spacey Foundation. The Change the World Foundation does a lot of good work, but it is unclear how much of it should really be attributed to Brady.

Brady's other major venture is the TB12 foundation. According to [its website](#), "The TB12 Foundation is a nonprofit organization [...] Its mission is to help educate and inspire athletes to excel in both sports and life by providing access to innovative health and wellness resources that support preparation, performance and recovery. It empowers those at-risk to overcome economic or health-related obstacles to reach their performance goals." While this charity has a good mission, it is still small. In their most [recent 990 forms from 2018](#), the program only spent \$322 thousand,

which is small for the namesake foundation of a major athlete.

Brady also drives other efforts. He has donated to his teammates' charities over the years and has partnered with Wheels Up to give over 750 thousand meals to the city of Tampa. However, his biggest effort is put into Best Buddies. According to Best Buddies, his support has raised tens of millions of dollars, which deserves to be applauded. However, it is not truly his money, which is the concerning part of Brady's charity work. Brady has a net worth of \$200 million, and his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, is worth \$400 million. It seems odd that Brady donates so little to both his foundation and others given his massive net worth.

James on his own is worth \$500 million. He has stood up to this figure, donating millions of dollars and lots of time. According to his foundation's 2018 tax filing, he still puts five hours a week into his foundation. He also uses his opportunities to support others. His production company, Springhill Entertainment, tells the stories of activists and underrepresented individuals. He has truly dedicated himself to making the world a better place.

Brady can learn a lot from James. The latter has a very focused effort, and not only does he work hard, but he also truly cares. He is helping others. Additionally, his activism for social justice and dedication to motivating people to vote can truly make a difference in communities.

On the other hand, Brady has always tried to stay clear of politics, and when asked about his support of former president Donald Trump, he has said they are "just friends." He is not utilizing his voice or time, and it is a true shame that Brady doesn't try to do more than fostering the exchange of money between charities. It is clear Brady is trying to put in effort to make a difference, but he can do so much more. He has plenty of money and influence. If he can utilize his success as an athlete like James does, he can truly be great.

## Football

## A Tale of Two Quarterbacks

By KRISH GUPTA

After 17 seasons and [240 consecutive starts](#), longtime Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers has retired from the NFL, joining fellow 2004 draft-ee Eli Manning. Both had stellar careers and were rare pictures of durability and longevity in a league in which most players don't even last three seasons.

Before Eli Manning and Rivers even took an NFL snap, their legacies were destined to be intertwined forever. Not only were they both selected in the top five picks of the 2004 NFL Draft, but they were also members of arguably the most famous, and controversial, draft trade in league history.

## The Draft Day Saga

"With the first choice in the 2004 NFL Draft, the San Diego Chargers select Eli Manning, quarterback, Mississippi." And so it began.

Eli Manning walked up to the stage, clearly disappointed with the move. He reluctantly held up the Chargers jersey and sulked back off. Leading up to the draft, the Manning family made it known that they weren't going to let Eli Manning play in San Diego. Entering the 2004 season, the Chargers boasted only [four winning seasons](#) since 1983. Given his own experiences, Father Archie Manning didn't want his son to have to slog through his career surrounded by a weak team. The elder Archie Manning was the starting quarterback for the New Orleans Saints for 11 seasons, but his team was never able to put together a winning season, much less make the playoffs and Super Bowl. The Giants, at the time, were the team in a better position to contend right away. Eli Manning went as far as to say that he'd rather go to [law school](#) than play for

the Chargers. Nonetheless, then Chargers General Manager A.J. Smith still elected to select Eli Manning with the first pick, saying that it was best for the franchise.

Three picks after Eli Manning was selected, the Giants chose NC State's Rivers, who looked like a kid in a candy store. Little did he know that the day was far from over.

Rivers would never suit up for the Giants, and Eli Manning would never suit up for the Chargers. The Chargers traded Eli Manning to the New York Giants for Rivers, in addition to a bundle of later round picks.

Eli Manning and Rivers went on to be two of the greatest quarterbacks in recent history, in addition to Ben Roethlisberger, who was selected later in the first round. The [2004 draft class](#) is often considered one of the best quarterback classes in NFL history, combining for four Super Bowl wins and 18 Pro Bowl selections.

## Career Comparisons

Both Eli Manning and Rivers entered their rookie seasons in talented quarterback rooms, with the Chargers starting young Drew Brees and Doug Flutie ahead of Rivers and the Giants switching between Eli Manning and Kurt Warner.

As a rookie, Eli Manning got a significant snap count but was inconsistent, starting seven games. He topped [1,000 yards](#) passing while tossing six touchdown passes and nine interceptions. In his second year, though, Warner left the team, handing Eli Manning the reigns of the G-men. Eli Manning had a breakout season, leading the third highest scoring offense and ranking in the [top five in passing yards](#) and touchdown passes. The Giants clinched the NFC East title, giving him invaluable playoff experience

early on (granted, the Giants lost 23-0, and Eli Manning tossed three interceptions).

While Eli Manning was making a name for himself in the league from the jump, Rivers didn't assume the starting job in San Diego until his third season in 2006. Rivers saw flashes of playing time in 2004 and 2005, but he finally got his chance to lead the Chargers in the 2006 campaign after the departure of Brees, and he made the most of it. Rivers led the Chargers to a [14-2](#) regular season record and earned his first Pro Bowl nod. Despite the dominant regular season record, the Chargers fell to the Patriots in the Divisional Round. Eli Manning's Giants also made the playoffs that season but fell in the Wild Card round again (not something Eli Manning would make a habit of doing, though).

Eli Manning did the unthinkable in the 2007-2008 season. Coming into the playoffs with the number five seed in the NFC, he guided the Giants to the Super Bowl, where they faced the undefeated New England Patriots, looking to make history. The Pats were favored by double digits over the G-men, but Eli Manning didn't back down, leading the Giants with a signature fourth quarter comeback highlighted by the famed [Helmet Catch](#). The rest of Eli Manning's career is history. After winning Super Bowl MVP, he did it again four years later in 2011 against, you guessed it, Tom Brady and the Pats. The Giants entered the playoffs with the lowest seed in the NFC, but no matter. Eli Manning, underdog at heart, comeback kid, and younger brother, swiftly brought the Giants their fourth world championship.

After 2011, Eli Manning continued to lead the Giants until 2019, when they selected his successor, Daniel Jones. Though

he never reached the peak for the third time, Eli Manning continued to be a stalwart starter in the NFL. He earned four Pro Bowl nods, holds Giants franchise records in [virtually every passing category](#) (including interceptions, to be fair), and ranks in the top 10 in all-time NFL passing yards and touchdowns. The legendary quarterback finished his career with the most Eli Manning record ever, 117-117.

While Eli Manning experienced the highest highs and lowest lows in his career, Rivers played at a dependably high level throughout his career. He was named to eight Pro Bowls and made the playoffs seven times (one with the Colts in his last season). However, he had a 5-7 postseason record, only making it to the AFC Championship once. The only knock on him is his lack of a Super Bowl appearance. He is fifth on the all-time passing yards and touchdowns list and won the hearts of NFL fans around the country with his signature trash talking, including his signature "dadgummit." He also has become the butt of many jokes for having nine kids, quite literally his biggest legacy.

## The Hall of Fame Conversation

Eli Manning and Rivers both had tremendous careers. Rivers was the picture of consistency in the NFL, looking like the best quarterback in the league for several seasons. However, he was never able to fully achieve greatness. Eli Manning, on the other hand, led the league in interceptions three times and was benched twice toward the end of his career, but also won two Super Bowl MVPs. Both of these quarterbacks should be shoo-ins to the Hall of Fame given all their accomplishments, but the question then becomes, who deserves it more?

It's called the Hall of Fame, not the Hall of Talent for a reason. The Hall of Fame is about achieving greatness. So what if Rivers had more accurate throws and a better deep ball? Eli Manning won the Super Bowl twice and is [one of just five other players](#) to be named Super Bowl MVP two times. The other four? Joe Montana, Brady, Bart Starr, and Terry Bradshaw, three Hall of Famers and one G.O.A.T.

Eli Manning is one of the most clutch players in NFL history and should be ultimately voted into the Hall of Fame as such. Though Rivers certainly should be inducted as well, if someone had to choose between the two, Eli Manning would be the right choice. As Eli Manning himself once iconically [said](#), "With the game on the line, I want the ball in my hands."

While fanatics continue to argue about the Rivers vs. Eli Manning debate, both players are looking to enjoy retirement life. Eli Manning spent a year away from football, instead spending time with his family, playing golf, and, most notably, getting a Twitter account with his signature dry humor. In fact, it was on Twitter that he announced his [first throw](#) in seven months after retirement with his old friend Larry Fitzgerald. "When you retire, you are allowed to workout in khakis," he wrote. Needless to say, Eli Manning is thriving in retirement. Recently, rumors have grown that he would like to work with the Giants in some capacity.

Rivers is set to coach high school football at St. Michael's school in Alabama, hoping to eventually coach his son.

Rivers and Eli Manning, two polar opposite personalities, finally retired after two polar opposite NFL careers, both with a place forever in the NFL history books.

## NBA

## The NBA's Best Backcourt?

By AIDAN FINGERET

To answer the question in the title, no, Alex Caruso and Talen Horton-Tucker (THT) are not the best backcourt in the NBA. But, they have a good case for the best bench backcourt. While they may not be the fanciest duo, their prowess goes beyond basic stats. Only the power of advanced statistics can fully communicate how great THT and Caruso truly are. But first, a basic rundown of the important advanced statistics: offensive rating is how many points a player or lineup produces every 100 possessions, defensive rating is how many points a player or lineup allows every 100 possessions, and net rating is the difference between offensive and defensive ratings.

Caruso is exactly what you want from your first guard off the bench. He is one of the best defensive guards in the league as evidenced by his Lakers' best

defensive rating (among players who play at least 10 minutes per game) and third best defensive rating in the NBA (among players who have played at least 15 games). When Caruso is on the court, the Lakers' league-best defense becomes an all-time great defensive lineup. On top of providing outstanding defense, Caruso has an insanely high basketball IQ, always making the right passes on offense and the right rotations on defense. LeBron James, arguably the greatest basketball mind ever, [described Caruso](#) in an interview with The Wall Street Journal: "We're one and the same when it comes to winning basketball, to see our chemistry together [...] I think it comes with our minds." These traits alone would be a great asset for any championship team, but on top of his high level defense and basketball IQ, Caruso's recently drastically improved his three-pointer. In the playoffs last year,

he shot an abysmal 28 percent from three, but this year, he is shooting 44 percent, which puts him amongst the NBA's elite shooters.

THT may not contribute to winning games as much as Caruso does right now, but he has a much higher ceiling given his scoring ability. THT has both the longest wingspan and the heaviest weight for any player at his height (6'4") in the NBA. This combination, along with his agility with and without the ball, allows THT to manipulate and bully defenders while attacking the hoop, which has already paid dividends. In the Lakers' most recent game against the Clippers, he scored on Kawhi Leonard, one of the NBA's premier perimeter defenders, by pushing him off his spot, leading to an easy layup, something not many people can do, especially against Leonard. THT has shown glimpses of his full potential as he grows as a player, as seen

when he scored 33 points on the Clippers in the preseason. One of his teammates and locker room leaders, Jared Dudley, really believes in THT, going so far as to say on an episode of [Inside the Green Room](#), "I know he may have just turned 20, and I'll be shocked if he's not starting next year." Although it may take some time for THT to become a force of nature offensively, he is still earning his playing time by being one on the defensive end. THT's per 36 minutes stats include two steals and one block, which is only matched by six other players in the league.

There is no better backcourt coming off the bench in the NBA than THT and Caruso right now, and the only ones that can compete provide very little defensive value, relying primarily on shooting and scoring to make an impact. The Clippers' bench duo is led by multiple time Sixth Man of the Year award winner Lou Williams,

who is an automatic bucket for his team and the opposition. The Jazz's duo is led by Sixth Man of the Year frontrunner Jordan Clarkson, who is doing his best Williams impersonation by providing simple points and not much else. The last bench backcourt that even sniffs THT and Caruso is the Mavericks' backcourt of Trey Burke and Tim Hardaway Jr., who both provide a scoring punch and spacing but do not do the Mavericks' bottom five defense any good. Their astounding defensive work and contributions to the Lakers winning games make THT and Caruso far and away the NBA's best bench backcourt. As long as Jeanie Buss is willing to go over the luxury tax to retain the current roster quality, the Lakers should keep on competing for championships for the foreseeable future as Caruso and THT continue to blossom.

# THE SPECTATOR SPORTS

## Soccer

### A Historic Day for Indian Soccer

By **SOHAM MUKHERJEE**

It's quiet around the stadium as the score is tied 1-1 in the 86th minute, and tension lingers in the atmosphere. All of a sudden, Mohun Bagan striker Abhilash Ghosh fires a terrific shot into the top right corner of the opposition's net! Mohun Bagan has just made history and become a nationalist symbol in the Indian freedom struggle against British imperialism.

Mohun Bagan's win in the IFA Shield Final against East Yorkshire Regiment in 1911 was not only one of the greatest achievements in Indian sports history, but was also an essential stepping stone toward independence from British rule. It all started when the British first landed in Surat, India on August 24, 1608. Using foreign goods that could be sold efficiently without tariffs or duties and the division of India into separate territories ruled by different princes, the British quickly took over the economy and formed strong alliances with local rulers. Thus began the British "control" over India, which lasted from 1858 to India's independence in 1947.

When the British first came to Kolkata, also known as Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, they brought a novel sport with them: soccer. At the time, mostly higher-ranked British army officials played the sport. However, it quickly became very popular, and the common people picked it up.

A group of Bengali middle class men decided to hone their skills in hopes of beating the British at their own game, so

they began practicing regularly in a nearby urban park, the Kolkata Maidan. At the same time, a few financially solvent Calcuttans convened in the nearby Basu Villa, and the Basus decided, along with the neighboring families of the Mitras and the Sens, to form the Mohun Bagan Athletic Club, named after the Mohun Bagan Villa. It was the birth of an all-Indian club which would soon be a symbol that represented all of India in the freedom struggle and fight against the British.

At first, the Mariners only played in small, local tournaments against minor clubs like nearby college teams. The team was mainly made of Bengali middle class gentry who played without any equipment, not even shoes, and with no training whatsoever. Mohun Bagan initially lost most tournaments in the first few rounds, but over time, the team became more experienced, and the players learned and adapted to the modern style of play. In 1911, Mohun Bagan entered the IFA Shield competition, which has existed since 1893, making it the fourth oldest soccer competition in history. It was named after and hosted by the Indian Football Association, which is the oldest soccer association in India.

At the time, the tournament was mostly played by British regiment teams who were well equipped, experienced, and properly trained. In the first few rounds, Mohun Bagan defeated St. Xavier 3-0 and beat the Calcutta Rangers 2-1. In the third round, Mohun Bagan overcame the Rifle Brigade in a 1-0 win,

and in the semifinals, they tied against the military team, first Middlesex Regiment. In the event of a tie, matches in the IFA Shield would be replayed the next day to determine the victor. In the second match, Mohun Bagan returned and convincingly won 3-0.

It was a historic moment and an opportunity for the first Indian team to win a premier soccer tournament in British India. The Indian side felt ready to take on the East Yorkshire Regiment after months of preparation and hard work, and they were looking to make history. The green and maroon Mohun Bagan were coached by Sailen Basu, a former soldier in the British Indian Army. The strict, disciplinarian methods which Basu learned from his army training helped put the team into good shape. Mohun Bagan used the 2-3-5 formation throughout the tournament, a very common lineup at the time, and planned on maintaining it for the final. The two wing-backs, Bhuti Sukul and Sudhir Chatterjee, valiantly protected their trustworthy goalkeeper Hiralal Mukherjee. In the middle of the field, Nilmadhab Bhattacharya, an amazing passer, and Manmohan Mukherjee, a great defensive midfielder, both flanked star center defender Rajen Sengupta, who was remarkably the youngest player in the squad. The attack consisted of versatile Srishchandra "Habal" Sarkar and blazingly quick Jatindranath "Kanu" Roy darting down the right side. The left flank was occupied by the oldest of the squad, Bijaydas Bhaduri, and his younger brother Shib-

das Bhaduri, who captained the team. Finally, Ghosh played as the muscular and clinical striker leading the line at the front.

The day of the final was a special and hectic morning as everyone hurried toward Kolkata Stadium. The East Indian Railway Company had to arrange special trains to the stadium to accommodate for all of the passengers. Other steamer services were introduced to carry rural supporters to the match. Upon arrival, most of Mohun Bagan's supporters did not get good seats to watch the match, so they came up with another way of communicating to each other. Green and maroon kites were flown with the score written on them to let the supporters know what was going on.

The match kicked off with both sides trying to gain an early advantage. The Indian side played barefoot without any shoes or shin guards against the British, who were wearing cleats. The first half went by cautiously as both teams were playing carefully, making sure they were always safe while attacking. Halftime came, and the score was still tied at 0-0.

The game picked up right where it left off as the second half kicked off with both teams going for similar angles and maintaining their cautious strategies. However, the game opened up in the 75th minute when a harmless challenge from Sengupta awarded Yorkshire with a free kick, which led to the first goal of the game coming from Yorkshire captain Sergeant Jackson. With only 15 minutes remaining and Mohun

Bagan down 1-0, hope was disappearing fast.

However, Mohun Bagan didn't give up after coming this far. They started playing much more aggressively and tactically while attacking. Soon, the equalizing goal came from the skipper himself, Shibdas Bhaduri, and the game had turned on its head. The match was almost coming to an end, and it was looking more and more like a draw. In the 86th minute, Shibdas Bhaduri released a fantastic pass for Ghosh, who scored the deciding goal to seal the match. Mohun Bagan had won the 1911 IFA Shield and made history by becoming the first Indian team to win the premier soccer tournament in British India.

This win meant a lot more than just showing the prowess and ability of the Mohun Bagan team. This victory earned the squad the nickname "The Immortal 11," and they became a nationalist symbol in India's freedom struggle for independence. Mohun Bagan's win was one of India's key victories against British imperialism and served as a beacon of hope for those who had lost faith. This win fanned the flames of the freedom struggle as there were already smaller organizations looking to fight against British imperialism. Now everyone could follow Mohun Bagan's example and challenge the British through fair, justified means rather than violent ones. This win gave India hope and confidence in a time when both were foreign, and it is remembered to this day as one of the greatest achievements in the history of Indian sports.

## X Games

### Getting X-Treme at the Winter X Games

By **LEAH D'SILVA**

In a world that seems to be constantly changing, it is nice to know that some things do stay the same. Marking its 20th year in Aspen, Colorado, the 2021 Winter X Games slid in with yet another jaw-dropping competition, filled with gravity-defying tricks and historic talent. Straight from Buttermilk Mountain, just under 100 of the world's most skilled winter athletes competed in the first international snowboard and freeski event of the season.

The X Games, well known for being one of the biggest snow-sport events of the year, was held over the course of three days with 14 action-filled disciplines, including men and women's big air, superpipe, half-pipe, slopestyle, and Knuckle Huck for both skiing and snowboarding. This year's competition took on a jam-session format for every event, meaning that athletes had a set time frame to complete as many runs as they could, with each athlete's best run's score being ranked.

While the same incredible jumps and tricks were present

over the course of the event, the X Games, like every major competition, was forced to adapt in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In stark contrast to previous years' live concerts and fan interactions, this year's competition was closed to all spectators and consisted of a slimmed-down roster, making for an oddly quiet weekend. In addition, all motocross events were cut, leaving only skiing and snowboarding. Without any fans cheering, the silence on the slope was broken only by the scrape of skis and snowboards. Several big names, including Mark McMorris, the most decorated X Games contestant of all time, also had to sit out due to testing positive for COVID-19. Mark McMorris had previously never missed a competition since his debut in 2011.

Among other pandemic-related adjustments, the X Games incorporated an interactive, immersive virtual media hub to bring the event to fans at home. Live-telecast announcers Craig McMorris, Brandon Graham, Jimmy Coleman, and Tom Wallisch provided engaging analysis and raw reactions for virtual viewers. With these adaptations,

the X Games continued to successfully showcase both famous and rising athletes as they took on the Aspen slopes.

One of the more shocking breakout stories of the Games involved rookie Dusty Henricksen. At only 17 years old, Henricksen competed in three events, taking home two gold medals by the end of the weekend. In the men's snowboard slopestyle, Henricksen coasted down the course in a short-sleeved t-shirt, picking up a gold medal and edging out Olympic champion Red Gerard. As such, Henricksen became the first American since Shaun White in 2009 to win this contest. In the men's snowboard Knuckle Huck, Henricksen continued his strong form, securing yet another gold medal.

Another name to remember from the weekend is China's Eileen Gu, a 17-year-old rookie who crushed the competition. In her X Games debut, Gu won gold in both the women's ski superpipe and women's ski slopestyle, also placing third in the women's ski big air. In doing so, she broke several records. She became the first woman to win two gold medals in her rookie

year, the first woman to earn three medals in her rookie year, and the first athlete from China to ever win a gold medal. In the past 26 years that athletes representing China have competed in the X Games, they have won a total of three medals. Gu single handedly doubled that number in one weekend.

Of course, many big names

made their mark over the course of the competition as well. Jamie Anderson, a two-time Olympic gold medalist in women's snowboard slopestyle and the most decorated woman in X Games history, performed

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## SPORTSBEAT

Golfing legend **Tiger Woods** sustained serious injuries in a car accident on February 23 in Los Angeles, California. His injuries were non life-threatening, and he is in stable condition.

**MLB Spring Training** started last week with a limited amount of fans allowed to attend. The season is set to start in about a month with Opening Day showcasing all 30 teams in action on April 1.

Tennis champions **Naomi Osaka** and **Novak Djokovic** both won Grand Slam singles titles at the **Australian Open**. It is Djokovic's ninth Australian title and Osaka's 21st entry in her running winning streak, which has stretched since last season.

The **NBA 2021 All Star** starters and reserves were voted on by fans and selected. The Western Conference starters include Luka Dončić, Stephen Curry, Nikola Jokic, Kawhi Leonard, and captain LeBron James. The Eastern side will feature Kyrie Irving, Bradley Beal, Giannis Antetokounmpo, Joel Embiid, and captain Kevin Durant.