



The Spectator

The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper

"The Pulse of the Student Body"

Volume 111 No. 14

April 28, 2021

stuyspec.com

SCIENCE

"Edward Jenner: The Father of Modern Vaccination"



With continuing developments surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine, Science writers Daisy Lin and Loy Hashimoto remember the scientist who pioneered the concept of modern immunization: Edward Jenner.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

"Nomadland": Frames of Humanity

Features editor Christina Pan discusses the Best Picture-winning "Nomadland," a film with a scope as big as the country it spans.

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Stuyvesant Announces Senior Graduation and Junior Prom Plans

By SAMIA ISLAM, JADY CHEN, SAKURA YAMANAKA, and MAGGIE SANSONE

Senior Graduation

As the end of the school year approaches, seniors anticipate their graduation. Due to the overall decline of COVID-19 cases and the introduction of vaccines, especially with the eligibility for those 16 years and older, this year's graduating class will be convening with a live, in-person celebration on June 25 at noon. The ceremony is planned to be held at Arthur Ashe Stadium in Queens, NY, an outdoor location that will be roofed during graduation.

With social distancing policies in place, the school administration is working alongside the Student Union to ensure that the event is held in a safe and enjoyable manner for all. "Graduation has been a project at the forefront of our minds since we began our term in September. At first, we worked with Mr. [Matthew] Polazzo, the Coordinator of Student Affairs, to explore options of both in-person and virtual ceremonies," Senior Caucus co-presidents Katerina Corr and Ayala Sela said in an e-mail interview. "There was never really any debate over whether we wanted to host an in-person ceremony—everyone agreed that it would be an invaluable end to such a challenging senior year."

To mitigate the risks of COVID-19, several health guidelines will be instated. The stadium will only be at about 20 percent capacity to comply with social distancing. Graduates, family members, and faculty must wear face masks. Additionally, attendees are required to have proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test result. Additionally, each graduate will receive three additional tickets instead of the usual two. The ceremony will also be live-streamed to allow those unable to attend to watch it at home. Last year, the graduation ceremony for seniors was to be located at Carnegie Hall but was canceled due to the pandemic. The event was substituted with a virtual graduation.

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Vaccine Eligibility Opens for New Yorkers Over 16

By RAJHASREE PAUL, MAHIR HOSSAIN, VEDAANT SHAH, and NADA HAMEED

Governor Andrew Cuomo expanded the eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine to include people 16 and older on April 6. This announcement is progress towards a return to normalcy for Stuyvesant students, many of whom meet the age requirement to receive the vaccine.

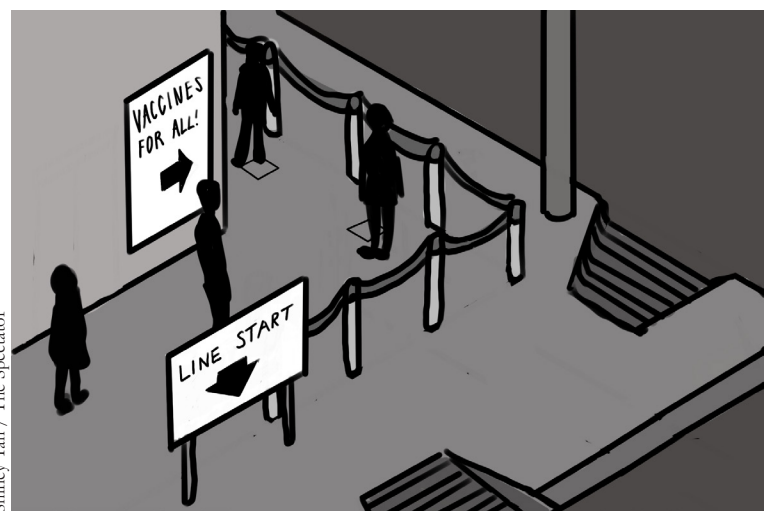
Many students were surprised by the earliness of their eligibility. "I thought that they'd do a much slower rollout: seniors now, starting with 40 year-olds, then 30, then 20, then teenagers," sophomore Sophia Eiden said. "I would get it if they made bigger increments too, but just opening it up to [those 16 and older] straight-up kinda shocked me."

Senior Jesse Hammer added in an e-mail interview, "I did not expect to be able to get my vaccine in early April. I was expecting no earlier than maybe early-to-mid May, but then the new presidential administration proved itself startlingly more competent than expected and here we are."

While the eligibility opens up

the opportunity for more vaccination, a few are concerned about the inequity in distribution. "I'm very disappointed by the demographic disparities found in who has been getting vac-

ciated," Hammer said. "I know I have benefited from those disparities, being white and from a fairly wealthy area, but the fact that I got it earlier is cold comfort to me if that means that someone who may have needed or deserved the vaccine more got it later than they should have."



Shirley Tan / The Spectator

Some students eligible for the

"I was a bit worried that I would be bedridden and unable to complete my homework."

For others, symptoms were much stronger. "My whole family, including me, had a slight

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NEWSBEAT

The Environmental Club hosted the annual **Earth Day Fair** virtually on April 23.

Seniors **Lamia Haque, Taaseen Jahan, and Brian Zhang** received the prestigious **Albert Shanker Scholarship**.

Seniors **Srinath Mahankali, Ethan Joo, Max Vaysburd, Theo Schiminovich, and junior Rishabh Das** are members of the New York City Math Team, which placed first in the **2021 Princeton University Mathematics Competition**.

Sophomore **Zoe Parkin** is a finalist in the sixth annual **"Tell Me A Story" High School Contest**.

Freshman **Lesley Lo** is a semifinalist in the **Japan Center Essay Competition** hosted by **Stonybrook University**.

Alumni Association Hosts Community Discussion on Anti-Asian Violence

By JAMES KANG, ISABELLA JIA, and ZIYING JIAN

"The community has become so activated, which has been amazing and that's one of the great joys of the horrific things that have been happening, which is that it has galvanized the community into action," Pearl River Mart President Joanne Kwong ('93) said.

In response to the spike in anti-Asian violence nationwide and in New York City, the Stuyvesant High School Alumni Association (SHSAA) hosted a Community Discussion on Anti-Asian Violence on April 15. Over 200 people attended the event, where panelists shared their personal experiences, opinions, and questions on the recent hate crimes and racism against the Asian-American and Pacific Islander community.

This discussion event was hosted virtually with a panel of speakers, consisting of alumni, Stuyvesant faculty, and current students. The panelists comprised of Kwong, Executive Director of the Asian-American Bar Association of New York (AABANY) Yang Chen ('83), SHSAA President Soo Kim ('93), AABANY

Board Director Chris Kwok ('92), Representative Grace Meng ('93), who represents New York's Sixth Congressional District, Principal Seung Yu, and juniors Christopher Liu, Xiaoshen Ma, Laura Xia, and Alice Zhu.

For Kwong, attending the discussion was important in sharing her experiences with race during her time in Stuyvesant and the enrichment of her views around anti-Asian hate. "It was so important to participate for Stuyvesant students to hear from alumni," she said. "I have these experiences I want the current generation of Stuyvesant to know about because when I went to Stuy, it was different. It was more diverse and all of my friends were mixed. There would be African American, Muslim, Asian, Latinx friends from all different socioeconomic groups."

Kwong's experience as the president of Pearl River Mart also contributed to her decision to participate in the event to spread more awareness of the Asian-American identity. "I have an art gallery and book gallery, which is very important for kids to walk into my store and see protagonist stories that look like them. It's

not about collecting it but learning about what are the traditions and cultures and how we share our culture and making sure that it is as fundamental as our American culture as eating bagels or celebrating [St. Patrick's] Day. Something like Lunar New Year and a lucky hat, all of these things are American because they are part of the American experience."

Growing up as a Korean-American in North Carolina, Yu reflected on his personal experiences and explained that witnessing the effects of anti-Asian hate on young people has shaped how he appreciates and identifies with his heritage. "It's interesting to think about it in retrospect because now as an adult, I see what's happening to our students now, and it has given me more recognition and appreciation of who I am and what I experience," Yu said.

The adult panelists also enjoyed hearing the perspectives of the current students. "It was important for me personally to communicate with the current generation about these very serious issues that I grew up with and it's sad to look over the past decades and realize there has been little

progress," he said. "It's important to speak to the next future generation who are future decision-makers, policymakers, changemakers, so they can continue to fight and help us to make real progress."

Yu believed a benefit of the event was hearing a blend of adult and young people's voices as they drew insight from each other. "We have to find the balance between what young people have to say and what their experiences are, and us as adults," Yu said. "Hearing the stories of current students and [alumni] helped bridge the gap between the current generation and the adults."

For student panelists, the discussion posed an opportunity for them to meet with notable alumni such as Congresswoman Meng and learn from reports. "The highlight was seeing all those interesting people, who I have met for the first time," Ma said. "I saw some interesting statistics, so [...] I got to learn as well."

Chen presented a report by **AABANY**, a non-profit organization that represents Asian-American

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News

Stuyvesant Announces Senior Graduation and Junior Prom Plans

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This year, senior dues will not include graduation ceremony tickets as the school administration and Stuyvesant Alumni Association will cover the cost instead. Seniors are only expected to pay for senior regalia, the senior t-shirt, and the yearbook.

As of now, plans for Stuyvesant's choirs, all three of which typically perform at graduation with a special ovation given to the senior members of chorus, are still unknown.

Many seniors approve of this proposed arrangement for senior graduation as they have not been able to fully experience their final year of high school. "Having free graduation tickets is fair. Many people are already discouraged from going because of COVID-19, so if there was a fee, I don't think many people would attend. I personally wouldn't attend if there was an expensive fee," senior Wilson Wong said in an e-mail interview.

Others agree that an in-person graduation is apt, given the improved health circumstances. "Both my parents are vaccinated and I am scheduled to be vaccinated in the next week. So on top of the existing safety procedures, I'd definitely rather have an in-person graduation than a virtual one," senior Maisha Nabila said in an e-mail interview.

Throughout the school year, remote learning has also presented many drawbacks when it comes to connecting with peers and teachers. "Even with virtual events and classes, it isn't quite the same as seeing your classmates in school or working together on an extracurricular project," Sela said.

Students also mentioned that remote learning has put a damper on the academic aspect of their senior year. "The largest downside of remote learning is that it has at times turned interactions with teachers and their classes into much more transactional exchanges where you just do what you have to do, and don't necessarily look forward to a certain teacher's class," senior Francesco

Siniscalco said in an e-mail interview.

These limitations of remote learning have become increasingly evident to upperclassmen as they were unable to participate in senior traditions and socialize with schoolmates. "Senior year is supposed to be a time [when] we celebrate our achievements at Stuyvesant and make memories with those in our community," Wong said. "This year was especially hard for seniors going through the college process remotely and most of us are worn out."

The Senior Caucus hopes to keep senior spirits high in spite of the limitations of remote learning as the year draws to a close. "So far, we have had the privilege of launching interactive online activities for seniors as well as hosting exciting events," Corr and Sela said. "This spring, seniors can expect a number of other traditions and activities including a college commitment Instagram account, college map, senior crush lists, a system for sending gifts for letters of recommendation, and several projects that will be unique to the Class of 2021."

Seniors this year will not have to miss the tradition of an in-person graduation and will be able to complete their high school journey together. "Though I'm sure that every senior has a unique perspective on what graduation this year means to them, I'd imagine that as a whole we're all excited for this last opportunity to celebrate together," Corr said. "Graduation represents both the bright future ahead for us seniors and the resilience we've all needed to succeed despite the pandemic."

Junior Prom

Junior prom, a beloved tradition at Stuyvesant, will not be held in-person this school year. While the administration had originally considered the possibility of both a senior prom and junior prom to be held on Governors Island earlier in the year, the Department of Education (DOE) established a no-prom

policy.

Normally, junior prom is held on a yacht. However, there is not enough outdoor space for an event to follow COVID-19 guidelines and the DOE has banned all in-person proms regardless. "This has all been a pretty difficult process for us that has involved talking with the administration to see what's available because only just recently, we heard that the DOE wasn't allowing in-person proms, so this is all in the works. We're adapting. We're trying to make something work," Junior Caucus Vice President Elio Torres said.

Though planning for junior prom has been difficult for Junior Caucus as they oversee the logistics, Torres and Junior Caucus President Cynthia Tan are currently exploring alternatives to uphold this tradition.

One such alternative is the option of a virtual prom. While Tan and Torres have started brainstorming ideas for a virtual junior prom, they are taking into account their role as a caucus and the considerations of the larger junior class before making a final decision. "The whole purpose of the caucus is just to get the students' ideas and put them in motion, so even though we really want to do a prom, we won't if the students aren't interested," Tan said.

To gauge interest, Tan and Torres recently sent out a Google Forms survey to the junior class to see the class's response to a possible virtual prom. The replies so far have largely been negative and against such a course of action. Such responses have prompted Tan and Torres to begin creating a more fleshed-out plan as to what a virtual prom would look like in the hopes that more details would influence juniors' future decisions.

They believe there are still ways to create a positive experience for the junior class and hope to maximize the experience of a virtual junior prom by implementing activities and entertainment depending on the selected theme. "We were thinking of having breakout rooms



Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and NASA

WORLDBEAT

Derek Chauvin, who was convicted of the murder of **George Floyd**, was found **guilty** of second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter.

Johnson & Johnson will resume its COVID-19 vaccine distribution in Europe with a warning that indicates a risk of **blood clotting**, as stated by the European Union's drug regulator.

Eight people were killed in a **shooting** at a FedEx facility in **Indianapolis, Indiana**, on April 15.

The **COVID-19** global death toll surpassed **three million** on April 17.

Raúl Castro has **stepped down** as the head of **Cuba's communist party**, leaving Cuba without a Castro leader for the first time in over 60 years.

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and husband of Queen Elizabeth II, **died** on April 9.

and getting to reserve a breakout room with your friends. And in that way, you can still speak to people that maybe you haven't gathered with in a large group setting in a really long time," Tan said. "[We are also thinking of] a speaker, a famous one or maybe a YouTuber, that can send a video specifically for Stuyvesant High School. Just like graduation, except instead of a commencement speech, it would be like, 'Hey, it's

us. Welcome to prom,'" Tan said.

Tan and Torres hope to send out a more concrete plan for the virtual junior prom and gauge interest from there. Depending on the response from the student body, they will decide whether to go through with it. "We want to do what's feasible and what people want, which is why we're trying to put the decision in their hands, not in our hands," Torres said.

Vaccine Eligibility Opens for New Yorkers Over 16

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fever and muscle pain for both doses, though I think the muscle pain was worse for my parents," junior Maisha Sreya said in an e-mail interview. "The intense muscle pain was mostly caused by the second dose, but we got fevers [from] both [doses]."

With the rise of new COVID-19 strain variants, however, some are still uncertain of the vaccine's effectiveness in preventing COVID-19. "I'm a little worried that [the vaccine] won't be very effective against variations or it won't be as effective as they say it is [...] I assumed that it would be complete coverage, but you can still get sick from [the virus]," Eiden said.

Others feel that variants may further cloud future prospects. "I wouldn't be surprised if we slip back into a COVID state, assuming that the virus mutates enough to avoid being affected by the

vaccine, but we'll have to wait and see until then," junior Andy Lin said in an e-mail interview.

Biology teacher Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore provided her outlook on the future of variants as more students get vaccinated. "Variants will eventually be diminished, but we need to be careful because if more mutations occur, then people will keep getting sick," she said.

While Dr. Nedwidek-Moore acknowledges the public's reluctance to receive the vaccine, she assures that the vaccines are safe and effective. "There's a variety of hesitancy and I can understand people's concerns. People don't expect something to be so effective with something that was made within forty days," she said. "However, people's lives are being ruined by this and at this point, [the risk that comes with] getting COVID is a lot higher than [the risk that comes with] getting the vaccine."

For an area as congested as

Stuyvesant, many believe that it is necessary for students to receive the vaccine. "When students are in close quarters and eating in the same space, it is obligatory [to get the vaccine] to make sure herd immunity is reached to the greatest extent," Dr. Nedwidek-Moore said.

Overall, the vaccine eligibility brought enthusiasm, especially for those looking forward to reaching immunity against COVID-19. "I'm excited to just be able to go out without worrying," Eiden said. "I'll be able to see [my grandma] and there's no risk with no problem."

With the update, many hope life will be restored to how it was before the pandemic. "Kids younger than 16 will be eligible for the vaccine as well in the near future, which hopefully means that schools will be reopening soon," junior Diya Rao said in an e-mail interview. "With more people getting vaccinated, I believe that most places (stores,

workplaces, sports facilities, etc) will begin to reopen."

Others are eager to return to Stuyvesant as well. "I am looking forward to being able to go back to in-person school and seeing my friends more often," junior Nour Kastoun said in an e-mail interview. "I'm also really excited to go back to in-person club activities (and hopefully a non-virtual SING!), as well as being able to spend time with people indoors with less risk."

For Spanish teacher Frida Ambía, she hopes that schools will reopen in the new school year following vaccine eligibility. "The government's goal is to open schools fully in September, so they may use [the vaccine] as an argument in their favor," Ambía said in an e-mail interview. "Hopefully, things will look better by the start of the new school year, [though] so many remain uncooperative."

While the vaccine is a step towards combating COVID-19,

many are still staying cautious after receiving the vaccine. "Getting vaccinated still doesn't guarantee everyone's safety from COVID-19 when there's still a large population who hasn't received it, especially in a city as dense as NYC," Sreya said. "We need to remain cautious and continue wearing masks until we're certain it's safe. We're not out of the storm just yet."

Ultimately, those who are eligible for the vaccine are strongly encouraged to obtain it as a communal effort to fight the pandemic. "I would encourage any and all who are eligible to get the vaccine," Director of Family Engagement Dina Ingram said. "Science supports everything we know about the safety of the vaccine even in the face of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine being temporarily pulled. As is the case with all vaccines before, we must trust the science and they only work if everyone participates."

Alumni Association Hosts Community Discussion on Anti-Asian Violence

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ican legal professionals and the larger Asian-American community, that provided statistical information. The report entails data showing the increase in anti-Asian hate in 2020-2021, particularly in New York City.

The report also delves into the underlying patterns for the observed increase and the community organizations and the government's efforts to address the violence. "We published this report two months ago and it's gotten a lot of press," Chen said. "Unfortunately, since the report came out there have been more attacks on Asian-Americans in the news in New York, so we've been very active in the Asian-American community [through] speaking

out and it's probably the most important issue when working on."

This paved the way for discussion on ways to encourage positive change and solutions to issues in the report. "One thing we're pushing hard on is to make sure the NYPD Asian Hate Crimes task force is being fully funded. We're very much supportive of any effort by law enforcement to bring attention to this issue and we're trying to put as much word out as possible especially to the mayor's office," he said. "Mayor de Blasio denounced Asian-American violence a year ago but we're still waiting for someone who is arrested for the crime to actually face criminal sanctions for it."

Despite numerous reports on hate crimes, Chen is still concerned about the accountability

behind these crimes but is hopeful that progress will be made soon. "Today we have dozens of reports, but not a single person has actually been prosecuted for it whether it be in jail or held accountable for the crime," Chen said. "Maybe we'll actually see our first crime prosecution this year and if we do, I think that is good news, but it is way overdue [since] there have been dozens of dozens of these reports and no one has been held accountable."

Though many thought the event to be informative, they also preferred for more direct discussion with the audience. "It would have been great to have more discussion—maybe breakout rooms—but it's hard for 200 people in the same room to have a discussion. It would have been great if the speakers and the audi-

ence were broken up into smaller groups to speak directly," Chen said.

Yu also observed that the virtual format compromised some of the emotional richness that would've been emulated in person. "It's hard in the remote environment because there's a different feel when you're in close quarters. I don't think the substance goes away, but it just feels different," he said.

Kwong appreciated Yu's presence during the discussion and feels his representation is important for the Asian-American community at Stuyvesant. "What I got out of it was the comfort from being in a space together even though it was digital and to see Principal Yu was actually very powerful for me because I can imagine how beneficial it would

be to have a new principal who's Asian-American during this time," Kwong said.

Ultimately, Yu stresses that it is crucial for these conversations to extend past the event. "These are the things we've seen over the course of four to five years, increases in a variety of racial incidents [...] there's a lot more learning that needs to happen and a lot more listening and recognition of [people of color's] experiences," he said. "I want our young people to feel proud about who they are. We all come from different backgrounds, different families, we come from different countries and our cultures are amazing and what we bring to a community is important. Equally contagious is the virus, but equally contagious are the smiles and the laughter."

Stuyvesant Alumnus James Blachly ('98) Wins a Grammy Award

By MARY LEE, JANNA WANG, and PULINDU WEERASEKARA

In the 2021 Grammy Awards Ceremony, Stuyvesant alumnus James Blachly ('98), along with the Experiential Orchestra, an orchestra that he founded, and vocal soloists Dashon Burton and Sarah Brailey, won a Grammy Award in the Best Classical Solo Vocal Album category for his recording of Dame Ethel Smyth's "The Prison." Dame Ethel Smyth was an English suffragette and women's rights activist who composed "The Prison," her last large-scale work, in 1930. Blachly and his team's recording released the recording on August 7, 2020, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Blachly serves as the Music Director to the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra, the Geneva Light Opera, and the Experiential Orchestra. He is considered a unique musician by many modern critics and the Experimental Orchestra was a widely-acclaimed step in bringing classical music to the forefront of modern arts and entertainment. His conducting was hailed as "artistic and articulate" by The Virginia Gazette and "admirable" by The New York Times.

The Experiential Orchestra first performed for "loft parties" in 2009, where the audience danced and interacted with the members of the orchestra in a midtown loft next to the orchestra. Blachly held Rite of Spring Dance parties, where the rooms resembled a modern Midsomer celebration and audiences danced to the Stravinsky classic. According to the Experiential Orchestra website, Blachly said, "My sense is that in this age of technology and speed, we crave full-body experiences that sweep us up and where we are invited to hold nothing back. I've always said there is no bigger experience in sound than a live symphony orchestra, and I want to open up that experience for new audiences and have them fall in love with the music on their own terms and through their own joy and wonder and awe."

Blachly felt elated to have received the Grammy and emphasized his experience in creating the album. "I will admit [the win] was euphoric at first, but what I

believe is more important than a week of fame is the years and years of work and enjoyment that went into recording this piece, and that's what is really important," he said. "I won't lie, a Grammy is very important to a previously mostly unknown musician, but it's not necessarily something that is earth-shattering."

He recorded "The Prison" with his orchestra, in collaboration with soloists Brailey and Burton, a soprano and a bass-baritone, respectively, as well as Grammy-award-winning producer Blanton Alspaugh. As conductor, Blachly played a significant role in keeping the ensemble together during the recording process. "Everyone looks to me for cues and it's my job to lead them," he said.

Blachly enjoyed working with the piece for multiple years before the final recording was released. "At the very first downbeat of the first rehearsal, I got shivers up and down my spine and it was like being in the grips of a powerful force, an inner drive that led me to create a performance edition of the work, and ultimately to this recording," he said. "That journey has taken four years, from that first performance of excerpts in 2016 to the US Premieres in 2018, to the recording in 2019 and its release in 2020."

He reflected on his experience in Stuyvesant in relation to his passion for music. "I've been a musician for most of my life. It was at Stuyvesant that this started. I was a violinist, and later took up the double bass," he said. "Stuy taught me that good things come from hard work and that's important to remember."

Through music, Blachly found his passion for working with an orchestra and decided to pursue conducting professionally. "It came to a point where I couldn't imagine my life without music. I started creating my own music in the latter years of high school, and then I just thought that I wanted to be a part of everything that an orchestra has to offer, which is why I decided on being a conductor," he said. "I can safely tell you that I am very happy that I chose this profession, and it has brought me countless hours of joy and pleasure."

Former Stuyvesant Assistant Principal of the English Department Steven Shapiro also recog-

nized Blachly's high school musical experience. "During his time [at Stuyvesant], he applied for the Bertelsmann Fellowship. It was a competition in those days," he said. "He wrote an original piece of music that he composed called 'Passacaglia' and he won a \$10,000

award, which was really a wonderful achievement for him. And that was back in 1994."



Courtesy of Antonia Nelson

award, which was really a wonderful achievement for him. And that was back in 1994."

Blachly's Grammy award received a positive reception from

many Stuyvesant students. "I'm [...] proud that James Blachly won a Grammy award. It comes to show that Stuyvesant can be a school for everyone, not just the stereotypical STEM school a lot of people see it as," freshman Henry Ji said in an e-mail

on something other than Stuy's traditional strengths."

Shapiro agreed, believing that Blachly's success demonstrates the diverse talents of Stuyvesant students. "When I first came to [Stuyvesant] in 1987, I felt that English and the humanities as a whole had been given [the] short [end of the stick]. The kids at Stuyvesant are bright, they're bright across the board, and not just bright in math and the sciences," he said. "James, of course, was a very bright student [...] but he was also extremely talented in music. I'm so glad that he was able to work on his talent and music at school, even in a math-science high school."

Above all, Blachly emphasized the importance of truly pursuing a passion rather than fame or money. "Fame is a ruinous ambition because everything falls out of fame eventually. [...] As a person, you should focus on what you love," he said. "Many of my peers and the adults around me, including my parents, told me that I wouldn't make it as a musician, and while I'm not filthy rich, the joy I get from doing my job is wealth enough."

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Features

“A Sense of Community”:

Stuyvesant’s Return to Blended Learning

By **MILLIE BELL** and
ELIZA OPPENHEIMER

With the reopening of New York City high schools, some students have decided to opt into Stuyvesant’s blended learning plan. However, returning to the school building is a far cry from a return to normalcy: blended learners attend their remote classes from desks in the gym, cafeteria, or auditorium. Despite the compromised comfort of blended learning, students are provided with opportunities to socialize and interact with their classmates. While the Stuyvesant community has mixed opinions on this system, for many who have chosen to attend, the pros outweigh the cons.

Walking into the school building through the second floor bridge entrance, blended learners are greeted by staff who check their temperatures and health screenings. After swiping their IDs, students can go up the stairs to their respective pods. Between classes, students are able to speak to classmates and play games—an opportu-

nity that isn’t available during remote learning. During school hours, Zoom classes resume as normal.

Although blended learners are seated at desks spaced six feet apart from one another, Stuyvesant students have still found ways to socialize with their classmates. Many students have participated in community-building activities, such as ping-pong, walks, and tours of the building. “On Tuesday, I went with Ms. Ingram and some other kids and got to meet a senior. Ms. Ingram told us about Stuy, and we had candy, and it was just really nice,” freshman Zoe Grossman said. “In your free periods you can play ping-pong and go hang out with people,” she continued.

Additionally, many students have recognized the benefits of doing schoolwork from an academic setting. “I share a room with two siblings and it can get kind of crowded, so I like that I can go into blended and be around other people in a space that’s really quiet and a school environment,” freshman Aman-

da Cisse explained. Junior Alec Shafran agreed: “I’m a lot more focused when I’m in school, because I know that I don’t have my phone here or my parents walking around.”

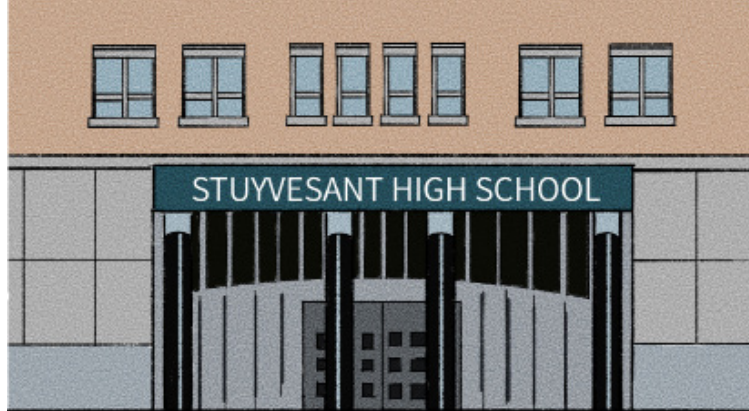
However, blended students have also noted several down-

I fully wake up at 9:08 to get to a 9:10 class. It’s really bad. But that’s one of the biggest things. I also [struggle with my] commute, which I’ve kind of gotten used to not having in the mornings,” Shafran said.

Furthermore, blended learn-

Andersen said. Other students shared similar struggles of feeling uncomfortable taking tests or participating in their classes when in the school building. “It does get a little bit uncomfortable to participate because you’re in one big room with really good acoustics, so every time you participate you either have to whisper or sound like you’re screaming at the top of your lungs,” Shafran said.

Overall, blended learning requires sacrifices for students to reap the benefits of it. But for Stuyvesant students who have decided to return to the school building, most have found the experience to be invaluable. “I didn’t realize how much I had lost until I went back in and experienced being in the school building with my peers again,” senior Jonathan Schneiderman said. Especially for seniors whose high school experience is coming to a close, Stuyvesant is not designed to be experienced from home. Thankfully, the reopening of blended learning is one step closer to normal.



Angela Liu / The Spectator

sides to in-person learning. Some students have had difficulty returning to their routines from pre-pandemic school, and many mentioned that waking up earlier to commute to school on time has been a struggle. “I’ve been cutting it so close in terms of waking up when I’m at home.

ers have noted that being in a large room with other students learning remotely can be challenging when attempting to focus in class. “In the theater there’s not really any desks and we’re all really close together and it’s a little bit louder than it is in my room,” senior Maddy

Scholastic Scholars

lineage

By **MEERA DASGUPTA**

“we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”

- a Native American proverb

there is a mother here. her skin has known the salt of broken oceans. her hands have traced the sun until it became her. she learned respect from a father and his hands. how the bones of dead flowers made their garden a burial ground. her body was her family’s burial ground. her mouth an untamed flame. it escaped and left her with a vase. in it, her reflection appeared and shattered. there is a brother here. he has learned to breathe air as dark as his skin. there are no lights in a city of stars that do not reach him. some days he feels paperweight-in his dreams he is flying. he has forgotten the smell of grass and his mother. he has forgotten the sounds of the wind - what it means to fly. in his dreams he carries a star in his pocket but it burns from the inside-out. it reminds him of himself. that there is a burning within him. there is a father here. he overflows into his mother’s garden. her flames lick his stubborn skin as he swallows the ocean whole. he writes odes to himself until his blood becomes a dead rose. and as the sea-levels rise. as they run like a crimson-mouthed psalm. as children curl like wayward leaves. as storms shake their sea-blue hands. as these hands overturn burial grounds. as burial-grounds become his mother. a father becomes a son in mourning. there is a daughter here. she has been taught how to sustain on seeds but to never settle for them. to treat the grounds as she treats her body. to till the earth until she too is the sun.

Street Vendors and Empty Promises

By **ELIO TORRES**

For the successive months after the pandemic first presented itself in New York City, we ate our favorite restaurant entrees out of plastic takeout containers, with cloth-bundled silverware exchanged for single-use cutlery and a bottomless bag of napkins. The time when we would again be served in-person platters and aromatic spreads no longer seemed within close reach. As we patiently endured springtime in the city, counties in Connecticut and New Jersey gradually received an okay to re-open dining services, while New York City eateries watched in understanding but deep envy. Days under lockdown grew into weeks and months, and by June 22, Cuomo cleared New York City—the former global epicenter—for outdoor dining. The precautions that disallowed indoor service from resuming, to the dismay of struggling restaurants, were drawn from Cuomo’s fear about the warning signs “from other states on the horizon.”

In anticipation of a sudden clamor for outdoor dining tables, restaurateurs scrambled to erect outdoor seating and barriers for the street space adjacent to their restaurants, transforming the city sidewalks into bustling woodworking stations. While the brick and mortar eateries were back in business, the decision to grant restaurants free rein over street space was yet another blow to New York City’s forgotten food population: street vendors. The temporary outdoor dining program, introduced at the New York City Council, has permitted restaurants to occupy plazas, sidewalks, streets, and parking lots—in many cases displacing vendor carts and street-food trucks that had been serving out of these very places for years. Forced to relocate, vendors lost many of their day-to-day patrons, a slowdown that was further perpetu-

ated by a drastic reduction in foot traffic throughout the city during the three-month lockdown. The network of vendor carts around Stuyvesant, for one, rely on a midday rush of students—a demographic of customers who have not spent a dime at these same carts since the March closure of the school building.

Vendors have already been economically underserved by the government throughout the course of the pandemic: a large fraction of the city vendor population is comprised of undocumented immigrants who were not afforded stimulus checks back in April. A resilient group of 20 thousand hard-working individuals who serve much of the working class in the city, vendors are rarely represented in local legislation and are often overlooked by lawmakers in Albany. This precedent of hostility toward street vendors was cemented by a 1981 law that capped the number of street vendor permits at 5,000, essentially whittling down the industry to an elite hobby, not a passage for the American Dream. The mismanaged vendor license system, which emerged out of this antiquated legislation, has forced aspiring vendors to pay up to 18 thousand dollars for a retail \$200 permit in order to sell legally out of their carts. The strict cap on vendor permit availability, which has remained unchanged for four decades, has not kept pace with the extensive population growth of the city and has authorized over-policing of vendors. Evelia Coyotzi, a tamale vendor in Corona, Queens, was arrested more than 15 times, not for breaking well-defined laws and rules, but for selling her authentic Tlaxcalan cuisine in the wrong place at the wrong time—namely, an era during which the police and former mayor Rudy Giuliani reportedly did not want a single vendor on the streets.

A community that has long

been subject to Albany’s cold shoulder, street vendors now have a chance to pass legislation that would support the industry in a period of unprecedented need—Intro 1116. Council members Margaret Chin and Carlos Menchaca pioneered a bill that would “aim to bring increased opportunities, fairness, and consistent enforcement to a chaotic system created by a decades-old cap that has forced many vendors to turn to an underground market for licenses.” Intro 1116 would directly expand the availability of vending permits, implement an official vendor advisory board, and create an office for street vendor enforcement.

As Stuyvesant students, we understand that the street vendor population in our city is indispensable; our go-to orders at the halal and Korean food carts have stayed fresh on our minds even after a six-month hiatus. The vendors themselves were more than just faces we would pass as we trekked down Chambers Street—we exchanged daily greetings and smiles, and they knew our orders at the mere sight of us. For all of the affordable lunches that they served to us, it is now our obligation to support the bill that might very well keep their businesses alive in these troubled times. These vendors deserve more than our thoughts and prayers—they need decisive action.

If your life has been bettered by a street vendor, or if you want to protect these resolute workers with families and dreams, I urge you to take to the following actions: call your council member and urge them to support Intro 1116; call Corey Johnson, the speaker of the New York City Council, and remind him that you care about street vendors in our city; and, finally, try to buy your next meal from a local street vendor. They have always been there for us at our every convenience—now imagine a New York City without them.

Altarpiece of Hypocrisy by Jiahe Wang



Features

The Day in the Life of a Blended Learner

By AGATHA EDWARDS

After over a year of remote learning at home, it was great to hear that Stuyvesant would be allowing students back into the building to continue with blended learning. I had previously done blended learning in the fall, so I knew what to expect, but since that was way back in November 2020, I was very excited to get back into the routine.

When I tell people that I'm doing blended learning, often their first reaction is an incredulous "Why?!" They wonder, "What's the point of going into school to do the same exact classes that you could be doing from the comfort of your own home? What's the point of waking up two hours earlier?"

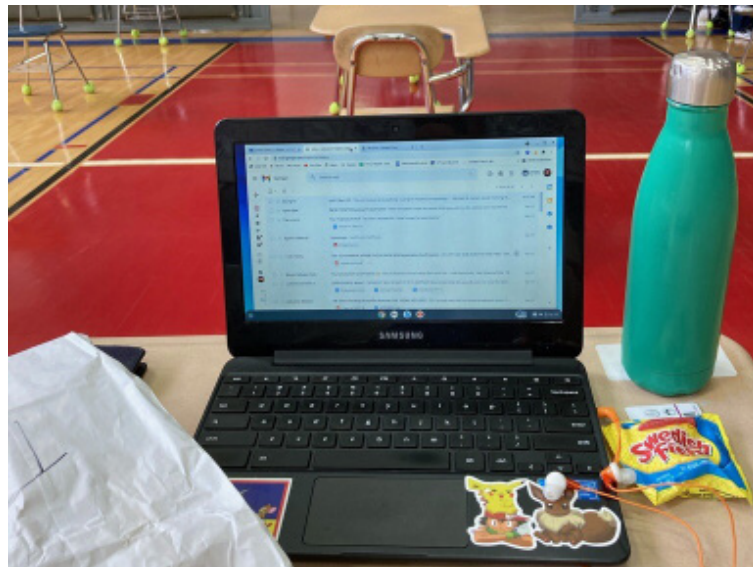
For these people, I have answers. I miss Manhattan. I miss the nostalgic train rides, the smell of halal carts, and the terrific view of the Hudson River. I tend to get distracted and unmotivated during class if I'm at home, but being at Stuyvesant helps me feel like I'm in an actual school setting and can do my work efficiently. I love seeing the few friends that are also inside the building with me, as well as other students I recognize from my time around the building. Additionally, I'm on Stuyvesant's track team, and I've gotten bored with running loops around the same park at home—I've always loved running by the Hudson River and down to Chelsea Piers.

On a blended learning day, I wake up at 7:00 a.m., eat a quick breakfast, chill on my phone for a little bit, and get ready for school. It feels similar to what I did pre-pandemic (though I do get an extra hour of sleep). It's exciting to pick out an outfit to wear, since normally I would just be slumped at home wearing baggy sweats.

Upon entering the school, I come head-to-head with the

temperature checker machine, which often says that my temperature is too low, so they either just let me pass or take the temperature on my wrist, which is more accurate. I complete the daily health screening which clears me to enter the building.

Walking down the hallway to the 2-3 escalator (which is actually working, though the 2-4 is still completely blocked off), the halls feel a little strange—there's never anybody nearby. The senior bar, once completely crowded with students, stands untouched in front of the empty lockers. As I ride the



escalator I can't help but feel an afterschool vibe, reminiscent of when my teammates and I would stay late to practice in an abandoned building.

I head toward the third floor gym. The walk down the hallway is very nostalgic because my old locker is right in front of the gymnastics room, still stocked with folders and food that's probably expired by now. I have opened my locker before but haven't taken anything home yet (which I really should get to sometime). I enter the gym, which looks smaller than it did before, filled with desks neatly arranged in rows all spaced out six feet apart. I

check my name off the sign-in sheet at the front of the gym and sign my name on the lunch form, requesting a chicken wrap prepared by the cafeteria. My seat is D-37, which faces the gymnastics room. Sometimes I'll switch seats, though, if I have to charge my laptop. I'm usually one of the first students to arrive, since my classes start at 9:10, but I always enjoy watching other students walk in, recognizing their faces behind their masks, waving to some as they pass by.

From here on out, my experience at school is similar to

more!) Mr. Moran even comes into the gym frequently and asks if any student wants to take a walk outside with him. During my free periods I usually try to complete some homework early, but sometimes I want to enjoy myself and will partake in a game of ping pong, chess, or cornhole, which are all set up outside of the gym for student use. Sometimes I also just want to stay in my chair and relax, so I might watch some YouTube or a show, which is a pleasant distraction because I've rarely done that in a school setting before. There's just a different and exciting air to watching "The Falcon and the Winter Soldier" in the school building.

What I do after school varies, but the one thing I never do is go directly home. I can't resist the feeling of being within Stuy's walls. I always took that for granted and, yeah, this sounds corny, but it really is a magical place. Sometimes after school I stay to do homework before the adults kick us out at 3:30. Sometimes I run with my friend Talia, and sometimes I stay at school to play chess.

And that's my blended school day for the most part. It may sound boring or pointless, but after spending a year cooped up at home it's great to be able to walk outside and get a routine going. Unfortunately, I'm a senior, so I won't be able to go back to Stuyvesant when things are "normal" again. It is for this reason that I want to absorb as much of the school as I can before I head off to college. As of now, the window for opting back into blended learning has closed, but that's not to say there won't be another opportunity to opt back in later in the year. Let's pray that by staying safe and getting vaccinated we'll all be able to return to the building soon, even if it isn't this school year. And if you are physically at school, maybe I'll see you around!

QUERIDA CLARA



Clara Shapiro's Advice Column

Querida Clara,

What should I do if I feel jealous of everyone around me all the time?

—Anonymous, Junior

Job, a righteous man who came from the Land of Uz, took comfort in the fact that he was dust. So are all of us dust, here to hover for one brief blink in the sun. Whenever I encounter a man who is a better hunter and smelter than I am and who possesses more oxen, cattle, wild-fowl, urns of silver, urns of gold, wives, children, and sheep than I do, I simply remind him, "You are dust, and to dust you will return." That puts him in his place. Everybody is fleeting dust.

It is logical for me to covet the hunting and smelting prowess of other men. Yet if I were to possess those abilities, it is certain that I wouldn't fully be myself anymore. Beings are themselves because of all the things that they are—in my case, a capable weaver, an honest tradesman, and a successful farmer—but also all the things that they are not, like a good hunter. The holes in the blanket are part of the blanket. Those who love you may love you just as much for what you have as what you lack.

VOICES

By CALISTA LEE

I've never been ashamed of my Chinese ethnicity. Rather, many of my fondest memories are closely tied with this part of myself.

In elementary school, after winter break, while everyone else waited for Valentine's Day or the Super Bowl, I'd wait eagerly for Chinese New Year. I was so excited for the party we'd throw in class, where I'd proudly share the traditional treats my grandma would make.

In the days leading up to the holiday, I loved teaching my non-Asian friends and teachers how to say blessings, such as "gong hei fat choy," in Cantonese.

In 2016, I was elated when NY's public school system recognized Lunar New Year as an official holiday on the school calendar, closing schools for a day to allow Asian families to celebrate.

In sixth grade, my social studies class held a cultural feast, where everyone brought a dish from their background. I brought in Chinese steamed sponge cake that I had made, and I swelled with pride when a classmate came up to me, saying my dish was the best

one they had tasted that day.

When I saw someone that looked like me declare that he was running for office for the 2020 presidential elections, I felt inspired and proud.

But for the first time in my life, I'm terrified of my Asian identity, of my skin color, of the traditions and background I was born and raised in. When my father showed me a video of a woman being attacked forcefully in broad daylight in Manhattan, my stomach curdled and my mouth went dry. It's terrifying to think that my grandparents, my parents, my sister, or I could easily be going through that exact same thing. I was even more horrified when a doorman, who had a full view of what was happening to the woman, didn't call for help and instead closed the door. Wasn't the logical thing to see to the woman and call for help?

There are no words to capture just how egregious this attack was. I'm repulsed. I'm hurt. I'm angry. I'm in disbelief as to how another human being can commit these atrocities—beating, kicking, pushing another human being.

It's one thing to hear about the hate crimes, but another when you visually see videos

Asian-American All the Way

of the physical attacks. When I watch that video my father showed me—when I watch a man beaten and choked until unconscious on the J-train, when I watch a woman being pushed outside the bakery in Queens—the reality sinks in. And there are even more of these attacks that are not being reported because of fear of retaliation from the attacker, language barriers, and uncertainty whether reporting it will be fruitful, among other reasons.

This violence has made me scared of not only my identity, but the city we live in. New York City has one of the highest rises in Asian American hate crimes in the nation. In a report released by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, Asian American hate crimes in NYC rose from three in 2019 to 28 in 2020. Compared to other major cities listed in the report, our city saw the highest increase. As a result, there's a sort of tension in the atmosphere, like a rubber band pulled taut, and you don't know what to expect until the band snaps. Now, my imminent return to school this fall has my family and I worrying about my safety, especially since I take the subway, as do countless other Stuyvesant

students. We worry about my grandparents when they purchase food from the supermarket, despite it being only a few blocks from our house.

However, the optimistic side of me can't help but see some of the good, however



small, that can come out of this. I can't help but hope that born out of this disrespect comes respect, born out of this heartlessness comes a society with more heart, and born out of this outrage comes change. Now that there's more recognition and attention given to this discrimination, society can start to debunk some of the stereotypes of Asian Americans, particularly the model minority myth that paints us

as successful and obedient people. I hope that we can encourage the majority of Asian Americans who fear reporting hate crimes to share their stories, condemn the usage of words such as the "China virus" or "Kung flu," advocate for the community to reach out, provide support for one another, and raise awareness about the daily struggles Asian Americans face today as well as how this racism is rooted in America's past and its policies. It's saddening to think that it took a pandemic and such cruelty for this issue to be highlighted, but COVID-19 has an ability to reveal some of the biggest inequalities in our country—Asian American discrimination is one of them.

Even though I want to hide and stay fearful for my Chinese ethnicity, I feel as though this is a time that calls for me to embrace it all the more. At a time when we are being attacked for this very reason, I should not succumb to violence. Rather, I will remember those moments filled with joy and pride I had from sharing and participating in my culture's traditions, draw strength from these memories, and hope that I will be able to create more of these in the future.

Editorials

We Need to Go Back

We come to Stuyvesant for the academics but stay for the people: the best friends, the club buddies, and the passing acquaintances. We get to know our unique teachers and the unlikely companions who sit next to us in class. But after over a year of online learning, we have replaced the everyday interaction and fun present in normal school with tedious Zoom lectures. Thankfully, we have hope; the vaccine is already available to every New Yorker over 16 and soon to everyone. But the current situation is untenable. We must return to normal in September with full in-person learning.

In-person interaction provided us solace from the stresses of Stuyvesant. Spending time with friends, waving to acquaintances in the hallway, and even simply being in the building with other students carried us through the countless assignments, lengthy commutes, caffeine-fueled days, and late nights. With remote learning, the social interaction that used to pull students out of bed every morning is gone, and our motivation to attend classes has diminished. Even with cameras on, staring at a sea of heads comes nowhere near an in-person class.

This struggle has had an especially adverse effect on current freshmen, who have not met any of their peers or become acclimated to their school environment. Most freshmen have not stepped foot into the building, let alone made new friends. This problem is not exclusive to them. Current sophomores have only spent a little over one semester in the building. Even juniors and seniors feel their

friendships fraying, and without a full return, rising seniors may miss out on the traditions of the final year of high school.

We understand that the administration and the Student Union have been sincere in their efforts to mimic in-person socialization through community Flipgrids, speed-friending events, and movie nights. But the reality is that students are feeling lonelier than ever, speaking only to the same small group of friends at best, and at worst nobody. Relationships cannot be fostered over Zoom, which is why it is imperative to go back to school in September. In-person, a student can make a friend in a class or through a club and see that person multiple times a week, but now, making friends is a task that requires constant initiative.

The issue is not the plethora of connective opportunities but rather the lack of connection in them. While these opportunities are well-intentioned, they are facilitated and controlled. The spontaneity of human interaction used to be taken for granted, but we need it now more than ever.

Additionally, Stuyvesant students, contrary to their diligent and studious reputations, can find themselves distracted in class. While daydreaming and occasional boredom are part of the student experience, remote learning has magnified this problem to the utmost degree. A scratched desk or bent paperclip is not as distracting as the black hole of a computer or phone next to us. Though we may hide it, many students have often drifted away from class because it is easier than ever to do so. Students

do so not because of moral failing but for lack of accountability. This online school environment actively works against our studies, our attention, and our very dry eyes.

We have dreams for an in-person school year—one in the pre-pandemic era. We love and miss the idea of school with live instruction, sports, and extracurriculars, rather than another year of blended learning. To receive at least a decent high school experience, we need to be in school to socialize and express ourselves through in-person clubs. From the freshmen who do not know the perils of the Hudson stairwell to the rising seniors who know them all too well, we all need to be immersed in the Stuyvesant environment. The school needs to figure out a plan for fully in-person school to truly create bonds. As social creatures, we need to be in school five days a week.

By September, a return to school is possible and expert-recommended. The city will have had an entire summer to recover, and millions more New Yorkers will be fully vaccinated. As New Yorkers, we are used to taking risks and navigating perils. What is certain from in-person schooling are the gains—a chance to see our friends, to see our teachers, and to see our school. Come September, we need to be shuffling once again across the Tribeca Bridge, heading toward school. We will carry our megapounder backpacks. We will carry our iced coffees and Red Bulls. We will carry our violins and lacrosse sticks and bags of soggy swim clothes. We will—and we must—carry on.

Give Us The Old Normal

By AARON VISSER

I have the same experience after every Zoom call. I leave, the audio cuts out, and I am left staring at my computer screen and sitting in a room by myself. This past year has been one long sequence of these moments. We can imitate social interaction and a functional school day, sometimes convincingly, but deep down, we all feel the same fatigue. We feel it when another day passes without leaving the house. We feel it in the constant anxiety around strangers and the guilt for those who have had it worse in the pandemic. This trial has lasted for over a year, and I want to cancel my subscription.

The vaccine has arrived, and every American over 16 can receive it. The only group that stands between us and a return to normal is the vaccine deniers. No, I am not talking about those on Facebook who believe vaccines cause autism or the skeptics who question the side effects, though they are also dangerous. Instead, I want to focus on the vaccine deniers who control government policy. They take the vaccines themselves but doubt their efficacy. At a vaccinated gathering, they eat outside and wear masks “just to be extra safe.” They want a “new normal” where schools stay partially remote and masks are a part of social life. However, these deniers are nearly as harmful and anti-scientific as the skeptics they love to beclown.

The most complete information regarding vaccine efficacy comes from Israel, which has shared comprehensive vaccine data in exchange for early access. The results were unequivocally positive. The Pfizer vaccine was [97 percent effective](#) at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 and almost en-

tirely effective at preventing serious cases. However, a vaccine denier might retort, “That still leaves a chance for death or for them to pass it onto someone else. To avoid risk, we should still partake in some social distancing and masking.” However, the vaccine should not be considered on just an individual level. Once enough people receive the vaccine, transmission rates will decrease to a point where the chance of catching the virus plummets. Israel exemplifies this phenomenon. Back in January, it incurred around [50 thousand COVID-19 cases per week](#). Last week, with [61 percent](#) of the country vaccinated with at least one dose, [it only had 110 cases](#). That number is decreasing every day. America will quickly catch up to Israel on vaccination rates, with 40 percent of the country already having received one dose. Like Israel, we have already seen a sharp decline in deaths and will only see an acceleration as more people are vaccinated.

The data is clear, yet so many people deny the effectiveness of vaccines. They too hate the repetitiveness of our current lives, so why do they haggle to maintain the status quo? The answer lies in how humans calculate risk. We are terrible at it. No one can intuitively envision the chance of dying from the coronavirus in the same way we cannot evaluate the odds of winning the lottery or getting eaten by a shark. We instead rely on fear. The problem is that what started out as a healthy dose of fear for many rose into a state of panic and hardened into paranoia during the long days of lockdown. This paranoia can foster a negative response to data suggesting vaccines may allow us to return to normal life. It is similar to survivors of a sinking boat having worn life vests for so long that

they need them on dry land. Across our life, we accept some risk. My normal trip to Stuyvesant involves speeding cars, stabby strangers, and deadly scaffolding, yet that does not deter me from going to school. After widespread vaccination, the risk of catching COVID-19 falls enough below reasonable levels to support the return to normal.

My demands based on this evidence are simple: full reopening. I do not want the new normal but the old normal in all its glory: sports games, offices, movie theaters, and bars open at full capacity. Come September, schools should also reopen fully: no online learning, no social distancing, and no masks, with students packed in a class the way only NYC public schools know how. The logic of those who suggest indefinite social distancing or masking only applies in an unvaccinated world. With minute case rates, vaccinated adults will have nothing to fear from COVID-19. Children were not in danger in the first place—only [0.00047 percent](#) of US COVID-19 deaths are of those under 18—and experts expect vaccine approval for this entire group soon. I do not want mask mandates for public spaces once the pandemic abates for the same reason I do not want to wear them at home: they are uncomfortable, inhibit social interaction, and soon will be unnecessary.

Regardless of virus rates, this pandemic will not truly end until we return to normal. As Morgan Freeman once said in “The Shawshank Redemption” (1994), “These walls are funny. First, you hate ’em. Then you get used to ’em. Enough time passes, you get so you depend on them. That’s institutionalized.” We are institutionalized in a prison of our own making. I propose we simply walk out the front door.

The Spectator

The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper



“The Pulse of the Student Body”

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FOR THE RECORD

The News article in Issue 13, “Sandler Hosts Three American History Guest Speakers” was written by James Kang, Madison Kim, and Eugene Yoo.

Bitcoin: A Path to Fulfillment or Ruin?

By ALEX CHO

Bitcoin mania is built on a utopian premise—a dream of democratic finance that removes power from big banks, hedge funds, governments, and other potentially corrupt institutions. The blockchain ensures that the accounting of cryptocurrency and other assets happens through a decentralized network of computers that ensure the accuracy of the ledger. The fundamental belief in a better future, however, is contradicted by the reality of bitcoin itself, which contributes to the future climate crisis.

Cryptocurrency is extremely energy-intensive due to the amount of power needed to run the computers as they solve challenging math problems required to verify transactions, known as “mining.” These “proof-of-work” problems were intentionally made difficult by the inventor of blockchain to prevent the addition of fraudulent entries. The problem solvers are rewarded for their work in bitcoin much as gold prospectors used to be rewarded for their efforts in valuable nuggets. This time and energy-consuming process of bitcoin “mining” might seem like wasteful “busywork,” but it is structurally essential to make the digital currency work.

Recent estimates place the total energy consumed by bitcoin alone as more than that used by Argentina. The market heat for other crypto-assets, like non-fungible tokens (NFTs), has brought more scrutiny to the energy costs. NFTs run on blockchain,

and similarly use a network of distributed computers to verify the uniqueness of assets (with the requirement that they solve hard math problems which burn energy). NFTs allow artists and other cultural figures to sell proof-of-ownership tokens to otherwise publicly accessible digital assets. For instance, Twitter co-founder and CEO Jack Dorsey auctioned off the first-ever Tweet as an NFT for \$2.9 million. With notable contemporary artists and inventors of conceptual art like Damien Hirst selling NFTs for digital artwork, some eco-conscious collectors have noted that these projects come with massive energy bills. Hirst’s recent NFT project was estimated to require the energy that would be consumed over 412 years by the average household in the U.S. Others have noted the irony that Tesla Motors heavily invests in bitcoin despite marketing an eco-friendly lifestyle.

Defenders of blockchain’s carbon footprint claim that mining will lean toward renewable energy and that miners have the incentive to find the cheapest and most sustainable way to access tokens. However, cheap and sustainable are far from the same thing. A large percentage of mining takes place in China, which uses coal as the predominant form of energy.

Unfortunately, crypto-boosters are simply naive about this problem or in denial. An even more pessimistic view is that many are willing to easily jump from one bandwagon to another in our

continued on page 7

Fighting Fatphobia

By MAYA DUNAYER

Almost every girl in 2014 knew about the “Eating Disorder Tumblr” that glamorized anorexia and encouraged girls to continually shrink themselves down. This type of content has reemerged widely again on TikTok. Posts frequently remind girls that food is “a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips.” Any comment section of a larger person is plagued with this toxic fatphobia. Unlike in 2014, however, the “body positivity movement” combats these harmful posts and attempts to foster a more healthy culture. Larger-sized creators are showing off their natural and non-societally ideal bodies without shame.

However, a strange counter-movement has emerged that focuses on “skinny shaming” instead of fat shaming. Claims that “fat shaming and skinny shaming are the same thing” float around the Internet, with jokes like “You’re so fat. Eat a salad” being used as a response to comments such as “You’re so skinny. Eat a burger.” However, these two types of “shaming” are simply incomparable. Though both can be bad, fat shaming is far more harm-

ful than skinny shaming. The focus on skinny shaming tends to drown out the voices of larger people and is actually counterproductive to the body positivity movement. Therefore, combating fat shaming should be prioritized to truly achieve body positivity for all.

Larger people face all sorts of discrimination that skinny people do not. No advertisement has read, “Get fat quick! Gain an extra 30 pounds fast!” No one has sold weight gain shakes, supplements, or suppressants, and no multi-billion dollar industries are based around weight gain. In contrast, open any infomercial channel or walk into any drugstore and you will likely encounter a product aimed at helping larger people lose weight. Larger people tend to have a harder time finding jobs, as many companies rely on the stereotype that larger people are lazy and incapable. Larger people are even paid less. In 2016, researchers at the University of Exeter found that a woman who is 14 pounds heavier earns on average about £1,500 less a year than a comparable woman of the same height. Most skinny people cannot fathom the daily experience of a larger person.

Some claim that “skinny is no longer the standard” and that the “ideal” figure nowadays is a curvier, hourglass body type. Though this assertion may be true, the “hourglass” that is considered the ideal today includes a flat stomach, which many larger people do not have. Larger people have never been the standard, and the toxic culture that society has enforced can be seen in the smallest of interactions. Many girls consider it a privilege and accomplishment to shop at Brandy Melville, whose “one size fits all” sizing system only caters to very skinny girls. Many fashion retailers that sell clothes considered to be “on trend” do not offer sizes that cater to larger women. Shopping at plus-size stores is looked down upon, and many who do so feel ashamed. High fashion models are almost all size zero or two, with very little plus and medium-size representation on the runway. The idea that skinnier is better is even ingrained in our language. “You look so skinny” is considered to be a compliment, whereas “You look fat” or “You’ve gained some weight” is negative. The issue is not that we should not encourage overweight people to lose weight, but rather that these com-

pliments can sometimes encourage people to continue losing weight in an unhealthy way. It is important to remove such connotations from these terms as they are incredibly harmful to women who are struggling with their weight and body image issues.

The comments are different in kind of themselves. When people are told to “go eat a burger” or that they “look anorexic,” these comments can be damaging, but they are telling these people to eat more. However, when larger people are told to starve themselves or to lose weight, they are being told to eat less. In the majority of cases in which a person is a healthy weight, eating less will be more harmful than eating more. Encouraging people to eat less through fat shaming is highly correlated with the development of eating disorders, with 80 percent of girls having gone on a diet by the age of 10. Additionally, breaking the standard that skinny is better will also help those struggling with anorexia and other eating disorders. In many cases, these disorders are rooted in the feeling that a person is not thin enough, a direct result of fatphobia in society.

The body positivity movement

does not mean that obesity should be celebrated. Health-threatening problems are dangerous and should be addressed. However, they should only be identified by licensed medical professionals. Others have no right to comment and tell people that they need to lose weight. Though some members of the movement may interpret it in this manner, this movement should celebrate healthy bodies, no matter what size. Bodies come in all shapes and sizes, and people carry their weight differently. Everyone’s struggles are valid, and it is important to remember that conversation around weight should not be an “Oppression Olympics.” However, skinny shaming being used as a retort to larger people discussing their oppression is akin to, and maybe even more ludicrous, than the “All Lives Matter” retort to the Black Lives Matter movement. Yes, all lives do matter, but the issue in today’s world is that all lives don’t matter equally. In the same way, body positivity is for all body shapes and sizes, but some body types and sizes are less accepted. We must prioritize fighting against fatphobia first to truly achieve body positivity for all.

Nationalism Can’t Defeat a Pandemic

By SHIVANI SHAH

Governments talk about equality and human rights until their vaccines are on the line. [Three-quarters of the distributed vaccines](#) went to 10 wealthy countries, which only encompass about one-fifth of the world population. This shocking disparity in distribution is the outcome of vaccine nationalism, and it highlights the stark gaps in global healthcare.

Unfortunately, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) international agreement mandates a 20-year monopoly patent on vaccines, blocking developing countries and vaccine-producing companies from producing and distributing generic vaccines. A petition led by India and South Africa attempted to [waive the implementation](#) of TRIPS but was blocked by Western countries, including the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States. They disingenuously ar-

gued that waiving this intellectual property would lead to less vaccine distribution and [disincentivize the creation of new vaccines, diagnoses, and treatments](#). They instead advocated for voluntary licensing and the importation of technologies from Western countries.

Any efforts to end this pandemic should take precedence over theoretical future vaccinations. The cost of this intellectual property is already being felt as SK Bioscience, a South Korean company, was sued over alternative versions of the vaccine and forced to close Pfizer vaccine production due to Pfizer’s patents over alternative versions of the vaccine. This situation will continue to occur unless intellectual property rights are waived. We

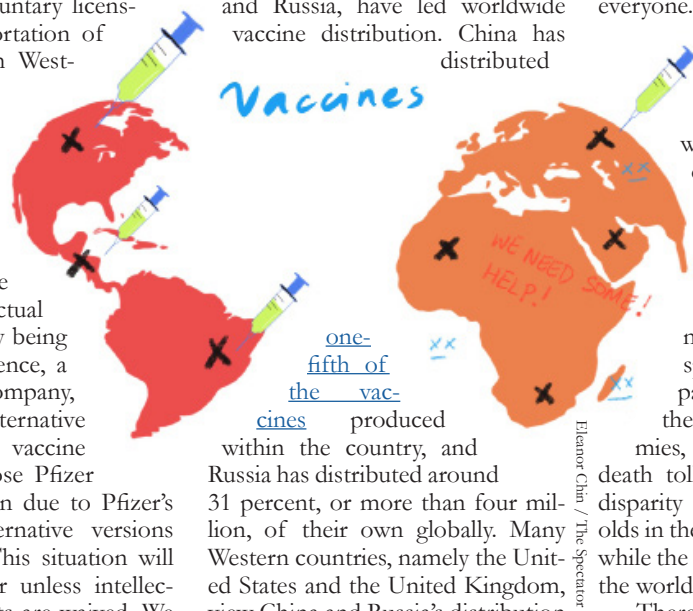
should view the vaccines as public goods, not as items on the global market.

While America blocks certain vaccinations, our adversaries, China and Russia, have led worldwide vaccine distribution. China has distributed [one-fifth of the vaccines](#) produced within the country, and Russia has distributed around 31 percent, or more than four million, of their own globally. Many Western countries, namely the United States and the United Kingdom, view China and Russia’s distribution

as attempts to bolster their respective images and are warning developing countries not to trust these vaccines.

Vaccine nationalism impacts everyone. If the populations of wealthier nations are vaccinated while those of developing nations are not, the pandemic will not end, as 80 percent of the world’s population resides in developing countries. When herd immunity is prolonged, there is a greater chance of new variants mutating and spreading. The longer the pandemic lasts, the greater the impact will be on economies, social hierarchies, and the death toll around the world. The disparity is furthered as 16-year-olds in the U.S. are being vaccinated, while the oldest and weakest around the world cannot secure a shot. There may be hope. COVID-19

Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) hopes to distribute six billion COVID vaccines to developing nations. This rollout will be quite slow due to the shortage of vaccines and resources, with experts expecting widespread vaccination in these countries to [occur by 2023](#). Other countries are also aiding worldwide. After a request from the United Nations, Mexico suspended many of its Pfizer vaccine purchases to help distribute to developing countries instead. India has donated more than three million vaccines to its neighboring nations, including Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, and created a plan to expand donations to Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. Though the United States has not donated to its full ability, it transferred \$4 billion to COVAX. While the pandemic has highlighted major disparities in global healthcare, it will hopefully act as a lesson and aid in reducing those disparities.



Bitcoin: A Path to Fulfillment or Ruin?

continued from page 6

hashtag-driven culture while forgetting what they were excited about. #Save-the-planet was switched out this season for #buycrypto without so much as glancing back, with Elon Musk at the head of this merry band of trendsetters.

Some recognize the need for a different cryptocurrency solution, one that admits the reality of climate change and helps lower carbon emissions in addition to democratizing finance. SolarCoin, for instance, rewards users with crypto tokens for generating solar energy. While a noble idea, it has yet to gain significant traction, in part perhaps because claiming SolarCoins requires filing verification paperwork with a central entity that distributes them. This administration is cumbersome but more importantly seems against the decentralized spirit of crypto. The next generation of innovative engineers, many of whom are likely at this school, have a responsibility to develop a truly effective eco-crypto solution. In the meantime, eco-conscious investors looking for the next big score may want to look elsewhere.

Playing Dangerous Games With Child Audiences

By AYA ALRYYES

Complaints on how new technologies and forms of entertainment are “corrupting the youth” are not exactly new. Television, cell phones, and video games have always been objects of worry. Now, YouTube is showing itself to be one of the most concerning new technologies for children due to the rise of inappropriate content directed toward children.

Because all of YouTube’s videos are user-uploaded, they are not screened to any real degree for content that may be damaging for children, which has led to the growth of channels that purposefully appeal to children yet promote themes that are inappropriate for their young fanbases.

For example, YouTuber Sebastian Bails, who has nearly a million subscribers, has amassed a total of over 76 million views and uses thumbnails with bright colors, exaggerated facial expressions, and emojis which are clearly meant to attract children. In the videos themselves, Bails and his girlfriend, Lauren Godwin, who is frequently featured, speak loudly in tones and

language that are again targeted toward children. However, the actual content cannot be further from what is appropriate for young viewers. While much of Bails’s content blends together into meaningless neon—which is not inherently problematic—looking below (and even right above) the surface reveals disturbing undertones. His content with his girlfriend involves borderline and even outright abuse, including one video titled “Telling My Girlfriend I Don’t Want to Wait Until Marriage Anymore...” in which he repeatedly pressures his girlfriend to have sex with him, and another “HOME INVASION PRANK ON GIRLFRIEND! **GONE TOO FAR**” in which he does what the title suggests. His channel shows kids that gaslighting, sexual harassment, and manipulation are alright.

Bails’s channel is only one example. A relatively tame one, ImJayStation, also directly appeals to children by speaking in exaggerated tones, putting his video titles in all caps, and featuring cartoon characters and puppets. However, these videos involve disturbing themes, including one in which he claims to

have bought a slave on the “dark web” and others that involve cruel and psychologically abusive pranks on his girlfriend. His account was finally removed a few weeks ago after he faked her death and made videos about it. While this action was a positive move on YouTube’s

Those creating disturbing or inappropriate content intentionally geared toward children bear a larger part of the responsibility.

part, it took far too long. Jason Ethier, the man behind the account, had already reached millions of children; exposed his fans, like Bails did, to disturbing content; and taught them to be abuse apologists.

This is not to say people are not allowed to post content involv-

ing mature themes on YouTube. The problem begins when creators make channels designed to attract children in an effort to profit from that large viewer base while portraying sexual and violent themes at the same time. YouTube has a responsibility to improve self-regulation and demonetize and/or ban nefarious content aimed at children. It should apply age restriction labels much more liberally and make sure its algorithm does not recommend such content to children.

Parents share the blame. It is undeniably irresponsible to stick tablets with YouTube in front of children’s faces and leave them to their own devices for hours on end. To ensure children are not being exposed to age-inappropriate content, parents should pre-screen videos and channels and limit the amount of time their children spend on the platform.

Those creating disturbing or inappropriate content intentionally geared toward children bear a larger part of the responsibility. To these creators, profit is the name of the game and they have no trouble exploiting their child audiences as a means to that end.

Opinions

Stuyvesant's Blended Learning Problem

By ELIZABETH BLACK

New York City's public high schools reopened on March 22 for all blended learning students. It is clear that Stuyvesant's "blended" learning system is more remote than it is in-person: students bring their computers or devices to school and participate in the same online classes, except they are in the Stuyvesant building. I knew I was not returning to "regular" in-person school just yet, but I was still excited to go back. After spending my first semester in Florida, I finally had the chance to set foot in Stuyvesant for the first time in over a year.

Upon arriving at my assigned seat in the cafeteria, I discovered that someone else was already sitting there because we had been given the same seat assignment. First period had not even begun, and there were already organizational problems, but that was the least of my concerns. The cafeteria was freezing and 10 times colder than the air outside, and almost every other student was visibly uncomfortable.

In fact, everyone was visibly uncomfortable in general. We could only hear the whirring of the air conditioners. No one dared to make a sound or stand up from their so-

cially distanced seats, even in between classes or during free and lunch periods. Everyone, myself included, spent their free periods staring at their phone or computer. An e-mail sent to blended students and their parents by Ms. Dina Ingram several days prior had stated that lunch would be delivered to students be-

with a student. As they passed me, I overheard, "These kids look like they're freezing. And they all look so scared," followed by laughter. I do not understand how a staff member, someone responsible for keeping students comfortable and safe, could find our discomfort amusing rather than concerning.

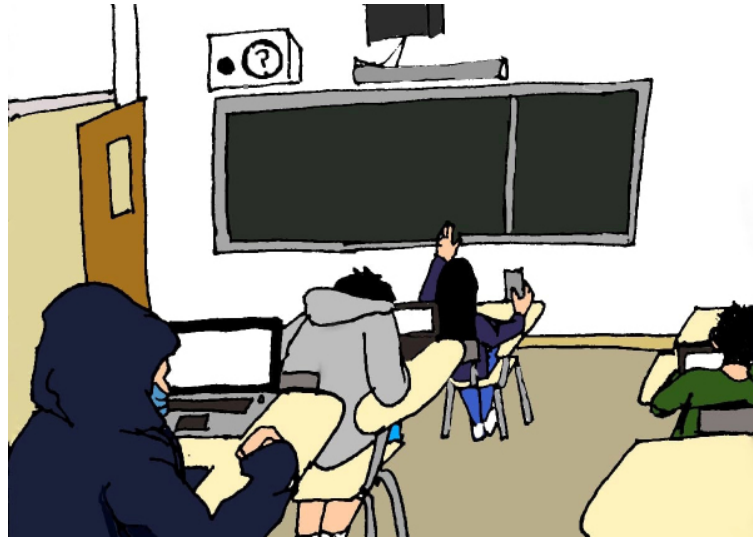
Ingram, asking that I be transferred out of the cafeteria in hopes that the conditions and atmosphere would be better. We then spoke directly to Principal Seung Yu. Both Ingram and Yu were extremely understanding, and despite the school's problems, I found that the administration was attentive to these issues rather than dismissive. For the next few days, I was in the gym. There were no blaring air conditioners, and lunch was distributed as promised, but the environment was barely better; it remained unpleasant and silent. Everyone still looked like they wanted to go home.

Overall, the atmosphere, especially in the cafeteria, was awkward and inhospitable. Students did not move around or speak to each other. Some were even hesitant to participate in class for fear of speaking out loud. While the school claims to attempt to have advanced socialization, they are not doing enough. Unsurprisingly, most students are not exactly social butterflies, especially since they have not attended in-person classes for months. This lack of social interaction is even more true for the freshmen who have not had a real chance to make friends. If the administration truly wants to help us socialize and enjoy school, they need to understand that we need a

bit more guidance than what they are providing. The school must arrange actual activities and opportunities for us to socialize instead of putting us in a room together and expecting us to do it ourselves.

Additionally, Stuyvesant seems to have trouble communicating with students about blended learning. Aside from providing MetroCards, the staff did not interact with us at all, leaving us in the dark about how blended learning was supposed to work. Many seemed uncertain as to whether they could stand up and move around or leave the room at any point. Hardly anyone used the bathroom as many of us were not sure how to ask to go. E-mails and weekly updates can easily be overlooked or get lost in the shuffle of the inbox, so it is crucial that staff members present keep blended students informed. If staff members were more communicative, not only would many more students participate in offered socialization activities, but they would also feel more comfortable and confident.

Transparency and communication between staff and students is the first step to making students feel less terrified to come to school and help the environment feel more welcoming than its present state of cold silence.



Lamina Xie / The Spectator

tween 11 a.m. and 12 p.m., but there was no announcement made about food during the day. I did not see a single student receive or eat school lunch. At one point, a staff member walked around the cafeteria chatting

I left school early that day for a medical appointment. When I saw my mother, she immediately noticed how cold, exhausted, and borderline unwell I looked. She did not laugh it off and instead wrote an e-mail to

Hand Out the Role Model

By GULAM MONAWARAH

American rapper, singer, and songwriter Lil Nas X has been trending on social media again after he dropped his latest single "MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)" on March 26. While the outfits in the music video are stunning and the beat is catchy, many are criticizing him for the demonic, sexual imagery in the video.

Many parents assume that Lil Nas X should assume a "role model" title regardless of his target audience. And it is not just him. Many other artists are told to change their public image simply to suit the personal needs of parents. While parents are understandably cautious in what their children are exposed to in the music industry, online shaming from adults can damage an artist's reputation. The main issue many conservative listeners have with Lil Nas

X's music videos is that he is "corrupting the youth." On social media platforms, they express their belief that he is connected to the devil and encouraging the youth to embrace Satanism; the relentless backlash strengthened when he released his Satan shoes with Nike. These same accusations have appeared countless times before: he is a role model for children, so he should act better and sing and dance differently.

Similarly, Cardi B's "WAP" received extreme scrutiny from parents who were critical of the explicit sexual references. The same cries erupted: Cardi B is corrupting the female youth and turning them against their parents. However, Cardi B could not have made it any more transparent about her target audience since the beginning of her career. Therefore, there is no reason to spit on her career choices.

The idea of forcing the role

model card onto every celebrity is unfair. As long as celebrities make it clear that their intended audiences are not children, celebrities have the right to explore mature themes, feelings, and experiences. Many traditional-leaning critics argue that there must be standards for the people children look up to, insisting that artists avoid mentioning sexual innuendos regardless of targeted age. They expect artists, especially female ones, to dress modestly, talk appropriately, and act obediently on stage and on social media. However, the majority of performing artists do not cater to children, and many have made that clear.

The same shaming from parents, conservative groups, and older listeners is seen with other artists as well. When Taylor Swift dared to take a more mature approach with songs like "The Man" or "Look What You Made Me Do," she was

shamed for it. All over YouTube, middle-aged men insulted Taylor Swift for her songs and the messages of sexism in the music industry she tries to portray. YouTubers such as StevenCrowder said that she was hurting the feelings of young boys who could watch this video. Ben Shapiro claimed that she was playing the victim of society. The large problem with these criticisms is that they claim that a woman in her position of fame should not spread messages like these. However, she is not trying to teach young men and women a "lesson" about how evil men are. Rather, she is recounting only her own experiences and feelings.

There are other ways for parents to control what their children are exposed to in the music industry. If a certain celebrity is considered a positive role model for children, then parents should try to be that role model. While parents have the

right to be cautious, there are possible consequences if they cross the line by shaming celebrities. The child may lose trust and respect for their parents or idolize the celebrity. An alternative for parents is to specifically show children content geared toward their age group. If the children are adolescents, parents should open up conversation with them. Shaming celebrities is only an over-protective and toxic behavior.

Parents must understand that handling their kids is not, and never will be, a celebrity's responsibility. Performers are not obliged to hide away their creative ideas for children they do not know. If artists want to make raunchy music that reflects who they are, as long as they make it clear who their target audiences are, let them do so. The vicious attacks on social media are not warranted, nor are they acceptable.

The Danger of Parasocial Relationships

By LAUREN CHIN

From musicians and actors to content creators, there are many different cultural icons who play a role in people's daily lives. It is normal to look up to and be inspired by entertainers and influencers, but when you begin to view a celebrity as your friend, conflict arises and leads to the development of a parasocial relationship.

Parasocial relationships are not a new phenomenon. The concept was first established in 1956 when scientists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl officially coined the term. They explained that these relationships develop because performers often simulate a real-life relationship with their audience members. For instance, if a person listens to many interviews with their favorite performer and tries to watch as much content about them as possible, it causes them to treat the performer as a replacement for other social interactions, which often results in obsessive dependence. Meanwhile, the performer has no connection with their individual audience members and thus cannot return such affection.

The digital age has made it easier for parasocial relationships to form.

For example, content creators can interact with fans around the world through social media. They can respond to comments on Instagram and Twitter and post photographs and glimpses into their daily lives. Streamers can broadcast live content directly to their audience members through Twitch and YouTube. In other words, viewers can directly communicate with their favorite streamers in real time, creating a new form of more realistic interactions. Often, streamers seem more genuine than other content creators, as their true personalities are on display through livestreams as opposed to celebrities who brand themselves. Livestreamers are also more likely to talk about their personal lives by sharing stories and information in an effort to connect with and entertain their audience. Of course, doing so also simulates the conversations that people have in real life, encouraging the development of a parasocial relationship.

The past year of quarantine has further developed the prevalence of parasocial relationships. In this period of isolation, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain relationships with real-life friends, especially since people can no longer see their school or work friends as frequently.

These old friends can quickly be replaced by celebrities since the content they create is produced regularly and repeatedly.

On one hand, parasocial relationships are not inherently bad. Even if a creator is not the actual friend of a viewer, he or she can still offer advice, inspiration, and comfort in difficult times. Creators can help young viewers develop a better sense of identity by learning positive behaviors that their favorite content creator exhibits. These relationships can also be beneficial to the creators since better audience retention and a more loyal fanbase are financially lucrative.

On the other hand, parasocial relationships can become dangerous for both the celebrity and fan involved. While there is nothing wrong with enjoying the content of a creator, the issue arises when fans become obsessive, which threatens the personal safety of a celebrity. For instance, Taylor Swift faced quite a few stalkers throughout her time in the spotlight. One stalker, a man named Eric Swarbrick, repeatedly sent letters to her former record label in an effort to contact the pop star. He threatened to physically harm both himself and Swift if his letters continued to go unnoticed. Though the man was

imprisoned in late 2020, Swift has also revealed in interviews that he and other stalkers have negatively impacted her. She now carries around heavy-duty bandages and gauze, fearing that she or a loved one may be injured with a knife or a gun.

Of course, most people involved in a parasocial relationship will not reach this level of illegal and disturbing behavior. However, many fan bases of real-life people have developed subsections known as "stans." Though the current definition means being a "superfan" of a certain entertainer, this word originally had a darker denotation. It originated from a song called "Stan" by Eminem as a portmanteau of "stalker" and "fan," and its lyrics describe a creepy stalker of Eminem who sends threatening, obsessive messages to him.

While most modern-day stans do not fit this old description, their behavior may often cause them to be stigmatized as such. Fans of K-pop are some of the most prolific and recognizable stans on the internet. Throughout the past few years, K-pop stans have become known throughout Twitter as an irritating and often dangerous community. They frequently attack those they deem "antis" or people who dis-

like their favorite singer or band and sometimes flood them with death threats or dox them, during which the personal information of those being attacked is released to the internet. This behavior is clearly dangerous for many reasons, especially if a person's life is being threatened over the opinions they express online.

Recently, many content creators have felt the need to make a distinction between parasocial relationships and real friendships. For instance, a Twitch streamer known as Ludwig posted a YouTube video titled "I Am Not Your Friend" in December 2020. In the video, he requests that his viewers see him only as entertainment and not as an actual replacement for a friend. He explains that he will never know a majority of his fanbase and as such cannot form a relationship with them. Ludwig also mentioned that his online personality is just a persona and may not always be his true self.

Despite the connotation, parasocial relationships are not necessarily a bad thing. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the people one watches online cannot replace the people one meets in real life. Audience members must remember to respect the boundaries of their favorite celebrities and content creators.



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Science

Science and Social Media

By JENNA
MACKENROTH

Science is often regarded as an inaccessible topic with its lofty jargon and esoteric unsolved problems. Dare to whisper the words “organic chemistry” and students will scurry away from you in fear. Thanks to social media, however, the perception of science as a hard-to-understand subject is dissipating, as hobbyists and educators alike are taking to the small screen. From posting basic infographics about the COVID-19 pandemic to making videos with in-depth explanations on complex quantum computing, scientific presence on social media is both evolutionary and revolutionary.

Science initially became more accessible after educators posted course materials and fun facts on platforms such as YouTube. They then used sites such as Facebook and Instagram and began to gain traction and reach a wider audience through the liking, commenting, and messaging features. Photo-based platforms, such as Instagram, were unique in making science accessible. An article published by the Pew Research Center in 2018 indicates that rather than including walls of text and lofty amounts of information, the use of simplified vocabulary and a focus on [visual aspects](#), such as graphs, cartoons, and drawings, have made science easier for the average viewer to internalize.

This trend continues onto the latest social media platform: TikTok. TikTok’s user interactions are unique from other kinds of social media. The “For You” Page, or the

FYP, has videos tailored to a user’s unique interests, ensuring that they see the content they want. Users can scroll through the FYP endlessly, with new posts popping up one after the other. Features, such as filters, challenges, and commonly used backing sounds for videos, make video patterns and memes catchy and easily recognizable to viewers. The short length of TikTok’s videos is also highly conducive to a fast-paced spread of information. Limited to a maximum of one minute, content creators condense nuanced topics through visuals and dialogue without using up too much time.

TikTok is also responsible for spreading science on social media—for better or worse. The high-speed spread of information means that more users are likely to hear about topics they would otherwise never cross paths with. Sometimes, the sources of information are from museums, such as the Carnegie Museum of Natural History’s TikTok page. The most popular aspect of this page is a man named Tim Pearce, the Assistant Curator of Mollusks. His videos often charmingly pair scientific information about snails with corny but lovable puns. The reaction has been positive, with users commenting, “Every snail joke that shows up on my feed immediately brightens my day,” and “Tim is the only thing holding my sanity together.”

Educators known throughout classrooms have also taken to TikTok, with the most popular examples being [Sal Khan](#) and [Hank Green](#), who are already well-known through their signature profiles Khan Academy and Crash Course,

respectively. Hank Green is especially known for responding to seemingly ridiculous video prompts and comments, such as, “If there’s so much of it around, why can’t we just eat grass?” and uses it as a humorous and educational opportunity for all. Sal Khan explains the process behind his videos and his inspiration behind starting an educational platform and emphasizes making education accessible for all, a sentiment he spreads to his followers.

Though the spread of information on social media platforms can appear casual and fun, as with Tim Pearce, Hank Green, and Sal Khan, it can also appear in more technical and formal forms. TikTok user and professor of Psychology at San Diego Mesa College Dr. Inna Kanevsky, affectionately known as Dr. Inna by her approximately 860,900 followers, is known for her technical take on science and dedication to scientific integrity. Her followers tag her in psychology videos, which she proceeds to verify or debunk information depending on their veracity. Dr. Inna divides her videos between explaining psychological concepts, such as conditioning and development, and pointing out misinformation, such as eye-catching but false “psychology facts.” Through both kinds of content, Dr. Inna consistently mentions the scientific method as she arrives at a more accurate answer.

While there are users dedicated to correcting misinformation, it unfortunately runs rampant and is responsible for fooling thousands of gullible users. It is easy for users to misinterpret journal articles and

spread their false interpretations to an otherwise ignorant audience. The spread of scientific misinformation is most evident regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. While some information seems trivial, with overbearing family members frantically sending cures involving garlic, ginger, and dubiously sourced vitamin supplements on WhatsApp, they may also contribute to larger social issues, such as the public’s unwillingness to wear masks. Many anti-mask users on TikTok have used the platform to post themselves spraying water through their masks, apparently displaying their “failure” and “uselessness.” Despite the several flaws with such reasoning, the sentiment spread like wildfire.

The fast-paced nature of social media makes misinformation frighteningly popular. Users quickly absorbing information will believe it as soon as they see it, without verifying it through more reputable sources. Scientific misinformation has also been used to justify racial bias and hatred, with more bigoted users manipulating and converting inconclusive and difficult-to-interpret data into content that is easy for otherwise ignorant users to view. The easiest way to forego the risk of misinformation is for users to perform their own research using a number of trusted sources. We cannot count on a personalized Dr. Inna for every post, comment, and video, but we can learn from her methods of checking research and arriving at our own conclusions from source material.

From light-hearted videos to more technical content, science is having a social media footprint.

SCIENCEBEAT

The **B.1.1.7 strain** of COVID-19, more commonly known as the United Kingdom strain, has become the **most common form** of coronavirus identified in the US.

NASA’s helicopter **Ingenuity** successfully landed and **flew on Mars**, marking the **first flight of a spacecraft on another planet**.

Scientists have discovered a **strong correlation** between patients with **antibodies against platelet factor 4** (a clot-forming protein) and **rare blood clots resulting from COVID-19 vaccines**, giving doctors insight in **preventing** further cases.

The rise in accessibility puts users in a unique place, reducing the difficulty of learning about science and heightening the responsibility of having good judgment. The presence of science on social media is sure to change scientific interpretation and participation across the world for everyday users, students, and educators alike. However, it is ultimately our job to make sure we consume such media responsibly.

Does COVID-19 Trigger Diabetes?

By SHRIYA ANAND

We have heard stories about people losing their sense of smell or taste after contracting COVID-19, but have you heard of the virus triggering diabetes? Recent data reveals that this may actually be true. Scientists saw a drastic increase in the number of cases of diabetes in the past year, particularly in patients with COVID-19 who had no previous history of diabetes. In fact, a study from the United Kingdom revealed that in a sample of hospitalized patients with COVID-19, approximately [14 percent developed diabetes](#) while only 4.9 percent of the regular population did so.

Certain enteroviruses, which are serious viral diseases that occur mostly in children, have been previously linked to diabetes. The viruses themselves cause symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches, and sneezing, all of which are unrelated to the development of diabetes. Yet, there were more frequent tendencies for patients diagnosed with the enterovirus to develop diabetes. Even in the

early 2000s, during the SARS-CoV outbreak, many patients with SARS-CoV developed diabetes. The respiratory illness did not have symptoms that correlated with diabetes, so the correlation went largely unexplained.

Now, however, scientists have paid closer attention and proposed multiple explanations for the connection between the virus and disease.

One of the many theories of viruses triggering diabetes is that the SARS-CoV-2 virus could be directly attacking insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. As a result, the body would be unable to create the amount of insulin required to regulate blood sugar levels and trigger the cell’s consumption of glucose. Another theory suggests that the virus may be con-

trolling the insulin-producing cells indirectly. In this theory, the virus would be infecting the bloodstream or cells in the pancreas that supply the insulin-producing cells with oxygen and nutrients. Infected cells would be unable to carry out their

tasks efficiently; cutting off this supply would then limit the efficiency of the insulin-producing cells and create the same effect mentioned in the previous theory.

An additional theory is that the virus is infecting organs such as the intestines, causing the body to be less efficient in breaking down glucose. In this case, the virus is not attacking the insulin-producing cells but rather those that use the insulin to break down the sugar.

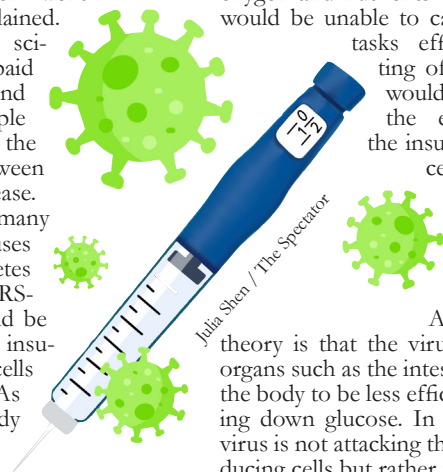
Another proposal that may coexist with the previously stated theories is that the patient may be at a “tipping stage,” taking only a “small push,”

such as quarantine inactivity or COVID-19 medication, to develop diabetes. This “tipping stage” is prediabetes, a condition where patients have higher-than-average blood sugar levels, but not extreme enough to be labeled as diabetes. It is possible for patients to have prediabetes for years without diagnosing or even recognizing it. The “small push” can therefore be inactivity, as the human body breaks down considerably less glucose when stationary than when active, causing a higher concentration of sugar in the bloodstream. A more probable explanation, however, is the COVID-19 medication itself, as patients are often treated with steroids, which raise blood sugar.

At first glance, forming a correlation between the virus itself and diabetes seemed like a far reach. Yet, I bring another proposal to the table. Alternative factors, such as quarantine inactivity, may have led to the disease spike. Overweightness and obesity account for [65 to 80 percent of diabetes](#). Considering the “[quarantine 15](#),” an observational study that suggests that the average

American has gained more than half a pound every 10 days in quarantine, diabetes development is not surprising. Since scientists focus more on patients with COVID-19 that were hospitalized, it is important to recognize that hospitalized COVID-19 patients tend to have weaker immune systems or underlying health conditions, which could have made their bodies more susceptible to disorder when inactive.

Still, statistics have proven an uptick in diabetes cases over the years. Therefore, it is important to take preventative measures. For example, practicing proper hygiene and social distancing will help limit the spread of the virus. To prevent the possibility of developing diabetes, maintain a healthy, balanced diet and stay active. Especially when many of us are stuck at home with little to no exercise in our daily routines, it is crucial that we take time every day to work out. While quarantine has made it more difficult to keep up with healthy habits, perhaps the desire to not develop diabetes will act as a motivation.



Edward Jenner: The Father of Modern Vaccination

By DAISY LIN and LOY
HASHIMOTO

Pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Moderna are working to distribute their COVID-19 vaccines as the pandemic plagues hundreds of thousands of people globally. Their vaccines work by introducing weakened or inactive parts of a particular infectious organism to a human body. In more recent vaccines, it is the antigen, a substance that can induce an immune response, that is introduced, rather than the organism. The immune system will react and produce the antibodies necessary to fight off the real pathogen when it infects the body. As millions are already vaccinated against COVID-19 and many more will be in the coming months, it is important to recognize the scientist who made vaccinations so widespread: Edward

Jenner.

It all started with smallpox, a lethal illness that affected humans since the first agricultural settlements 12,000 years ago. There is even evidence of scarring caused by the disease on mummified remains of [ancient Egyptians](#). Those who contracted smallpox were very likely to die from it, and those who survived were likely left disfigured due to extreme scarring and blindness. During the 18th century, many practiced crude treatments in a desperate attempt to find a cure: sleeping with the windows open, keeping bed sheets

at half-mast, and drinking 12 small beers a day. No one had an answer to the mysterious plague because the germ theory had not yet been proposed.

[Edward Jenner](#), the father of vaccination, could have been one of the many who perished after encountering smallpox as a child. When Jenner was eight years old, he was treated for smallpox through inoculation, a first-rate medical treatment at the time. It involved fasting, purging, and bleeding to prepare the patient before introducing dried pustules, pimple-like overgrowths of bacteria from a recent smallpox victim, into a wound on the patient’s

hand. If the young patient then developed smallpox and survived, they would be immune to the disease. Unfortunately, not many people survived the variolation process, but fortunately, Jenner did. When he grew up, he trained in London to become a surgeon but later returned home to Berkeley to open a private practice.

During this transition, Jenner came into close contact with cows and milkmaids from the surrounding farms. There, he noticed that milkmaids enjoyed immunity from smallpox despite never going through the difficult variolation process that he had endured. Jenner suspected that there was a correlation between cowpox immunity and smallpox immunity. On a superficial level, cowpox was a disease that looked a lot like smallpox, with patients having crusty overgrowths on

their skin. However, cowpox was a relatively harmless disease compared to smallpox. To test his hypothesis, Jenner decided to purposefully introduce cowpox to a young patient to determine whether they would also gain immunity to smallpox.

On May 14, 1796, Jenner carried out his [risky plan](#) on his gardener’s eight-year-old son, James Phipps. He took a sample of pus from a local milkmaid and introduced it to scratches he made on Phipps’s arm. Phipps contracted cowpox but recovered quickly in a week. Jenner then introduced variola smallpox material into Phipps. Astonishingly, Phipps did not develop any signs of smallpox and was consequently considered immune. Jenner wrote of

continued on page 11



Emily Young-Squire / The Spectator

Facing a New Reality

By OSCAR WANG

Seeing faces on a screen has become a normal, even trivial part of our lives. Through online classes, social media, and video calls with friends, we reinforce a close association between the pixels on our screens and the people on the other end. Therefore, it may be surprising to hear that these images are not always the product of a person in front of a camera, but rather one of a computer and its algorithms: a deepfake.

A portmanteau of “deep learning” and “fake,” deepfakes can alter a person’s identity in a matter of seconds using artificial intelligence. With deep learning, computer programs can analyze vast sets of data to create a perfect render or animation of a person’s face onto a different body. Social media apps like Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram use this technology on a face to create entertaining results. A recently released app called WOMBO makes it easier than ever before for users to create deepfake videos. Consequently, there have been videos of Elon Musk and other celebrities lip-syncing to popular songs on social media. Though these videos are evidently parodies and for humor, they reveal the ever-growing power and sophistication of deepfake technology.

WOMBO videos are easy to identify as deepfakes because of their colorful logos, background distortions, and unnatural face movements. On the contrary, more convincing deepfakes remove these small details and fine-tune the facial movements until they appear natural. As a result, the use of deepfake

technology demands great responsibility because fake news and misinformation can spread easily through the Internet. Currently, deepfakes aimed at defaming celebrities and spreading misinformation are arousing government attention and public concern. While there are steps to create legislation to ban deepfakes altogether, much of the effort has been focused on creating detection software. Sophisticated deepfake detection is not easy: computers must analyze on the scale of individual pixels to find evidence of tampering. What makes this especially challenging, though, is the alarming rate at which deepfake technology is improving.

Deepfake creation requires [generative adversarial networks \(GANs\)](#), a class of machine learning frameworks that makes two neural networks—a creator and an analyzer—compete against each other. With deepfakes, the creator works to the best of its ability to produce realistic faces, which are then inspected by the analyzer to compare with a large set of actual faces. The deepfake is complete once the analyzer fails to identify the generated face. This process is part of an artificial intelligence (AI) revolution called unsupervised learning, or “AI imagination.” Because of this complex and arduous process, deepfake detection software must overcome

this severe, ever-changing challenge.

Currently, the [three main ways](#) to detect deepfakes are hand-crafted models, learning-based models, and artifact detection. Hand-crafted models refer to manually detecting imperfections in algorithmic-created facial features. A report published by University of California Berkeley researchers indicates that [an individual has distinct, but not unique facial expressions](#) as they speak.

Accordingly, the researchers used a software called OpenFace2 to extract facial movements as vectors of facial features from a video, which are then cross analyzed with a deepfake video. By associating numerical values to a source video, this detection software can easily detect irregularities in deepfake videos.

In contrast, learning-based models employ neural networks to spot patterns and features of deepfakes. These networks analyze videos

for discrepancies in motion that often occur as a result of deepfaking. Artifact detection involves spotting evidence of video manipulation, which includes [photo response non-uniformity patterns \(PRNU\)](#) on images captured by cameras. PRNUs are noise patterns, or disturbances in image brightness and color, that vary depending on the camera model. A lack of PRNUs, or unnatural noise distribution in a video, could be a sign that a GAN, rather than a camera, produced an image or video. If

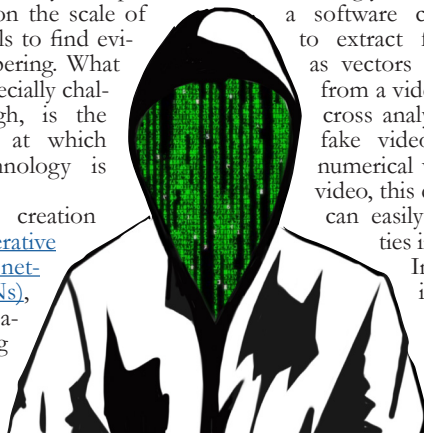
GANs themselves could produce artifact fingerprints of their own, they can be cross analyzed with authentic videos to detect proof of manipulation. Additionally, skin color analysis [can reveal blood circulation](#). Blood circulation patterns, or lack thereof, can then reveal whether or not the subject of a video is a real person or an impostor.

While these innovations are impressive, deepfake manufacturers can circumvent detection in multiple ways. For example, low-quality compressed videos prevent learning-based models from accurately deconstructing deepfakes. Even then, high-quality deepfakes are made to better simulate motion with the use of 3D modeling and more advanced AI. Other deepfakes can overload detection software by simulating too much simultaneous movement in various points of focus. What is more distressing is that GANs can be programmed to remove fingerprint artifacts in an altered video while maintaining the same results. These factors combined make it more difficult to apply detection software to media that may differ greatly from those tested in experiments. This problem becomes more severe when controversial deepfakes spread and are altered more frequently on the internet. When videos are uploaded on different platforms or repeatedly on the same platform, the quality declines based on the uploader’s device and how each platform processes the video. Therefore, if a viral video of a celebrity or political figure gets reposted around the internet, it would become difficult to accurately determine its legitimacy.

Because it is difficult to estimate

the limit of AI advancement and deep learning, researchers and computer scientists are still unsure which side will win the war between deepfake creation and detection. Though it is frightening to imagine deepfakes destroying trust in online media, they can also educate people. Schools can use deepfake videos to create a more engaging curriculum with historical figures or world leaders delivering speeches directly to students. For example, the Illinois Holocaust Museum uses deepfake technology to allow visitors to conduct [real-time interviews](#) with individuals who have since passed. If used appropriately, deepfakes can also achieve an international impact with notable figures delivering powerful speeches in various languages, as shown with [David Beckham](#) delivering multilingual speeches to spread awareness on malaria. Especially now, seeing a full face is a major step toward normalcy; with deepfakes, political leaders can continue to deliver powerful speeches without being present in public and wearing a face mask.

Deepfakes are a byproduct of the unprecedented rate at which current AI technologies like machine learning and neural networks are advancing. Regardless of their negative impact, deepfakes can continue to educate and push researchers to greater heights. The inventor of GANs, Ian Goodfellow, sees a [bright future](#) for deep learning and AI: “I hope that AI will help us to develop new medicinal techniques and green energy technologies.” The many faces of deepfakes—entertainment, education, propaganda, and slander—are collectively driving the initiative for AI innovation.



Aries Ho / The Spectator

Edward Jenner: The Father of Modern Vaccination

continued from page 1

his findings, but the Royal Society of Medicine shut him down when they realized that his discovery was a threat to their established practices. When he attempted to self-publish, he was met with extreme opposition. Cartoons at the time suggested that patients were afraid to be treated with material from a cow because they too would begin to show bovine characteristics. [Jenner even coined the word “vaccination”](#)

through the Latin word for cow, vacca. Through Jenner’s influential friends such as Frederik Augustus, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Thomas Jefferson, the practice gradually became well respected by established doctors and the general public.

But how did making two scratches on an arm turn into the vaccination method we know today? Fifty years after Jenner’s discovery, the hypodermic syringe was invented. This syringe had the sanitation advantage of using a sealed glass tube that contained the medication or fluids, lowering the risk of spreading

the infection. [In 1885](#), Louis Pasteur used one to vaccinate a rabies-infected individual who then survived, representing great progress for immunization. However, hypodermic syringes were also limited because their large needles could easily rust or break, their glass barrels often broke, and their tips leaked. The needles also needed to be sterilized and sharpened.

Luckily, disposable needles were invented in the 1960s, providing a safer and cleaner way to inject vaccines. Through technological improvements, sharper and thin-

ner needles were created. Scientists and engineers are still trying to find other methods of injection, such as through the mouth or nose, that would get the vaccine into the body with minimal side effects and a cost-effective method. As of right now, hypodermic injection, which the COVID-19 vaccine is administered as, is still the most common method.

Nearly two centuries after Jenner’s time, the World Health Organization declared that smallpox was “dead” in 1980, concluding their campaign to eradicate the deadly disease. It became the first major

infectious disease to be eliminated completely. Thanks to significant progress in vaccinations, once fatal diseases like polio, measles, and mumps are [nearly eliminated](#) from most countries. Today, the COVID-19 vaccines are using a new technique where mRNA from the SARS CoV-2 virus is introduced to the body. However, the vaccine still maintains some of Jenner’s ideas of producing an immune response against the disease. There is no doubt that the work Jenner started saved and will continue to save millions of lives.

What’s Happening with the AstraZeneca Vaccine?

By ARIN FARUQUE

As we pass the one-year anniversary of quarantine, the single-stranded RNA coronavirus has already taken [over 3 million lives](#) and left communities and economies worldwide in shambles. As countries scrambled to formulate vaccines, pharmaceutical companies faced the challenge of creating an affordable, effective, and profitable vaccine for the public. The Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines satisfy the last two conditions, each showing over a 90 percent decreased risk, or efficacy rate, of getting symptomatic COVID-19 in clinical trials. However, their costs range from [\\$15 to \\$20](#) per dose. The alternative to this seemed to be Oxford’s AstraZeneca vaccine, which only costs \$4 per dose while offering similar efficacy. While its bargain price brought the possibility of a “universal vaccine” for COVID-19, the AstraZeneca vaccine has recently been restricted and even suspended in many countries due to concerns about recent reports of blood clots in those who have taken it.

Vaccines help our bodies build an immunity to a target virus and reduce the severity of a potential infection. To combat a virus like COVID-19, vaccines using mRNA became the front runners in the vaccine race because of mRNA’s ability

to be quickly synthesized once a target viral sequence is identified. The mRNA works to instruct the cell to produce just a portion of a viral protein, known as the spike protein, which is unique to COVID-19 and enables the virus to enter host cells and cause infection. Once the mRNA enters cells, the spike proteins appear on the cell surface and trigger an immune response, producing antibodies to fight this induced infection. The immune system remembers parts of the spike protein and produces the same specific antibodies against COVID-19. Like the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the AstraZeneca vaccine also provides instructions for cells to express the COVID spike protein, but uses double-stranded DNA rather than single-stranded RNA.

AstraZeneca’s vaccine delivers this double-stranded DNA payload through a viral vector, using a harmless virus to enter and deliver genetic code to our cells. This specific vaccine uses ChAdOx1, [a modified chimpanzee virus](#) capable of entering but not replicating in human cells, to deliver the spike protein code to our cells. Because this vaccine uses DNA protected by the protein coat of the viral vector, it is much less fragile than mRNA, allowing it to be refrigerated, rather than frozen, [for up to six months](#).

This accessibility separates the AstraZeneca vaccine from its mRNA counterparts, as it does not require expensive freezing storage systems, allowing it to be remarkably cheaper than its competitors.

Almost as if it was too good to be true, the AstraZeneca vaccine has its share of problems. European countries began to approve AstraZeneca in late December. Initial concerns with AstraZeneca’s effectiveness for adults above the age of 65 and its limited supply made countries hesitant to use it, and some temporarily suspended the administration of the vaccine. However, by mid-March, AstraZeneca vaccine rollout resumed in 70 countries.

This progress was short-lived, though, as a report released by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) on March 23 warned that AstraZeneca possibly [used outdated clinical trial data](#) to determine its efficacy. AstraZeneca responded by releasing [updated data](#) from their U.S. clinical

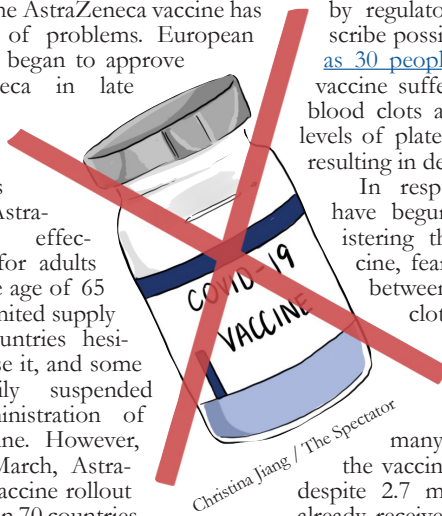
trials, revealing a 76 percent efficacy rate, rather than the 79 percent efficacy rate they had stated previously. Believing that AstraZeneca was being intransparent, many countries, including the U.S., began to distrust the vaccine. Furthermore, reports by regulators on April 1st describe possible lethal side effects, [as 30 people](#) who received the vaccine suffered from mysterious blood clots and concerning low levels of platelets, with seven cases resulting in death.

In response, some regions have begun to restrict administering the AstraZeneca vaccine, fearing the possible link between the jab and blood clots. After reporting [about one case per 100,000](#) AstraZeneca vaccinations, Germany stopped giving out the vaccine to [adults under 60](#), despite 2.7 million people having already received the first dose. The Netherlands’ government, which has already given out around 400,000 doses of the vaccine to its citizens, released a statement stating that they will suspend the vaccine usage for people [under the age of 60](#) due to similar concerns.

In the U.S., the AstraZeneca vaccine has not been approved by

the Food and Drug Administration. However, director of the NIAID Anthony Fauci has expressed that the US may not even need it since they already have contracts with other leading vaccine companies such as Pfizer. Canada has not received any reports of blood clots, with their chief medical advisor [Dr. Supriya Sharma stating](#) that the benefits outweigh the risks. However, Canada ultimately suspended the administration of the vaccine to adults under 55, following a dozen European and Asian countries that have halted the vaccine’s administration, until its safety is confirmed.

Despite the current restrictions, AstraZeneca’s vaccine is still promising. The suspensions are only temporary, depending on when or if AstraZeneca can guarantee its safety. Unless another cheap vaccine like AstraZeneca’s is produced, countries will most likely continue to use AstraZeneca’s more expensive counterparts. While this may not impact the U.S., the sudden rollback of AstraZeneca’s vaccine is an abrupt setback for countries relying on it to provide immunity for those who cannot afford costlier alternatives. With AstraZeneca’s vaccine off the table for now, it is even more important for countries to come together and formulate a vaccine rollout for their people.



Christina Jiang / The Spectator

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Arts and Entertainment

FILM

By CHRISTINA PAN

There's an old parable about a bear who lives in a circus. When it's not performing, the bear is kept in a small cage with barely enough room to walk around. So the bear spends its days pacing in circles, the same loop over and over again. One day, the bear's trainer forgets to lock the door. He realizes his mistake and rushes back, fearing a ferocious animal on the loose. But, upon his arrival at the cage, he finds he has nothing to fear. The bear doesn't even notice the door isn't locked. It keeps pacing in the same small circle, oblivious to the fact that it could finally be free. Eventually, the cage begins to rust and fall apart, so the trainer stops using it. Wherever the bear is told to go, it'll just keep pacing in that same small circle.

Chloé Zhao's "Nomadland" centers Fern (Frances McDormand) with the whole country opened up before her. She can go wherever she wants and see whatever she wants to see. There's nothing tying her down to one place but seasonal jobs and seasonal friends. She takes advantage of that freedom, reveling in the beauty of nature and the countless breathtaking sights over the course of the film. But in some ways, her van has become a cage she can't escape even when the door is wide open. Does Fern truly love this lifestyle, or has she simply trained herself to feel safe there?

Like many Americans her age, Fern built her life around a single company that she relied on for everything: health insurance, housing, income, and security. At once, it all disappeared. U.S. Gypsum shut down its plant in Empire, Nevada, and with it, the rest of the city. It's a difficult thing to picture, particularly in what comes after for the town's

residents. Without home or work as an anchor, Fern hits the road.

"Nomadland" tracks Fern's life after Empire, which is loosely structured on Jessica Bruder's eponymous novel. With Fern's story, the film starts by acknowledging that our capitalist system isn't enough to grant meaning to life, but then asks: what is?

The question is addressed by a



Christina Pan / The Spectator

number of characters, sometimes with startling directness. One of them is Swankie, an octogenarian nomad with terminal cancer. She plans to take one last trip when she still can, explaining to Fern that she refuses to spend her last days confined in a hospital. She reflects on the things she's seen in her life—one sun-drenched canoe ride facing off a cliff, surrounded by a riverside mirage of flying swallows. It's a scene that's as breathtaking as the canoe ride itself surely was, but all we see is a closeup of Swankie's eyes. They glaze over for a moment as the frame moves from a steady shot to erratic flurries around Swankie's face like swallows nesting on cliffs. It's as if she's there.

Later, she sends Fern a video from her final trip. It's all there—the cliffs, the swallows, and fragments of broken eggshells

floating on the surface of the water. It's just low-resolution, shaky cell phone footage. And it's stunning. We're witnessing what made life worth living for Swankie. Fern watches the video, and whispers while smiling, "You made it, Swankie."

There are long shots and extended scenes like Swankie's scattered through the film that gives the story a slower pace but

together meander in a rhythm that makes every frame feel like experiencing life on the road with other nomads. There's a constant level of respect in how the film treats the real-life nomads in its hybrid docu-drama format. It does not blame the victims for their downward trajectory and treats its subjects with respect and curiosity. Their misfortunes are not used to objectify or "other" them as often happens in films about an impoverished subculture. It shows people who manage to preserve their own dignity and, to a large extent, a sense of personal freedom in the face of systemic forces that are exploiting them.

Yet as it progresses, the film focuses far more on grief than poverty. Fern lives this way, it emerges, not for economic reasons. When Fern leaves her

dying town after losing her husband, "it would be like it all never existed." Her description of her old place is also telling, suggesting a desire for escape from ordinary life that preceded the van: "it was just desert, all the way to the mountains—there was nothing in our way."

The sense of dramatization is strong here, and it makes sense as a fictional arc. Fern is on her quest for self-actualization that can only be found in solitary splendor with nature. But there could be no better character than the seemingly nomadic-by-choice Fern when it comes to lessening any political impact that "Nomadland" might have, and it seems like this is hardly an accident. The film is dealing with a subject matter that's inescapably political, but somewhere along the road, those aspects of the story have been softened by people involved who are convinced that the best kind of cinema is ideology-free. The end goal is often the same—to create a personal tale that is ultimately inspirational rather than critical of the systemic horror show that lies just below the film's distractingly beautiful facade.

Fern gets a temporary job at Amazon and is shown strolling through the warehouse carrying a single lightweight box, smiling and nodding to fellow workers who also work at a leisurely pace. That hardly matches descriptions of what it's like to work at Amazon. Workers in Amazon warehouses don't stroll around like Fern. They're often forced into a relentless working pace with little pay and long hours.

Instead, "Nomadland" wants to remind us of a different side of America, where we can imagine our lives in a better light. If it's sometimes said that no such thing as an "anti-war film" exists—the action and stakes

of combat will make the whole enterprise seem exciting, no matter the intent—it may be even more true that there's no such thing as an anti-road movie. It's theoretically possible to imagine such a thing, in an America of factory-made interstates and anonymous strip malls, but the glories of the vast country are too much for most audiences to resist. "The road" has never exited American consciousness. Even when the road is a journey through barren scrubland and the loneliest, scariest, ugliest place in the world, it still compels us.

It's a poisonous and idealized legacy, in many ways. But there's no denying what "Nomadland" evokes—relief and boundless joy at mountains on the horizon after a vast stretch of flatlands, viewed through the windshield of a roaming vehicle, and thinking as Fern does—"to just keep on driving, right out into it."

We have very few utopian films now, as dystopian visions have taken over. "Nomadland" has such startling emotional power because it's a utopian perspective emerging out of a dystopian framework in a failing nation. It does not propose prescriptions to the systemic ills it depicts, but rather asks us to remember our common humanity. Zhao balances intimacy and incredible scope throughout the film, with impossibly wide shots that envelope the nomads in blood orange sunsets cut against extreme closeups of faces and eyes and antennas on butterflies. The end effect is hypnotic—a melancholy lyricism that entralls in the same way you start to get a dizzy feeling when you spend most of your time on a road headed somewhere else. Where to, exactly? Nowhere in particular. The next place. There's always a next place.

MUSIC

By JAEIN KU

Montero Lamar Hill, commonly known as Lil Nas X, is known for hits like "Old Town Road" and "Panini." As a queer Black musician in mainstream music, Lil Nas X has broken cultural barriers and notions of musical genres, a testament to his skills as an influencer and artist. He is also paving the way for the future, where people can unapologetically be themselves. His new single, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)," and his Satan-centric music video prove just how true to his art Lil Nas is.

"Montero (Call Me By Your Name)," released on March 26, is a reference to "Call Me By Your Name," (2017) a queer film that chronicles the blossoming of a relationship between a curious young boy and an older man. Lil Nas was inspired by the concept of calling your lover by your own name, hence why the song is named after the artist himself rather than the man who inspired it all. With this single, Lil Nas wanted to bring queer narratives more into mainstream music. In a video as part of Genius's YouTube series, Lil Nas X explains that the lyrics, "Cocaine and drinking with your friends /

You live in the dark, boy, I cannot pretend" was a double entendre, referencing how the man was "in the closet" and therefore miserable. Lil Nas himself struggled to come out as a teen, so he hoped to empower other queer people to express their true identity. Furthermore, Nas added racy lyrics such as "Shoot a child in your mouth while I'm ridin'," in an effort to destigmatize queer relationships in popular music.

The electronic hip-hop song also features a controversial music video which plays on religious symbols. In the video's climax, Lil Nas is seen sliding down a pole to hell before giving the Devil a lap dance. The music video is undoubtedly provocative, but it also boldly embraces gay sexual liberation with its powerful symbolism and iconography. As he descends to Hell, which is depicted as an ominous red and black landscape, he passes a Latin phrase which translates to, "They condemn what they do not understand." Conservatives criticized this scene as evidence of Devil worship, but it is actually a critique of the repressive nature of society and how Lil Nas X finally accepts himself and his sexuality.

Empowering or Satanic?

As detractors, including staunch conservatives and right-wing politicians, started to express their discontent with the music video, Lil Nas X announced his limited edition Satan Shoes, a collaboration with the New York-based art collective MSCHF that featured pentagrams and inverted crosses, with each supposedly containing one drop of human blood in the sole. Like the lyrics and scenes of "Montero," these Nike Air Max 97s were incredibly symbolic: only 666 pairs were made, and the cost was also a reference to the Bible passage Luke 10:18, which read, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Anger increased and critics started voicing their discontent to Nike, though the brand did not design, release, or endorse the shoes. To prevent any controversies, Nike soon

filed a lawsuit against MSCHF for trademark infringement and dilution, despite MSCHF explicitly stating that the shoes were for art and not for wear. In addition, Christians and conservatives continued to raise hell over the Satan



Yume Igarashi / The Spectator

eternal soul[s]" of children. Others promised that their kids would never play "Old Town Road" again. However, Lil Nas

X did not back down, instead embracing his identity with a video titled "Lil Nas X apologizes for Satan Shoe," on YouTube which cuts to the Devil lap dance instead of an apology.

On Twitter, the artist stated, "This will open doors for many other queer people to simply exist. You see this is very scary for me, people will be angry, they will say I'm pushing an agenda. But the truth is, I am. The agenda to make people stay the [EXPLETIVE] out of other people's lives and stop dictating who they should be." The criticism wasn't of the music, after all, but of Lil Nas himself. People do not actually believe that a music video or pair of shoes will turn the youth of America into Satan worshippers. Instead, they just hate the idea of something that counters the omnipresent heterosexual male sensibility. Beneath the public's anxieties about the Devil lies an older fear of being gay and proud. Though the artist stated that the backlash he received was taking a toll on his mental state, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" is the stepping stone for queer representation and empowerment in the entertainment industry.

Arts and Entertainment

MUSIC

By LEVI SIMON

As quarantine passes by and big-name artists stockpile more and more music until they can get back on tour, it's often hard to find new music to listen to. Even our heftiest playlists are starting to sound dry from months of repetition. Fortunately, there are plenty of fresh styles of music to cleanse our palettes. Many are overwhelmed by the vast amount of possibility contained within the unknown of musical exploration and don't know where to start. The easiest remedy for such concerns is a genre sampler, where listeners can dip their toes into the highest quality music that a sound has to offer and explore further as they see fit.

Hip-hop is arguably the most dominant cultural influence in the whole world, and as such, its deviations blend the formats that we've become accustomed to with everything from iridescent voice manipulation to volatile noise passages. Industrial hip-hop takes the grimy, dystopian soundscapes of metal and noise and grounds them to reality with the populist, human perspective of hip-hop and hardcore punk. In "From Filthy Tongues of Gods and Griots" (2002), pioneers of the genre New Jersey group Dälek use menacing, screeching electronics, and East Coast drums to simulate the ills of society, and then shatter them with MC Dälek's impressive command of the mic. Today's artists put a contemporary spin on Dälek's work in a variety of ways. The infamous band Death Grips augment

their lead vocalist's distinctive screams with bizarre samples, addictive melodies, fiery drumming, cryptic lyrics, and Los Angeles group clipping, (see my article on the group [here](#)) incorporating influences from West Coast hip-hop and soundtrack music to tell uniquely harrowing narratives. JPEGMAFIA supports his poignant wit and penchant for internet-based humor with catchy and creative production and vocal performances. His song "1539 N. Calvert" is a fan favorite that anybody can get into.

Typically characterized by lush, ethereal atmospheres and sleek, bright melodies, dream pop is the perfect music to simply vibe to, and it is a far cry from the aggressive rumble of industrial hip-hop. It strikes a balance that makes it equally possible to sing along and pour yourself into each syrupy note, space out, and contemplate your aspirations while the pink clouds of bliss surround you. The song that best exemplifies the appeal of dream pop is the timeless classic, "Cherry-Coloured Funk" by Cocteau Twins. When the liquidy chords brighten and give way to Elizabeth Fraser's angelic falsetto, the resulting feeling can only be described as transcendent. Cocteau Twins, in all of their greatness, have been extremely influential in the development of the dream pop genre. One more recent group that draws clear influence from Cocteau Twins is Beach House. They update the Twins' faded vintage warmth for a polished and groovy final product. Songs like "Lazuli" and "Silver Soul" are fantastic introductions for any potential fan of the genre.

Genre Shopping: A Selection for the Bored Listener

When in search of a genre with unrivaled gravity and memorability, look no further than post-rock. While post-rock is an extremely diverse title, it has two fundamental components: guitar-centric instrumentation and slow compositions that compound upon a motif until the floodgates break open and the song reaches its emotional apex, allowing for some of the most cathartic crescendos of any genre. "Good Morning, Captain" by Slint is the epitome of the genre's capability for a climax. Slint uses jagged, plodding guitarwork, subtly emotive drumming, and a gripping abstract narrative to build to an explosion of desperation and fear unlike any other in musical history. Thirty years after the release of "Good Morning, Captain," Slint's impact still lingers. English band Black Country, New Road describe themselves as "the world's second-best Slint tribute act," on their fantastic post-rock track "Science Fair." "Science Fair" might be a better place to start for a new listener of post-rock because it's not as emotionally crushing, but still instrumentally complex and satisfying. Other cardinal releases include "Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven," by Godspeed You! Black Emperor, which provides a political slant and implements classical chamber instrumentation, and "()" by Sigur Rós, which incorporates ambient and sampling to create a mystical experience.

While some may be satisfied with a linear song structure and traditional rhythms, others need to be pushed outside of their comfort zones to stay

engaged. Intelligent Dance Music (IDM) is the perfect treat for such an ambitious or curious listener. (Don't worry, it isn't as pretentious as the genre name sounds!) Names aside, it bears very little similarity to Electronic Dance Music (EDM). It swaps out the more popular genre's buzzy synths and simple, propulsive rhythmic progressions for off-kilter, dense rhythms and strange sound design. While the elements of IDM can be overpowering on their own, their intrigue and universality enable IDM to easily slot into other genres. Frequent crossovers with jazz, techno, ambient, and drum 'n' bass music are central to the genre's identity. The most notable and fun of these crossovers is Sweet Trip's "Fruitcake and Cookies," which fuses the catchy and spacious elements of dream pop with twitchy, frenetic fills and rolls to make an engaging and danceable cult classic. Cosmogramma's "Dance of the Pseudo Nymph" is a similarly sunny slapper that forges its Sweet Trip and funk influences into a punchy slice of joy, that's not only expertly crafted and rich, but accessible for the unaccustomed.

While their intricacies may be confusing at first, genre lines are an effective way of easily finding music that listeners love. With so many subgenres to choose from, gravitating toward the same artists and styles represents missed potential. There are dozens of genres waiting for listeners to discover and fall in love with—IDM, industrial hip-hop, dream pop, and post-rock among them. Happy listening!

PLAYLIST

Lullabies 2.0

By THE ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DEPARTMENT

This one goes out to all of us with erratic sleep cycles. Whether you're desperate to slumber before the sun comes up or trying to work in some extra shut-eye, these songs work for those late nights and early mornings.

Apocalypse
Cigarettes After Sex
Alternative

White Ferrari
Frank Ocean
R&B

How to Disappear Completely
Radiohead
Alternative

Dancing With Your Ghost
Sasha Sloan
Pop

On Melancholy Hill
Gorillaz
Alternative Rock

Best Part
Daniel Caesar ft. H.E.R.
R&B

Slow Dancing In The Dark
Joji
R&B/Pop

Nocturne Op.9, No.2
Frédéric Chopin
Classical

In The Light
The Lumineers
Folk/Americana

Asleep
The Smiths
Alternative

Savior Complex
Phoebe Bridgers
Indie

Firewood
Regina Spektor
Alternative Folk

MUSIC

By ZOE BUFF

"There isn't enough recognition for chamber music in this day and age."

Sad but true. One day, when sophomore Eugene Yoo was in his symphonic orchestra class, his teacher Joseph Tamosaitis introduced a chamber-music related contest using those exact words as encouragement for students to participate. Yoo, junior Cynthia Tan, and sophomore Sophia Wan-Brodsky were inspired by the unique opportunity to make a musical impact on their community. And they found the perfect way to do so.

The Young Musicians Innovation Challenge is a program launched in 2021 by the Chamber Music Society (CMS), an organization at Lincoln Center dedicated to promoting chamber music. CMS is known for encouraging musical education in schools through several programs for students in the tri-state area. This year, there were seven teams participating in the challenge, including two groups

from the pre-college program of the prestigious music conservatory Juilliard.

The challenge was met with enthusiasm and dedication by participants, who presented projects ranging from podcasts to educational mobile apps to concert series surrounding chamber music. "We received proposals from New York City, Great Neck, and Miami, all of which exceeded our expectations," remarked Matthew Tommasini, Director of Education at CMS, in an e-mail interview. "All of our Preliminary Round teams did a wonderful job absorbing feedback from their mentors."

The contest consisted of two rounds: the Preliminary Round and the Final Round. The students displayed their projects as video presentations, which would be followed by a Q&A session with a member of CMS. Yoo, the leader of the Stuyvesant group, admits that it was a bit "nerve-wracking" to present their projects in front of professionals. "They were grilled by a distinguished panel

of musicians and administrators," commented Tamosaitis in an e-mail interview. Luckily, Yoo was able to push through the stress: "My teammates and I persevered, stuck with the plan, and that ultimately paid off in the end," he said.

The Stuyvesant team proposed Project Connect, a musical education network which gives children in underserved communities with limited access to properly funded music projects the opportunity to experience chamber music. After winning "Honorable Mention," Yoo and his teammates will receive coaching from a CMS member before launching their program in June. The virtual lessons will be led primarily by Stuyvesant students in the summer, switching to in-person meetings during the 2021-22 school year. The group leaders hope to host concerts for the chamber music groups and invite guest speakers from music organizations to talk about the genre. The project was created as an effort to pass the art form onto the next generation,

CMS Meets Stuyvesant

Arts and Entertainment

TELEVISION

By NICOLE LIU

When you think about the mystery genre, chances are Sherlock Holmes is one of the first names that will pop into your head. As one of the most beloved fictional characters of all time, the detective is an incredibly well-known figure in pop culture. However, the story of Sherlock Holmes extends far beyond Arthur Conan Doyle's original novels. There has been a multitude of films and shows, each with their own reimagining of Sherlock Holmes and his partner John Watson. The newest name to be added to this long list of adaptations is "The Irregulars," which was released on Netflix on March 26.

"The Irregulars" revolves around a ragtag team of misfits who start investigating supernatural crimes in Victorian London under the instruction of Dr. John Watson (Royce Pierreson). The eccentric lineup includes Bea (Thaddea Graham), the unofficial leader of the group, and her sister, Jessie (Darci Shaw), who experiences eerie visions and has psychic powers. Coming along for the ride are Billy (Jojo Macari), a street fighter, and Spike (McKell David), the

comedic relief of the group. Finally, balancing out the gang of vagrants and criminals is prince-in-disguise Leopold (Harrison Osterfield).

Throughout most of the show, we follow this cast of characters as they move from one odd case to another. These mysteries, which include eye-gouging ravens and face-stealing women, hint at a more sinister force at play, adding to the overall mystery. Despite the young age of the teenagers, their rough upbringing and the gruesome nature of these crimes give an interesting maturity to the characters and a grittiness to the show, which is balanced by the entertaining banter between the group of friends.

All of this takes place in the dirty, cobblestoned streets of Victorian London. The setting is fantastically portrayed, and the costumes work well to immerse the audience into the show. The CGI is also impressive and contributes greatly to the eerie tone. Since the cases rely heavily on the supernatural, the special effects do a lot to keep the show grounded and impactful. For example, when Jessie has nightmare sequences about plague doctors and monsters,

the CGI of the show works to sell the terror.

With supernatural elements, curious mysteries, and even blossoming romances, the show attempts to juggle countless genres but manages to do none of them effectively. The supernatural aspects of the mysteries, though entertaining at times, often feel gimmicky and almost cartoonish at other times due to how dramatized some of the villains are. In one case, a "tooth fairy" is introduced as an antagonist, and despite the attempts to villainize her, it was hard to buy. The concept alone was difficult to get past, and the character's writing and presentation did little to help the audience see her as a convincing villain. In addition, the main villain of the show felt exaggerated and cliché (not to mention that his evil laughter could have used some serious work). Moreover, the supernatural aspect of the mysteries takes away from the intrigue of mystery itself. When every case can be explained with some unintroduced supernatural phenomenon, the solutions never feel clever or thrilling, especially when compared to the more intricately designed mysteries of Conan

Doyle's works. Ultimately, the majority of the mysteries had interesting premises but were badly executed. Even the romances fall flat, with unnecessary love triangles and a lack of chemistry between love interests.

The plot, despite its original and intriguing premise, lacks excitement. Most episodes become formulaic with every episode starting off with a supernatural case and ending with the villain being defeated in a similar way every time. Many of the twists are predictable, and the climax of the show is poorly written and rushed. In addition, the overarching conflict is solved too easily, so there is never any real narrative tension for the audience. Certain plot points feel unnecessarily dragged out, while others feel undeveloped and sudden.

Despite the mediocre execution of the plot, the characters help make up for it. The core cast all have unique personalities that balance each other out as well as in-depth backstories and personal struggles. The crew's development from mistreated and caged orphans to courageous heroes is wrought

with many obstacles, but their ultimate triumph allows for a satisfying and entertaining journey. Their personalities also contrast with each other a great deal, creating an amusing dynamic. John Watson and Sherlock Holmes (Henry-Lloyd Hughes) play important roles in the show, though they are portrayed in a much darker way than we are used to seeing them. However, unlike most other portrayals, they don't play a major role in most of the actual mystery-solving, giving the teenagers space to shine.

All told, "The Irregulars," has an imaginative premise but lacks the execution needed to make it a truly entertaining show. The plot relies heavily on the mystery, but the supernatural aspects take away from any intrigue. As a Sherlock Holmes reimagining, it lacks the charm and mystery of Conan Doyle's books. Fans of the iconic detective should look elsewhere for engaging mysteries or a faithful adaptation. However, despite these letdowns, the characters are well-developed and have you rooting for them every step of the way. "The Irregulars" brings a likable cast but not much else, ultimately failing to tell a compelling story.

CINEMA

By GAVIN MCGINLEY

"Zack Snyder's Justice League" is a movie that has little reason to exist. The film is a 70 million dollar director's cut for the commercial and critical disaster that was "Justice League" (2017), a dumpster fire few want to revisit. Most people, quite reasonably, questioned how giving one man a boatload of money, a four-hour runtime, and total control of the fetid carcass of the DC Extended Universe (DCEU) could produce anything even somewhat watchable. The insane thing is that Snyder almost proved them wrong.

The failure of the first "Justice League" is a messy story. Following the tragic suicide of his daughter, Zach Snyder took a step back from leading the project, and Warner Brothers brought in Joss Whedon to handle the last leg of production. However, Whedon's job went far beyond directing reshoots and finalizing editing and story choices: he was also tasked with transforming Snyder's bleak, four-hour cinematic marathon into something both more lighthearted and, more importantly, short enough to put in theaters. The result was the first release of "Justice League," dubbed the "Josstice League" by the internet, and universally hated by everyone, from the most committed DC fanboys to the most uninter-

ested and casual viewers. The movie was garish, without any real structure or tension, and painfully bland. Half of

quippy, Marvel-style character writing fell flat when forced into Snyder's overly self-serious story. Following this disap-



the main cast was devoid of any personality, and Whedon's

pointment and the subsequent abandonment of the DC "Sny-

Justice is Gray, Four Hours Long, and Uncomfortably Square

derverse" by Warner Bros., fans clung to the one hope they had left: the mythical Snyder cut—Zach Snyder's unreleased masterpiece that would surely set everything right. For years, Snyder's magnum opus was locked in the deepest vaults of Warner Studios, reduced to a punchline, until finally, the studio needed some publicity. To promote their new streaming service, HBO Max, and show the possibilities of their platform, they greenlit Snyder's four-hour monstrosity, a film too big to ever be released in theaters. Hence, "Zack Snyder's Justice League" was born.

Much like the first "Justice League," the Snyder cut focuses on DC's most famous heroes as they try to stop Steppenwolf (Ciarán Hinds) from collecting the three "Mother Boxes" and bringing an alien invasion to Earth. The difference, however, is in how much Snyder does with the creative freedom he's been given.

While it's hard for any movie to justify being four hours long, "Justice League" is almost an exception. The most apparent problem of the "Josstice League" was how rushed it was. As a consequence of DC trying to compete with Marvel in as little time as possible, most of the DCEU world was left critically underdeveloped, forcing the movie to choose between slow worldbuilding and actual action. This is most obvious

with Cyborg (Ray Fisher) who, unlike many of the other central characters, needed to be fleshed out for audiences who were unlikely to know much about him. In the "Justice League," he just appears out of nowhere to fill out the team, and then he does almost nothing for the rest of the movie; Whedon's truncated film didn't have the time to elaborate on him past "robot man." Snyder is able to avoid this by giving Cyborg a full backstory and a character arc integral to the main plot of the movie, all without removing anything important from Whedon's film. He's able to cover up a lot of the first movie's flaws just by spending more time in the world and giving the characters more room to develop. Snyder also cuts out a lot of Whedon's cornier, more pointless one-liners, which, when combined with a more grand scale and his personal directing choices, does a lot to make the film's tone more serious.

Is this long runtime without its flaws? Certainly not. "Zach Snyder's Justice League" is fairly well-paced, but it's still four hours long. The huge amount of content in the film might be an improvement over the shortened first cut, but the movie still drags on far longer than it should in several places. While it's interesting to see the threads Snyder wanted to set

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Arts and Entertainment

MUSIC

By **KENISHA MAHAJAN**

Pop superstar Justin Bieber rose to fame in 2009 after his debut single “One Time” broke platinum status in his home country of Canada. The 15-year-old soon went on to conquer the American music scene with his first EP, “My World” (2009), reaching startling heights of stardom, even in the earliest years of his career. Bieber is known for his commercial pop hits and a die-hard fandom, and his success is rooted in his teenage fame.

After years of living a demanding life brought on by his early stardom, Bieber took a brief hiatus from music following his marriage to Hailey Baldwin. Bieber’s domestic bliss was the subject of his fifth album “Changes” (2019), featuring the abominable track “Yummy,” regarded as one of 2020’s worst songs. Despite the suboptimal reviews “Changes” received, the album was nominated for Best Pop Vocal Album at the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards. However, Bieber found it “strange” that his album was nominated in that category. “Changes was and is an R&B album,” the artist [posted](#). “I grew up admiring R&B music and wished to make a project that would embody that sound.”

Thankfully, Bieber abandoned the lite R&B of “Changes,” going back to his pop roots on his sixth studio album “Justice.” While Bieber largely does retreat back to his comfort zone on this project, the tracks still draw inspiration from genres like R&B, ‘80s dance-pop, and even rock. This variety is reinforced by the plethora of artists

Bieber features on the album, including up-and-coming reggae singer Burna Boy, Chance the Rapper, Australian melodic rap-

an alternative hip-hop/rock artist, to create a classic chart hit veering into pop-rock territory. “Hold On,” a track featuring a

Outside of its impressive sound, “Peaches” fails lyrically, with its most meaningful lines being about peaches and pot.

This shortcoming seems to be the case throughout the tracklist: “Justice” succeeds sonically but falls flat with its lyrics, singing about the joys of his married life with prosaic, unimaginative lyricism. Bieber occasionally sings about his experience with self-hatred, feelings of loneliness, and his maturation—notably on the piano-backed track “Lonely”—but these raw, confessional lyrics are overshadowed by his saccharine and shallow testimonies about religion and marriage. While those topics are not necessarily unwelcome, “Justice” fails to bring a new story to light and regurgitates the contents of your run-of-the-mill wedding ballad or love song. Especially compared with the intensity and vulnerability of some individual lines, the album does not live up to lyrical expectations.

Even with lines as unoriginal as “I will love you different, just the way you are,” perhaps the most significant shortcoming of “Justice” is its title. The issue is that the album is not about justice in any way. The opener, “2 Much,” begins with a famous quote from American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” After Bieber promised to use his platform “to speak up about racial injustice,” listeners were anticipating a strong message condemning bigotry or promoting social change. Instead, MLK’s voice is followed by a two-minute ballad dedicated to Bieber’s wife,

featuring odes to Aerosmith and formulaic lyrics. Unfortunately, this isn’t the only time Bieber samples MLK on the album. The seventh track is a lengthy snippet of Dr. King’s “But If Not” sermon. MLK’s words about dedicating one’s life to fighting for justice are sandwiched in between two songs highlighting his thankfulness for his wife and detailing his commitment to her, “Unstable” and “Hold On.”

The ill-advised inclusion of these MLK excerpts seems to be nothing more than a cash grab. Riding the wave of content inspired by the resurgence of several social justice movements, “Justice” aims to capitalize on our ever-changing political climate by sprinkling in some conventional messages about justice rather than delivering strong, meaningful messages on the topic. This incorporation is exceptionally egregious when considering the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement over the last few months. The album’s lyrical shortcomings and surface-level messages are only worsened by such weak attempts to be relevant.

With its expert production, “Justice” is one of Bieber’s smoothest albums to date. Still, the ear candy is overshadowed by the miserable failure of the messages behind the tunes, resulting in a mishmash of sappy love songs, simplistic messages about religion, and a few stray introspective pieces all tied together with a misleading title. On “Justice,” Bieber seems to have found his sound, but his search for meaningful subject matter and original lyrics continues.



Ismath Maksum / The Spectator

per The Kid LAROI, and Khalid. Stylistically, Bieber embraces his beginnings and welcomes his cross-genre influences without falling prey to the cookie-cutter contemporary R&B he released over the last few years. “Justice” shifts the focus back onto the elements that made Bieber a star.

“Justice” surprises listeners with twists and turns on each song. Whether it’s slowing down the tempo and accenting Bieber’s voice with heavy instrumentals or pumping up the synths for dance-pop tracks with ‘80s sheen, subtle changes keep listeners captivated for the entire tracklist. On “Die For You,” Bieber pairs with Dominic Fike,

modern-pop feel with pumping synths and a pounding bass groove, features one of Bieber’s strongest vocal performances in the collection. The ‘80s-inspired instrumentals continue on “Somebody,” while the subsequent track “Ghost” kicks off with an electronic beat smoothly fading into acoustic guitar and contrasting passages of tender harmonizing and solid vocals. Bieber slows down on “Peaches,” one of the few non-pop tracks, and partners with Daniel Caesar and Gideon. With its relaxed melodies, lush vocals, and seamless instrumentals, the warm, sunkissed R&B song is one that’ll get stuck in your head.

TELEVISION

By **CAROLINE PICKERING**

Nearly three years after whispers of the series were first heard, “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” has finally made its record-breaking debut on Disney+. Set six months after the events of “Avengers: Endgame” (2019), the series deals with the aftermath of the return of half of all life after five long years. More importantly, it finds our heroes, Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) and Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan), trying to find where they fit in the ever-expanding Marvel universe. After parting ways following the defeat of Thanos, Sam Wilson and Barnes are together again, this time going up against the Flag-Smashers, a group of rebels fighting for global unity and a return to the way things were before the “Blip.” However, the pair is forced to team up with Baron Helmut Zemo (Daniel Bruhl), the terrorist responsible for breaking up the Avengers in “Captain America: Civil War” (2016). Only time will tell if Sam Wilson and Barnes can stop their bickering for long enough to become the crime-stopping team that the world needs.

“The Falcon and the Winter

Soldier” delivers classic Marvel action, but the serialized format also allows for a much more in-depth look at the characters and story as a whole. Every episode is jam-packed with plot and much-needed character development. Each character is rife with personality that provides hours of analysis in a way that simply isn’t possible with a single movie. The pacing can feel a little slow at times, and each episode seems to leave more loose ends than it resolves, but it will be exciting to see how everything ties together in the final two episodes and what problems will remain for future MCU projects.

Now, it’s no surprise that a show about Captain America is going to have political overtones. “Captain America: The Winter Soldier” (2014) and “Civil War” have shown us that much with their in-depth criticisms of global surveillance. However, “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” brings much more pressing social and political issues to the forefront of the plot, which, for a Disney property, is completely unexpected but wholly welcome.

The closing scene of “Endgame” saw Steve Rogers

(Chris Evans) handing his legacy, the mantle of Captain America, to Sam Wilson. Sam Wilson is the perfect choice for the title, as he represents what America should be to the world. However, the series opens with Sam Wilson donating the shield to a museum. To Sam Wilson, the legacy of the shield isn’t just his friend but a representation of America as a whole. “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” unabashedly explores the different perceptions of the American identity and how those perceptions have repeatedly ended up hurting millions of people around the world. It delivers some absolutely bone-chilling scenes eerily reminiscent of real world events in a poignant political and social commentary unlike much else on television. However, it is important to note that the series is not fully trailblazing political commentary, and much of its message is steeped in military propaganda. The series is entertaining and provides an amazing story, but it is important to watch with a critical eye and keep in mind a bigger picture.

For a story about superheroes, “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” does a

fantastic job of humanizing its characters, taking the time to give them agency and personalities outside of its quippy action sequences. This development is long overdue for both Sam Wilson and Barnes, who have been standing in the shadow of other “main” Avengers for years. For Sam Wilson, this progress means the audience finally gets to learn more about his personal life. We learn about his home, family, and how he and his sister, Sarah Wilson (Adepero Oduye), are struggling to keep their family business afloat. We see him wrestle with the legacy of his parents and symbols of his family while also maintaining his responsibilities as a hero.

Meanwhile, Barnes is a free man for the first time since Pearl Harbor. Barnes has suffered more than almost any other character in the MCU, having been tortured and brainwashed for 70 years and forced to be HYDRA’s killing machine, the Winter Soldier. Barnes is completely alone to navigate through a strange new world and confront his trauma. For the first time in 10 years, Barnes finally has a real personality. It’s hard to have any real attributes when you’re a brainwashed

soldier, and now that he’s free, we finally get a taste of the real Barnes for the first time since “Captain America: The First Avenger” (2011). He’s extremely vocal about his opinion on how Sam Wilson simply “gave up” the shield, not yet understanding his reasons. But while Barnes is being more childish about how he deals with it, his feelings toward the shield actually create a perfect parallel to Sam Wilson’s struggle with his family. They’re both holding onto objects for legacy’s sake without realizing that they’re not alone in their struggles with the past. It is exciting to see both of these characters interact with the world around them and fulfill their potential that was left so unexplored by previous MCU media.

Take it from someone who has been excited for this series for years: it exceeds expectations. “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” does an exceptional job of balancing humor, social commentary, and action into one wild ride of a series. It bridges the old action-driven MCU format with what is looking to be a new, much more grounded character-driven franchise.

The Boys Are Back: “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” Soars onto Disney+

Arts and Entertainment

THINKPIECE

By **ALTHEA BARRETT**

One of the best ways to discern a country's values is to look at the kinds of stories it creates. For example, Western entertainment is saturated with individualistic philosophy about unrestricted freedom being the ideal, while Eastern entertainment leans toward lessons about conformity and unity, suggesting differences in how these cultures value the individual versus the whole. However, the cultural values of a work's country of origin can be incredibly difficult to ascertain: nations are far from monolithic, and the values of two citizens of the same country can contrast wildly. In contrast, the oversight of North Korean leaders in the propaganda cartoon "Squirrel and Hedgehog"—to the point that even the animation wasn't outsourced—makes its reflections of its country's culture very direct, resulting in a visual to outsiders of what the average North Korean is taught to value.

Scientific Educational Korea Studio's "Squirrel and Hedgehog," running from 1977 to 2013, is one of North Korea's most popular cartoons. The show ran for two seasons, the first lasting 26 episodes and the second lasting for seven. The first season centers around the two squirrels Juldarami and Geumsaegi as they infiltrate the malevolent weasels (going by the spy team moniker "Pangulggot"), foiling the weasels' plans to conquer Flower Hill. The wolves become the major antagonists of the second season, with Geumsaegi's brother Bamsaegi replacing Juldarami as the second protagonist. Field mouse Mulmangcho is the primary antagonist throughout both seasons, serving under multiple enemy forces and seeking to reveal Geumsaegi as Flower Hill's spy. While the seasons can certainly be watched alongside each other, one can also watch either season on its own and come away with a full story.

The first season of this cartoon is decent, with

interesting fight scenes, character designs, and setting. The animation starts off rough, but it gets noticeably better with each episode, eventually even sporting elements of CGI. The songs and musical motifs are great, too, and are probably the highlight of the first season. The second season, meanwhile, transforms Geumsaegi from a generic protagonist to a cunning war veteran, making him a proper foil to his naive younger brother. The episodes are also structured better, with a more sensible plot progression. My only complaint is that the strong musical motifs of the first season were almost entirely tossed aside. However, while "Squirrel and Hedgehog" is a fine cartoon, it's also nationalistic propaganda and serves as a glimpse into how North Korea manipulates its children.

One way "Squirrel and Hedgehog" manipulates its audience is through its setting. Flower Hill is depicted as a paradise—through beautiful scenery, a bright color palette, and always being in the midst of celebration—that its inhabitants rightfully seek to defend with their very lives. The outside world, on the other hand, is only ever depicted through military bases and ravaged villages: dangerous and full of enemies, with Flower Hill's soldiers constantly longing to be back home. The characters' love for Flower Hill is meant as a guide for how the viewers should feel about North Korea.

"Squirrel and Hedgehog" also manipulates its citizens' views of the world through its character designs, using different animals to represent different political forces. The protagonists of the show are squirrels, hedgehogs, and ducks, representing the North Korean government, military, and navy. The enemy mice, weasels, and wolves represent South Korea, Japan, and America, respectively. These different sides are depicted as the "good" Flower Hill versus the "evil" imperialistic forces that seek to bring it to ruin: there is no nuance or in between. This

The Entertainment Value of North Korean Propaganda

mentality is applied directly to the viewers at the beginning of every episode, during which a squirrel and a hedgehog salute at a camera and address the audience directly as "friends." The message is clear: North Korea is good, and those who oppose it are evil.

Aside from "good," the creatures of Flower Hill are depicted in several interesting ways. They're drawn with larger, rounder eyes; softer bodies; and even shorter statures than most of the enemies, with the only exception being the mice. Even the animals they're modeled after are all cuter, friendlier-looking animals, especially compared to weasels, wolves, and crows. The illustrations of the Flower Hill animals indicate that they are the friends, allies, and underdogs.

While the enemies are all shown as evil, they are still depicted in different ways. In the first season, the first enemies we're introduced to are the weasels, when we watch them pillage a town and take its inhabitants as slaves. Throughout the rest of the series, they are continuously characterized as savage, self-serving, cowardly, untrustworthy, and cunning (though never quite as clever as the squirrels from Flower Hill). In the second season, however, the first thing we notice about the wolves is that, well, they aren't just wolves. In the wolves' ranks, there's also a fox, an alligator, and many other animals, a possible reference to the diversity of the American forces in comparison to North Korea. The wolves are also written with dialogue conveying significantly more guile. The enemies and the creatures of Flower Hill alike frequently refer to the wolves as significantly more threatening than the weasels, with the weasels even acknowledging the wolves as their superiors. Even the designs play into this dominance: while the weasels are large, they're also depicted as rather overweight, unlike the wolves, who are drawn with muscular figures not present in anyone else in the show.

The characterization of the mice is most compelling. The mice are the subordinates of the weasels—frequently mistreated, looked down upon, and exploited by their superiors, even though they share many of the same villainous traits—which may be inspired by the dynamic between Japanese soldiers and South Korean citizens during Japan's occupation of South Korea. Of all the enemies, the mice are given the most sympathetic characterization. We first see them being mistreated by the weasels, who the audience is already primed to hate thanks to the first episode's opening scene. In the few instances during which the enemies show genuine affection toward one another in ways that even scantily reflect the constant affection between the comrades of Flower Hill, at least one mouse is always involved. When the mice act cowardly, they do so in ways that seem almost harmless. Unlike the weasels, who fight each other for personal power just as often as they fight Flower Hill, the mice only ever seem to want to survive. When Geumsaegi, Juldarami, or any other squirrel goes undercover, they do so as field mice.

On an individual level, names are also used to draw lines between good and evil. Almost every enemy is referred to either by title (General Commander, Black Weasel, and Lieutenant Vixen) or number (Field Mouse Number Six). The only exceptions are the recurring antagonistic mice brothers Mulmangcho and Oegwipali. The allies, meanwhile, consistently refer to each other by their names, serving to humanize the creatures of Flower Hill and dehumanize those who oppose it. With the "good" and "evil" sides set, "Squirrel and Hedgehog" contrasts them against one another to instruct their viewers on "right" versus "wrong."

One interesting value that the show preaches is the importance of revenge, which starkly contrasts many

Western cartoons. On all sides of the conflict, characters are shown promising to avenge their fallen comrades. This action is treated as the proper way to show respect to the dead. Revenge is a prominent virtue in the show, frequently appearing in dialogue, action, and even the lyrics of the songs sung to the audience. There's also a scene when, as revenge for Geumsaegi ripping off his tail, Mulmangcho promises to do the same to his young brother Bamsaegi. There is also a constant warning to never let your guard down. This message is the lesson that characters most often relay to both one another and to the audience, and the few characters who slip up learn their lesson the hard way.

Most interestingly of all, this cartoon is undeniably meant to raise its citizens with a wartime mentality. If the central characters all representing the government, army, and navy didn't give that away, then their lessons toward their audience certainly do. Brutal violence is shown on screen with a level of nonchalance that suggests violence is the norm and the right way to treat the enemies of Flower Hill—and, by extent, the enemies of North Korea.

"Squirrel and Hedgehog" functions as an entertaining cartoon, a scant look into North Korean culture, and a prime example of how propaganda is used to influence people. Seeing media from any other culture can give people fresh perspectives on their own, whether it be in seeing how they portray us as Americans or how they treat American cultural values. Furthermore, understanding the mentality behind foreign propaganda is a fantastic way to develop one's own critical eye, which can then critique the messages our own media presents to us. Even without these things, however, this show can still be entertaining in its own right, whether it be through its crazy fight scenes, its political espionage, or its brilliant musical scores.

CINEMA

continued from page 15

up for the future of the DCEU, the plot gets sidetracked far too often by fan service and excessively in-depth world-building that doesn't progress the already-bloated main storyline.

The other problem in the Snyder cut is the cinematography, which can only be described as too much Zach Snyder. The first thing you'll notice is that the movie is shot in 4:3, a decision announced explicitly before it begins, and explained by the studio's desire to "preserve

the integrity of Zack Snyder's creative vision." A holdover from the film's planned theatrical release, the aspect ratio is, at worst, out of place in most scenes, giving off the impression of an art house film rather than a superhero blockbuster. However, it's in the action sequences the smaller screen really starts to feel restrictive as Snyder struggles to fit all of the moving pieces of his elaborate battles into frame.

Past this strange choice, "Zach Snyder's Justice League" is also full of Snyder's two favorite things: slow motion

and desaturated color palettes. Slow-mo is a time-tested essential of action movies, but the Snyder cut uses it to a comedic extent, and at a certain point, it starts to draw the audience's attention away from the events on screen. On top of that, the movie's muted color palette, while in line with its tone, can be overwhelming at times. Though it's without a doubt a step up from Whedon's bright, television-esque, and genuinely ugly release, Snyder's completely colorless world makes some of the sets feel boring and interchangeable and leaves a lot

of the more visual setpieces dull and flat. These problems only intensify in Snyder's hilariously unnecessary black and white version release, "Justice Is Gray," which exacerbates the movie's previous issues and replaces its gritty feel with an overly moody visual style that's ultimately less compatible with the rest of the film.

"Zach Snyder's Justice League" is not an exceptionally good movie. Though it easily rockets past the low bar set by the catastrophically bad 2017 release, it is not without its flaws. At four hours long, it feels un-

focused and unnecessarily vast, brute forcing its way through the many hang-ups of the "Justice League" by the sheer volume of content. Snyder's direction, while giving the film a more fitting tone, feels overdone and distracting at times. And yet, despite all this, it's hard to say the Snyder Cut wasn't what fans wanted. The movie may be overblown and self-indulgent, but it's the first—and probably the last—film to give a comprehensible view of the DCEU. The Snyderverse may not be coming back, but at least it went out with a bang.

Justice is Gray, Four Hours Long, and Uncomfortably Square

Humor

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

The Origin of Memes

By OLIVER HOLLMANN

Memes: An Internet Mystery. They delight, confuse, and unite web users far and wide. While their effects are felt by many, you may be surprised to hear that their origin is more cryptic than you may think.

To investigate this conundrum, The Spectator asked a group of Stuyvesant students where they got their memes. We frequently heard, “I get all my memes from Reddit,” or, “I find them on Twitter usually.” One even admitted to getting memes from a DeviantArt message board and was quickly ostracized by the group of interviewees. Most puzzling was that no one was making their own memes: they were all sourced from various websites. We even interviewed local Onion writer Bradley Smendelman for insight into who was making these memes. He answered, “I dunno. I get all my memes from an archived IM chatroom from 2006. Y U No know where they came from, m8? That mate’s with an eight, by the way.”

All of this begs the question: where do all the memes come from? To dive deeper into this

mystery, we sent a team of trained investigators from The Spectator (a.k.a. News writers) to unearth the source. They first went to Instagram but quickly gathered that many popular meme accounts were just posting stolen memes with overcompressed and unreadable captions.

From here, our team tracked many of the stolen memes back to Facebook where they again found thieving Meme accounts, with most of them pointing to Reddit as the source. When we questioned the Redditors, they immediately complained that Twitter members were taking down their memes. However, we found that those Twitter members claimed that said Redditors were taking their memes. After a long online dispute in our Discord server, both parties admitted to getting their memes from 4chan. Our researchers were way too scared to venture into the dark wastelands of /b/, so they enlisted our local edgelord, xXdarkjamooXx. Unfortunately, he could not source the 4chan memes’ origin, as the platform was overcrowded by furry smut and alt-right message boards. There also turned out to be a lead about a meme develop-

ment group working out of Tumblr, but this claim was quickly debunked with the realization that



no one had used Tumblr for years. The trail ran cold and lasted like this for about six months. But

suddenly, on March 28, the research team received a Facebook Messenger Call from a user called “Anonymous.” Here is the transcript:

(Anonymous): Yo, just wanted to tell y’all to stay off this case. It goes deeper than you could possibly know, and if you keep pushing, there will be consequences.

(Research): What are you talking about?

(Anonymous): You can’t mess with memes. If you do, there will be payback.

(Research): Sir, we closed that case six months ago. Who is this?

(Anonymous): I have used means to conceal my identity.

(Research): Hold on, how are you making an anonymous Facebook call? That’s not a feature! Wait...

(Anonymous): I—uhh...

(Research): Ha! You know that renaming your Facebook profile to “Anonymous” won’t actually make your information anonymous, right? Wait, why do I have mutual friends with you? Someone named... Donna Gardener? I can’t believe—

Anonymous has ended the call.

Our team quickly tracked

this user’s Facebook to an e-mail account, leading to an AOL Instant Messenger Archive, then a QR Code showing an IP address, which finally pointed to a suburban dwelling in rural Michigan. Our researchers quickly boarded the nearest flight to Detroit and then took a local bus to this location. They were greeted by a middle-aged woman who, after a short discussion, reluctantly let them in. She led them down the stairs of her home into the basement where the shocking truth was found: Gary. It was Gary all along. Who is Gary? Let him tell you:

“Hi, I’m Gary. I live in a basement, and, yeah, I make all the memes. All of them. I’m the only guy who makes them,” he said. “It started in 1998 when I found this really funny picture of a gremlin and put a caption under it saying, ‘When you’re all out of apples.’ It pretty much took off from there.”

So there you have it. Next time you’re scrolling through Reddit, and you see a hilarious Megamind meme, or your disgruntled aunt sends you a minion meme, or your friends on Discord joke about an ironic Among Us meme, keep in mind that it’s Gary. It’s all Gary.

Tall People Everywhere Diminished by COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effects

By JASMINE WANG

After millions of Americans across the United States have been vaccinated against COVID-19, the shocking news of unexpected side effects diminishes the hopes of the sheeple who have received this vaccine. Pfizer, Moderna, and the other one have all admitted that their vaccine comes with cruel, unforeseen side effects that will leave people everywhere grasping for straws—literally, once they’re too short to reach their too-tall cabinets, that is. What’s that, you say? This is already a problem short

Fauci, the science behind this new phenomenon, dubbed “ShortVID-19,” is incredibly complex; I’m no Science writer, thank God, but I did take Banfield’s biology course in freshman year, so I kind of know what I’m talking about. Scientists say that in the process of creating the vaccine, the RNA was genetically modified to diminish the telomeres of the height gene X Æ A-12. Much like Dream’s various scandals, these modifications then rapidly spread throughout the entire body. From there, excess cytoplasm of the cells is released in the form of sweat and that weird

duced to kindergarten nightmares. I had the chance to speak to him in an exclusive, off-the-record interview. While I couldn’t make out much of what he said, what I did hear sounded like an angry mouse squeaking and crying. How utterly pedestrian.

While we’re on the topic of celebs, Prince Philip didn’t pass away from “natural causes.” The singular jab of a needle to his fragile, choux-pastry-like skin caused him to, in one of the most extreme cases of ShortVID, rapidly shrink until one of the famed Queen’s Guards stepped on him. May he rest in peace knowing that his cause of death lives on Twitter as McDonald’s Sprite instead of the much more humiliating “shrinking and being crushed.”

Short people everywhere, new and pre-existing, are now facing the same issues of an inherently biased society that favors average-height folks. And to this grave injustice, I must say, “Haha! Sucks to be you.” For I knew from the start that all this vaccine-shmaccine bull was just a way for the short liberal agenda to win over our tall, mighty, strong Republicans.

ShortVID seeks to divide us all, diminish our bonds, and cause our stature in the world to shrink. For the first time in the history of the United States, we have become a laughingstock amongst other nations. What do you mean we’re already a laughingstock? That’s not what Fox News says!

*The Spectator may or may not be certified to provide medical advice. These statements may or may not be confirmed by the WHO (we’re still waiting to hear back, even though I sent them 10 emails in the span of five minutes). Peruse at your own risk. You must be over the age of 18 to read this article. If you are not, close this newspaper now and dispense it at your local Starbucks. Batteries not included; see store for details.

Meticulous Drug Dealer Does Market Research

By ETHAN LAM

Those in the profession of drug distribution have been facing more problems over the past few years due to a rapid shift in consumer focus. The majority of drugs, such as cocaine, methyl acetate, heroin, and opioids, sold through traditional avenues have long dominated the market when it came to the commercial sale of pleasure. However, such drugs are now disregarded in favor of homegrown substances, such as serotonin and dopamine. According to tentative research conducted by some experts, this shift in market interest is largely due to a new trend where people “care about their health,” and “seek pleasure from fulfillment in life rather than substance abuse.” This selfish behavior on behalf of consumers has led to a decline in the traditional art of drug dealing, with many claiming that it is a dead tradition of a bygone era.

In contrast to his failing peers, renowned drug dealer Jackhammer Boomerang (Jordan Barakat University, M.A., Drug Dealing Studies), has been flourishing despite the unfavorable conditions. When asked about his success, Boomerang replied, “The shifting markets require you to keep your business model fluid. In today’s society, old business models don’t work. Once tried-and-true tactics like asking random kids off the street whether or not they wanted to try something exciting cannot run a sustainable profit margin anymore. It’s that simple.”

Boomerang elaborated that market research is the most necessary skill for someone within his profession. “You need to find out what your consumers are willing to pay for and any concerns that they might understandably have. I have found that many of my customers are worried about where I source my products,” he said. “As

such, instead of importing from foreign countries where labor is cheaper, I walk down to the warehouse by the docks every Tuesday and crib the supply of the junkies that live there. It’s sustainably sourced, which is sure to please my environmentally-conscious customers.”

Boomerang also gave insight into how he specifically gathers customer data and compiles it into usable information. He uses customer satisfaction surveys to receive feedback and judge demand for specific products. From there, the hundreds of data points are sorted into usable form by a machine. The machine, an ingenious contraption created by three people on Adderall shoved inside a box, is capable of as many as 400 incorrect computations a minute.

Boomerang emphasized that the customers can benefit from his business’s recent prosperity as well. “Just last week, I met an impoverished family. They couldn’t even afford to feed themselves. I knew that I couldn’t stand by and do nothing, so I sent them a care package full of opioids. It warmed my heart because I knew the spirit of community and brotherhood was with them that day. It just goes to show how innate knowledge of your consumer base will benefit everyone in the community.”

Boomerang hopes that his story will inspire the entrepreneurs of future generations to enter the industry. “I’ve always wanted to give back to the community that supported me throughout all these years and the best way to do that is through education. We need to empower our youth by ensuring that they understand what running a business entails. There is a distinct lack of young people planning to enter the esteemed field of drug dealing and that’s something that needs to change. I intend to make sure that happens.”

For I knew from the start that all this vaccine-shmaccine bull was just a way for the short liberal agenda to win over our tall, mighty, strong Republicans.

people deal with? Sorry, I need you to speak up: I can’t hear you from up here—I proudly went vaccine-free.

Enough shilling. Let’s get down into the gory, life-altering side effects that will knock you off your high horse and into smaller-sized pants and shirts. According to recent studies, if you are above five feet tall, the COVID-19 vaccine will alter your height...toward the destination of Lil Nas X’s famous pole. You heard that right; regardless of whether you chose Pfizer, Moderna, or that other one, the side effects are universally stunting. People over five feet tall are reporting a shocking regression in height normally only displayed by Danny Devito and people over 60.

According to Dr. Anthony

eye crust you find in the morning.

Here at The Spectator, we pride ourselves on truthful, insightful commentary. What goes unmentioned in most “real” articles is that this is just the evil plots of 30 years of liberal lies finally catching up to us. Their “equality” is showing up now. Forget tracking devices in your vaccines: when everyone is exactly five feet tall, who needs tracking devices? These snowflakes want to take our hard-earned inches from us, but we say no!

Actor and producer Samuel L. Jackson, known for his tall stature and deep, baritone voice, is one of the most famous cases of ShortVID-19 and deeply laments his loss of height and voice. No longer will he be able to act the cackling villain of doom; now, he has been re-

The Mice Squeak for You

By KRISTA PROTEASA

I know you've been feeling lonely cooped up in your little quarters all day, but don't worry. You're not the only one. Remember the mice you screamed at when you saw them scurry down the hallway or make a guest appearance in your lab? Yeah, they've been indubitably lonely as well. However, now that you're all finally going back into the building, their social batteries can recharge too! In fact, just take a gander at all their excitement over these past couple of weeks right in front of room 740.

"Soda, can you believe it?" Jeanine the small mouse said to her friend Soda, another small mouse.

"Believe what, Jeanine? All you do is lie. I haven't trusted you since our 2006 cheese feud, but continue."

"Soda, go take a nap, I swear. Anyway, the children! The youth! The future of tomorrow! They've made their return!"

"Why are you talking like someone giving a motivational speech?"

"Don't start with me, Soda. The point is, the kids are back!"

"Why do I care? All they do is shout for us to 'scram' and 'stop eating the cookies before they've been placed on the very generous share table.'"

"We can work on that later, but don't you see what this means?"

"Jeanine, oh my GOD. You've asked me that like three times already. Can you please just tell me?

I'm going to see another pandemic before you do."

"Okay, rude. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is um... they're back!"

"Jeanine, TELL ME WHY I SHOULD CARE! YOU'VE STATED THE SAME SENTENCE TOO MANY TIMES. I DIDN'T CARE BEFORE, AND I DON'T KNOW WHY I WOULD AT THIS POINT.

UNLESS THESE KIDS GOT 20 BUCKS AND CAN BUY ME SOME CHIPS OR SOMETHING, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT!"

Jeanine began to cry real mouse tears. The tears were so large her back rounded under the weight. As she started her trek down the seventh-floor hallway in defeat, Soda stopped her, of course.

"Jeanine, oh jeez, Jeanine. Look, I'm sorry. Tell me about the kids."

"Y-you wouldn't care," Jeanine managed in between sobs.

"No, please, Jeanine. What's up with them? I'm sorry I lashed out at you. It's just that if I didn't see

those kiddos soon, I might forget what stress and anxiety look like. Jeanine, please stop crying. Please, Jeanine."

Slowly, Jeanine steadied her breath and blubbered: "I—I just miss all their stupid jokes and coffee cups. Gosh, I really miss their coffee leftovers."

"Oh, me too, Jeanine." "I wasn't finished. I also miss

"It was awesome! Buffet time all the time!"

"Oh, Jeanine, you're so right." To mend their broken hearts

over not being able to taste all the miraculous crumbs that would line the half floor, Jeanine planned a mini-prom. But shh, don't tell Soda yet. She doesn't know.

"Hey, Soda?" "What's up, Genie in a bottle?"

"Interesting nickname, but okay. I just wanted to ask if you'd like to go to prom with me? I mean, since the kids won't be here, it'll just be the two of us? I'll bring some chemicals from the labs upstairs. I mean, they're colorful, so they probably taste good. Oh, I miss all the lab spills too! Anyway, yeah, that's all I got."

"Jeanine, before I say anything, there's a freshman behind you."

"OMG NO, WHERE?"

"I'm just messing with you. It's the weekend, silly!" Soda cackled as she rolled around the tiles.

"That's not funny... You know

I don't know my days of the week."

"And I don't know how to find motivation anymore. Join the club!" She continued to cackle.

"Please just answer me..."

"OH! Right. Yeah, of course I'd want to go, are you kidding? The only reason I brought up the kids was to try to segue into all their canceled activities, including their dances and such, so I could ask you first. But it seems like ya beat me to it. You always ruin my plans."

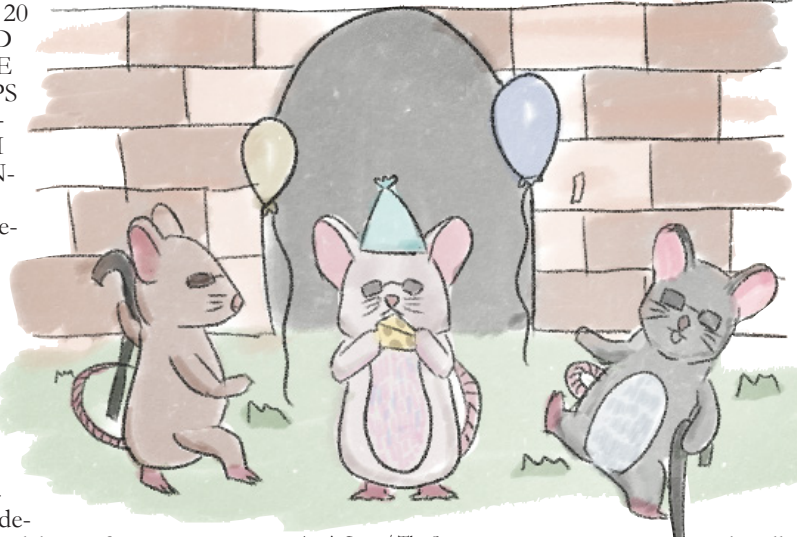
"You're so cruel. That's what I love about you."

"Now you're getting sappy. How 'bout we go hit the Hudson?"

"I see you've been keeping up with the Humor department of The Spectator, haven't you?"

"Literally the only reason I don't crawl up all those kids' legs is that they write funny things."

And so as the pair made their way to the infamous stairwell of infamous activities, they reminisced on all the times kids yelled at them, cried at them, and even tried to kill them with a College Algebra II and Trigonometry (or whatever the heck that textbook name is) textbook. When all is said and done, they still missed the presence of those relatively tall children roaming their halls. Legend has it that if you sit real quietly in the Hudson on the seventh floor, you'll hear a variety of squeaks, which, as you now know, come from none other than our favorite rodent pair: Soda and Jeanine.



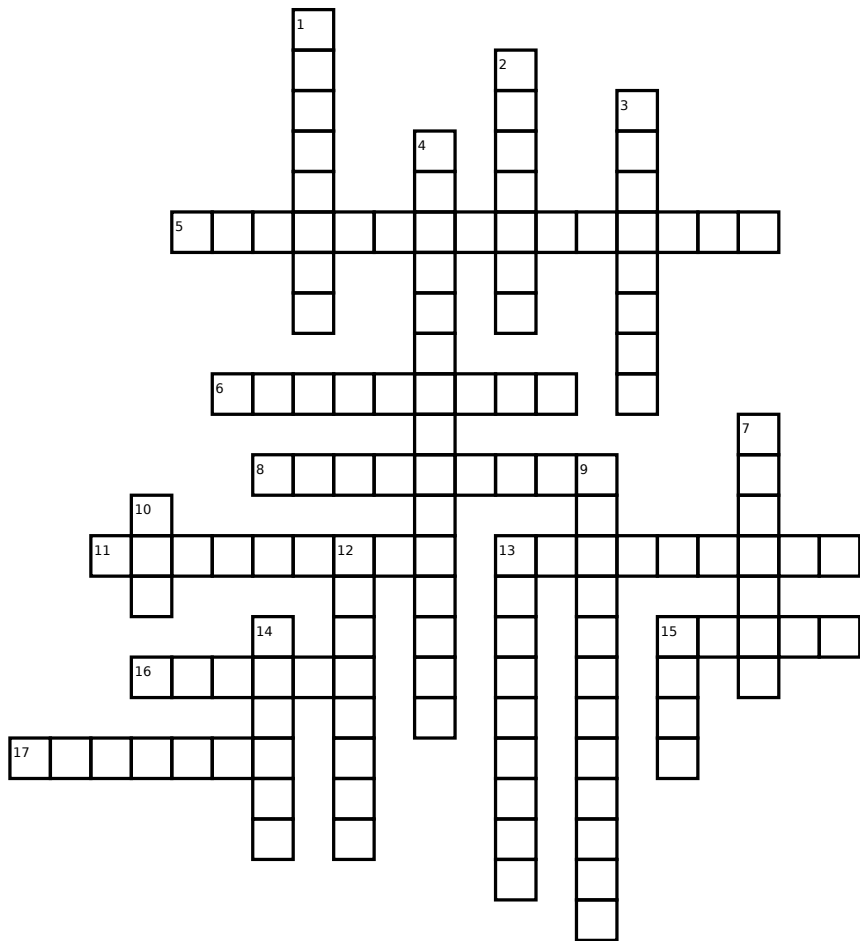
Annie Lam / The Spectator

their TikToks in the Hudson, the fluffy scrunchies they'd always drop, their vehement hatred for the cafeteria oranges, and the absolutely wondrous half-floor."

"Hey, Jeanine? You do know that half-floor was riddled with crumbs and absolutely disgusting, right?"

Clubs and Pubs Galore

Stuyvesant is a school known for its variety of extracurricular offerings. Can you decode our clues to these activities, teams, clubs, and organizations?



- Down:**
- Solves problems and makes friends (and solves more problems)
 - Is a delegate of 10 different countries every year
 - No instruments, just vibes (and good voices)
 - Talks fast, cuts too many cards, does dramatic performances
 - Door-opening
 - "Bridging the gap" (dictatorship)
 - Our school's theater group, abbr.
 - Girls' racketing!
 - The pulse of the student body
 - Had missing stoles (and a broken website)
 - _____ing in the shower

- Across:**
- Competitive scienceing
 - Helps one send flowers and candy to oneself
 - Find them in Van Cortlandt Park
 - A club that might be measured in beats per minute
 - "We're in"
 - After-school dance routine run-throughs
 - Ms. Shamazov's cult
 - Younger sibling havens

Crossword answers [here](#)

Caption Contest



Sabrina Chen / The Spectator

"When the Shamrock Shake is sus"
@yaqinrah

Sports

NFL

Is More Football Good?

By MAX SCHNEIDER

It's the best feeling in the world. You wake up on Sunday morning, eat breakfast, and proceed to spend the rest of the day watching football. The quintessential football Sunday is a day of raw emotion, epic plays, and good times with friends. So when I heard that the NFL was going to add a 17th game to the regular season, I was ecstatic. It seemed like a win all around. Players will get paid more, owners get to sell more tickets, and most importantly, we get more football Sundays. However, that was at first glance. When you look deeper, in fact, not only is playing more football not good, but it is also actually quite bad for everybody, including the fans.

Fans:

As mentioned, more football seems great for the fans, and on the surface, it is. It's one more week of the sport we love watching, so how could it be bad? Well, adding a 17th game will actually not improve the watching experience. Fantasy football enthusiasts are well aware of the annoyance of teams benching players after they clinch the playoffs. Get ready for this problem to be worse. With an extra game, the top teams will have an extra game to pull away from the others. This addition means that not only will more teams rest players, but some teams may also rest

them for two weeks rather than one. The next casualty is interesting games. With more playoff spots being decided before the season ends, we will have more useless games. Last season, for instance, if there was an extra week, 16 teams would have already been eliminated from the playoffs. However, in the actual last week of the season, 14 teams were eliminated. This change is slight, but it will cheapen football Sunday.

Players:

The party this change is most obviously detrimental to is the players. They suffer from the biggest con of the whole situation. Football is a high contact sport, and by the end of a season, players are badly beat up and need months to recover. Adding an extra game will exacerbate this condition, likely causing more injuries and subsequently contributing to more lifelong disabilities. The other main drawback for players is the shortening of the preseason. As fans, the preseason may be annoying. It's a teasing month of watching a team's third string quarterback throw wobbly passes over slow linebackers to a receiver who may very well drop the ball. The regular season is obviously way more appealing than the preseason. However, the preseason was never intended to be for the fans' benefit. It has been to give that slow linebacker or unheralded receiver a chance

to be great. It gave undrafted rookies like Warren Moon, Night Train Lane, and Antonio Gates a chance to earn roster spots. Without the preseason, these greats probably would have never played pro football. These players are icons of the game, and keeping the preseason preserves that opportunity.

The Game of Football:

The NFL has always had a strong competitive balance. Symmetrical schedules, hard salary caps, and clear-cut tampering rules have created a parity between teams unparalleled by other sports. However, almost every major sports league has one thing in common: an even number of games in the schedule. This number means that teams can play the same number of games at home and not. With 17 games, the NFL has to give half the teams an extra home game, putting them at an inherent advantage. Additionally, the NFL has the hard task of assigning every team an additional opponent. Their solution to this challenge is to give every team an opponent in the opposite conference, matched based on the standings from the previous year and excluding teams that are already on a team's schedule. This method creates another inherent disadvantage, this time for the better teams in the league. It also is a bad solution because it will add many more games between awful teams to the sched-

ule. As a New Yorker, seeing the Jets being given a game against the Eagles and the Giants game against the Dolphins just means two more boring games preventing me from watching playoff football.

Owners:

You may recall that I said that more games seemed better for everybody. This claim is false. It is good for one group and one group only, and that group consists of only 32 people—the most powerful 32 people in the league. This group is the owners. From this deal, they get the only thing they want: more money. This deal comes down to the fact that more games mean more TV deals and more tickets sold. They don't care about the safety of the players, they don't care about the integrity of the game of football, and they don't care about your fantasy team. The owners have not really had to justify this change. They are leaving that explanation to Commissioner Roger Goodell.

Goodell has justified the increase in schedule length in several ways. The first was by saying, "Well, I have to start by saying it's not more games [...] We're still within the 20-game format. That was something that was important to the NFLPA. And that was part of our structure of the CBA." However, the notion that preseason games and regular season games are equal is question-

able. They exist for entirely different reasons, they are played by different people, and the people care much less about one rather than the other. Goodell's other reason is that fewer preseason games will actually decrease injuries. However, this argument does not take into account that far more players participate in a given preseason game than in the regular season, and regardless of when the first game is, there will be more injuries since players' bodies are not ready for the stress of a season. A good example of this effect was in 2020, when COVID-19 canceled the preseason. At the beginning of the season, an unprecedented number of players got injured, including many season-ending injuries.

Football is a sport of balance. A team can't win without a good defense, and it can't win without a good offense. A quarterback can throw the perfect pass, but the receiver needs to catch it. We can't watch football without players, and we can't watch football without someone organizing it. The relationship between the owners and the players cannot become one of tug-of-war. If the owners keep prioritizing money, the players and the game will suffer, and as a fan, that consequence is unacceptable. So before you say that more football is good, take a step back, because is it?

NBA

The Brooklyn Nets: Success at What Cost?

By SATHIRTHA MONDAL

It's no doubt that the current NBA pales in comparison to the past. Over the years, the league has depreciated from games with admirable physicality and intense rivalries to what the veterans can only call "soft." Players can only play with so much heart since a little vigor or bump will earn them a foul. And who can forget flopping? On top of that, this era of the NBA is known for superteams, franchises containing several All-Stars and eliminating nearly all competition in the league.

A lot has changed since the 2007-2008 Boston Celtics, the first modern NBA superteam, posted the best single-season turnaround in NBA history and third-most wins in franchise history and won their first championship since 1986. The championship team was led by the triumvirate, or the "Big Three," composed of Paul Pierce, Ray Allen, and Kevin Garnett, and no successor has quite been like it.

The Brooklyn Nets had always been the "little brother" franchise, playing second fiddle to the New York Knicks, New York's pride and joy and primary team until the summer of 2019. Of course, that all changed when All-Stars Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving joined the Nets as free agents. Durant signed a four-year \$164 million deal with the Nets while Irving agreed on a four-year \$141 million deal. In a matter of weeks, the Nets went from struggling to close out games to headlining the championship discussion.

Durant was coming off a three-year run with the Golden State Warriors including back-to-back championships and NBA Finals MVP titles in the 2017 and 2018 NBA seasons when he joined the Nets. Nonetheless, Durant never received his coveted validation as he played in the shadow of the other members of the Warriors' All-Star "Fantastic Four," Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson, and Draymond Green. However, a title in Brooklyn would secure his legacy—Durant would have single-handedly changed the narrative of the New York underdog.

As for Irving, he felt he had failed as a leader with the Celtics and expressed the need to relocate from Boston. He also stated that the death of his grandfather compelled him to relinquish his commitment to basketball and re-evaluate his priorities in life. Brooklyn proved to be in his best interest as it offered him a clean slate to restart and allowed the New Jersey native to play closer to home.

Now, these two stars have already had complicated legacies, and joining the Nets was meant to be a fresh start, a chance to build an untainted legacy. However, the Nets' pursuit of a superteam has only complicated matters, casting the Nets as the NBA's newest "villains."

Prior to the recent acquisitions, the Nets were already a serious contender with Durant and Irving serving as a robust foundation, supplemented by Joe Harris, DeAndre Jordan, and several other talented players. However, the Nets saw potential in a new

"Big Three," and noticing James Harden's issues in Houston, the Nets carried out a historic four-team trade, landing the former MVP and eight-time All-Star in Brooklyn. Since then, Harden has proven to be a serious threat on the court as he earned the title of Eastern Conference Player of the Month in February, averaging 25.2 points, 7.7 rebounds, and 11.0 assists per game.

The Nets had already assembled a deadly collection of players, arguably one of the most formidable trios in the history of the game. But that didn't stop the Nets from seeking out more firepower. While they boasted the second-best record in the Eastern Conference, the Nets erred on the side of caution, recruiting even more of the biggest names in the game.

Soon after securing the Irving-Durant-Harden trio, the Nets signed six-time All-Star forward Blake Griffin in free agency. Though many were discontent, insisting that Brooklyn was acquiring too many stars, the veteran forward dismissed any criticism. While Griffin came out of one of the worst seasons in his career with the Detroit Pistons, averaging 12.3 points and 5.2 rebounds per game, he offers versatility and depth on the frontcourt to the Nets, improving their interior presence and rebounding abilities. Furthermore, standing at 6'9", Griffin fills the Nets' needs for sizable men on the court after the team dealt Jarrett Allen in the four-team trade to acquire Harden.

The Nets had already been se-

rious contenders, but their NBA buyout earned them a label as the "Yankees of the NBA." Nevertheless, the franchise expressed indifference to the perception of their team, soon acquiring yet another All-Star, a seven-time All-Star to be exact: power forward LaMarcus Aldridge. The addition was the latest case of the Nets' championship appeal, but Aldridge recently retired due to his Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, which involves a rapid heartbeat and posed a serious threat to his health while playing basketball.

Regardless of Aldridge's retirement, the Nets have received widespread backlash as many in the NBA world are upset by the lethal superteam they have built. ESPN's Stephen A. Smith even equated the Nets' actions to "buying the championship," expressing abhorrence that the Nets are merely buying everybody with no regard for competition. Many analysts have even pointed fingers at Los Angeles Lakers legend LeBron James, insisting that the Nets have pursued a superteam to dethrone the current champions, the Lakers, who boast a talented roster of their own, including power forward Anthony Davis and center Andre Drummond.

Despite the team's endless potential, the "Big Three" has constantly been broken up due to injuries and the COVID-19 pandemic, taking away time from building the necessary chemistry between the players. Durant missed 23 straight games due to a left hamstring strain. As he neared his return, Harden was forced to

check out of a game due to a hamstring injury and was expected to be off the court for 10 days. Irving has also been in and out the lineup, missing several games due to health and safety protocols and personal reasons. Regardless, the team has been quietly confident, looking forward to dominating once the stars are all reunited on the court.

The Nets have become clear, perhaps even unstoppable, contenders for the NBA title, but they are also under pressure as this year is now a must-win championship season. They also recognize that the overwhelming talent on the roster is not enough to win and that the title will not be earned without a fight. However, the inexorable offensive force the Nets have put together has defeated the purpose of many of the players joining the Nets in the first place. Durant, Harden, and Irving sought to fill the voids in their careers by joining the Nets. In addition, they also expressed their need to reconnect with and develop their game by starting over. As dominant as he is, Harden has yet to win a championship ring, and Irving's wins have been in the shadow of one of the greats: James. Durant made an incredible run with the Warriors only to receive criticism for the immense talent by his side, namely Curry, Green, and Thompson. Now, with the addition of Griffin, it is clear the Nets will stop at nothing to win, and at this point, they cannot afford to stop as they must secure the championship or risk eternally tainting their legacy.

NCAA

March Madness: Just 11 Months Away

By BENJAMIN HAMEL

At the end of March Madness, we all wish we could rewind to the start and watch all the games over again, make a better bracket, and most importantly, relive the thrills for the first time. March Madness 2022 is less than a year away, and all sports fans hope that the next tournament will live up to the heights of 2021. Fans had everything they could ask for in a tournament. From the great Cinderella stories to the game-winning buzzer beaters, this tournament was surely one for the ages:

Most Outstanding Player: Davion Mitchell, Baylor University

Davion Mitchell was the best player in the tournament. The rising star was the best playmaker for Baylor, the national champion, and averaged the most assists: 5.8 per game. Davion Mitchell was also the best slasher, and his arsenal of creative finishes was on full display throughout the tournament, earning him comparisons to Utah Jazz All-Star Donovan Mitchell. Named Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, Davion Mitchell was guarding the opposing team's best guard and created havoc. As he was the most athletic and dynamic player on the court in almost every game, he created run outs for easy baskets on the other end and was clearly the most valuable player on

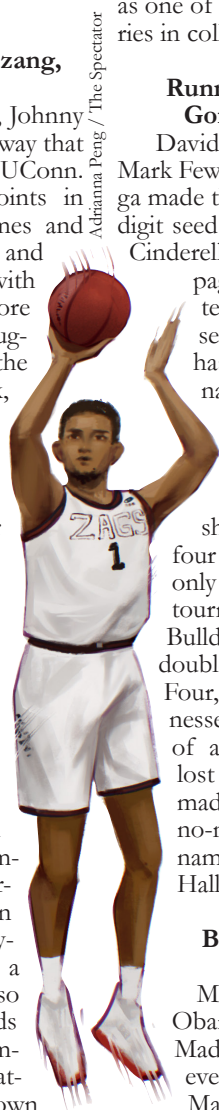
the winning team.

Runner Up: Johnny Juzang, UCLA

A school hero forever, Johnny Juzang carried UCLA the way that Kemba Walker carried UConn. Juzang averaged 28.5 points in his most recent two games and gave his blood, sweat, and tears against Gonzaga with his game-tying shot before being outdone by Jalen Suggs's heroics. He carried the UCLA roster on his back, and though the way the Bruins lost was heart-breaking, Juzang's performance will be one that sports fans remember for a long time.

Coach of the Tournament: Scott Drew, Baylor University

What a run. What a turnaround. What a coach. When Scott Drew took the Baylor coaching job in 2003, someone on the Baylor basketball team literally murdered his teammates. At his press conference, Drew vowed to win a championship with Baylor. The world called him a dreamer, and rightfully so until Drew defied all odds and won that fateful championship, albeit 18 years later. This journey will go down



Adrianna Peng / The Spectator

as one of the best turnaround stories in college basketball history.

Runner Up: Mark Few, Gonzaga University

David has become a goliath. In Mark Few's first two years, Gonzaga made the Sweet 16 as a double-digit seed two times. They were a Cinderella story and made front page news as the great team that we all love to see. Since then, Gonzaga has made the NCAA tournament in 18 straight seasons and was a top three seed eight times. The Zags have also made the National Championship game twice in the last four tournaments, being the only team to do so. In this tournament, the Gonzaga Bulldogs won every game by double digits prior to the Final Four, during which fans witnessed one of the best games of all time before the team lost to the Bears. Few has made a no-name school in a no-name town a household name, and he is no doubt a Hall of Fame coach.

Best Cinderella: Oral Roberts

Max Abmas. Kevin Obanor. These two March Madness legends will forever be ingrained in March Madness history with their

terrific performances. Abmas averaged 26.7 points per game throughout the tournament as he delivered for his team night in and night out. The great defensive play of Obanor helped slow down the likes of John Castleton and E.J. Liddell in the tournament while still producing like a madman on the offensive side of the ball. The lethal combination of these two helped create the highest average seed in the Sweet 16 (5.88). This Oral Roberts team will be in the record books as one of only two 15 seeds to make the Final Four in the history of the tournament.

Runner Up: Oregon State

Prior to the Beavers' loss against Houston, Oregon State won six games straight, including three straight to qualify for the NCAA tournament. Senior guard Ethan Thompson carried this team on his back as they beat the future number one pick in Cade Cunningham from Oklahoma State. The Beavers were led by outstanding free throw shooting and stellar defense, often the winning formula for an underdog. Hopefully, the Beavers can replicate this performance in the future as they were the first 12 seed to make the Elite Eight since 2002.

Biggest Disappointment: University of Illinois

The hype for this Illini squad was off the charts and rightfully

so. Coming off the Big 10 tournament championship, the sky was the limit for this team. With the likes of Ayo Dosunmu, Kofi Cockburn, Trent Frazier, and Andre Curbelo, Illinois was the second most picked team to win the national championship. Enter Loyola University Chicago. Led by Cameron Krutwig, the Red Ramblers upset Illinois in the first game of the Round of 32. Illinois was fighting to win their first championship of all time and fell well short of the expectations when it mattered most.

Runner Up: University of Iowa

Coming off of a Wooden award-winning season, Luka Garza seemed destined for greatness in the NCAA tournament. The Iowa Hawkeyes legend has never reached the second weekend of the NCAA tournament, and this year seemed like the year that Garza would lead the Hawkeyes over the hump and into the second weekend, possibly even the Final Four. However, the likes of Chris Duarte and Will Richardson embarrassed Garza and the Hawkeyes in the second round. Garza erupted for 36, yet the rest of the squad could not pick up the slack to help Iowa win. As a result, the Iowa Hawkeyes became one of the biggest disappointments in the tournament, as the Big 10 had an abysmal tournament as a whole.

NFL

NFL Draft 2021 Preview

By KRISH GUPTA and AIDAN FINGERET

After a free agency blitz, the NFL will be back in the news this month with the 2021 NFL Draft, in which teams will pick their future stars. There will be sleepers, there will be busts, there will be memes, and there will be stories. No matter where each player ends up, this draft is sure to be an interesting one.

Mock Draft for the Top 11 Picks

1. Jacksonville Jaguars: Trevor Lawrence, Clemson University: No-brainer; Jacksonville gets their guy. Lawrence is the best quarterback prospect in a decade, and the Jaguars need to start building a supporting cast. This pick has been set in stone since Urban Meyer took the job.

2. New York Jets: Zach Wilson, Brigham Young University: With Sam Darnold out of the fold, BYU's Wilson is the best option available for the Jets' current and future success.

3. San Francisco 49ers: Justin Fields, Ohio State University: The Mac Jones and Trey Lance hype ends up being a smokescreen, and the 49ers take the consensus number three quarterback who just so happens to be perfect for a Kyle Shanahan offense.

4. Atlanta Falcons: Ja'Marr Chase, Louisiana State University: This may not seem like an immediate need, but Julio Jones is getting older and more injury prone, and Calvin Ridley will already be 27 by the time he signs his next contract. The Falcons need young playmakers on the outside and are getting one of the youngest and best receivers in this class.

5. Cincinnati Bengals: Penei Sewell, University of Oregon: The Bengals need to give quarterback Joe Burrow the tools he needs to succeed coming off an injury, and a

good offensive line is the first step. 6. Miami Dolphins: Devonta Smith, University of Alabama: With Sewell off the board, the Dolphins get a future All-Pro receiving threat for Tua Tagovailoa in Heisman-winner Smith. Already having an upper-tier tight end in Mike Gisecki, the Dolphins will be fine passing on the best tight end in the draft, Kyle Pitts out of Florida.

7. Detroit Lions: Trey Lance, North Dakota State University: This pick may seem surprising given the Lions' recent trade for Jared Goff, but he can be cut without sacrificing a tremendous amount of cap space as soon as 2023. Lance needs time to develop after only starting for one season in college, and he will get that time behind Goff in Detroit.

8. Carolina Panthers: Kyle Pitts, University of Florida: With Darnold's arrival in Carolina, the Panthers have no need for a quarterback. Carolina is light on the tight end position and has a history of good tight ends (Greg Olsen). Pitts is an athletic anomaly and generational talent.

9. Denver Broncos: Mac Jones, University of Alabama: The Drew Lock experiment is not working out in Denver, and the Broncos are ready to compete next season as long as they get a quarterback. Jones is arguably the most pro-ready quarterback in the draft, even if his ceiling is lower than the four quarterbacks taken above him.

10. Dallas Cowboys: Patrick Surtain II, University of Alabama: The Cowboys' biggest need is at cornerback, and Surtain will be elite. It's that simple.

11. New York Giants: Micah Parsons, Penn State University: Having taken care of their secondary and receiving core in free agency, the Giants will choose to shore up their linebacking core. Putting off

offensive line help for day two, the Giants will select one of the highest upside prospects of the entire draft in Parsons.

Two prospects you're high on, one you're low on

KG: Both of the prospects I'm high on are named Kyle and are coming out of the University of Florida. The first is quarterback Kyle Trask. [Pro Football Focus](#) has him as only the sixth ranked quarterback prospect in the 2021 class, and [CBS Sports](#) has him as low as seventh. These low rankings are despite his record-setting 2020 season, in which he [led the nation](#) with 43 touchdown passes and was second in passing yards. There are reasonable concerns over his one-dimensional play style. He has very limited mobility, a direction opposite of where the league is heading. Though legs certainly help a quarterback's case, plenty of quarterbacks who wouldn't be considered dual threats have had significant success. Another concern is his lack of a deep ball, but there are also several quarterbacks who have championed the short pass and found success. An apt comparison for Trask is Alex Smith. Alex Smith is known for the short pass, and riding this style, he has achieved a good NFL career as a starting quarterback. No matter which team selects Trask late, they will be getting a low-risk, high-ceiling player who can be a steady starter in the NFL.

The other Kyle out of the Swamp is top tight end prospect Kyle Pitts. Here's an interesting pattern over the recent Super Bowls: each matchup has featured two elite tight ends battling it out, even when the quarterbacks weren't both elite. This year it was Travis Kelce vs. Rob Gronkowski. Last year it was Kelce vs. George Kittle, despite having Jimmy Garopolo, an average quarterback at

best, behind the helm. The year before that it was Gronk again, and before that it was Gronk vs. Zach Ertz.

The tight end is the most underrated position in the league. There are so few elite tight ends that any team with a top tier tight end can compete for the playoffs and for championships. The athletic freak Pitts is a once in a generation tight end talent. If teams let Pitts slide out of the top 10, they will miss out.

While I think he will be a solid NFL starter during career, I don't believe the hype surrounding Jaylen Waddle. While [PEF](#) has him as their second-best wide receiver prospect, it is ridiculous that Heisman winner DeVonta Smith is rated below him. Waddle evokes Henry Ruggs and John Ross, two speedsters who are solid WR2s but haven't gained their touted elite status. Teams have overrated 40 yard dashes for years. Last year, the Las Vegas Raiders surprisingly took Ruggs early, despite options such as Justin Jefferson and CeeDee Lamb still on the board. Which-ever team is clouded by Waddle's speed will regret taking him over DeVonta Smith for years to come.

AF: I am going to start with the prospect that I am lower on because I strongly disagree with Krish's admiration of Trask. Trask is one of the least mobile quarterbacks in recent memory both outside and inside the pocket. It's the pocket movement that makes other slow quarterbacks, such as Tom Brady, effective, and Trask has terrible pocket movement. On top of his limited mobility, Trask's arm strength is not very good and was consistently bailed out by Florida's insanely talented receiving core. In Trask's two years as starter, the Gators have had six receivers (including Pitts) who have been drafted or will be drafted. The ludicrous

amount of talent that Trask threw to and the offense heavy Southeastern Conference that he played in inflated his stats and stock so much that a player who should go no earlier than the sixth round is getting second-round buzz.

My favorite prospect who isn't a part of the top tier is Jaelan Phillips, the defensive end from the University of Miami. Phillips was the number one recruit coming out of high school, but due to multiple concussions, he had to take a couple of years off in college. This past season was his first back from injury, and he reminded everyone why he was such a highly touted recruit. Though his injury history is scary, for a team to pass on such a dynamite talent for fear of injury in a sport where any player's career can be over in a single play makes absolutely zero sense.

Another prospect I really like is Rondale Moore, the receiver out of Purdue University. As a freshman, Moore was a consensus All-American, and the only reason he did not keep racking up accolades was because of injuries. Moore's injuries scare me a bit more than Phillip's because they are nagging hamstring and lower body injuries, which, as Julio Jones showed this past season, can really derail a player. As long as Moore is able to stay healthy, he is a versatile weapon for whoever drafts him. He fits the Tyreek Hill mold of receiver in that he is very small but does not lack muscle and is very quick and shifty with the ball in his hands. Hill is a bit high of a projection for Moore, but whichever team drafts him will be improving their offensive potency immensely.

With the draft quickly approaching, watch out for the storylines and the stars as teams select players that will be the cornerstones of NFL franchises for years to come.

Sports

Sports Editorial

Sergio Agüero's Legacy at Manchester City

By SHAFIUL HAQUE

Even the most passive soccer fans have almost certainly heard of Manchester City, an English club that's been on the rise in the 21st century. The Abu Dhabi United Group purchased the club as part of a rebuilding project in 2008 and aided City by funding for player transfers and budgets. Eventually, City became part of the City Football Group, a holding company that manages soccer clubs. One legend for the club, 32-year-old striker Sergio Agüero, joined City during their takeover transition. Since joining in 2011, Agüero has helped City win 13 trophies, including four Premier League titles. With the new generation of City players, Agüero is departing Manchester City after 10 successful seasons in the Premier League. But there's no denying that Agüero has truly made an important impact on Manchester City's rise to the top.

Agüero joined Manchester City in July 2011 from Spanish giants Atlético Madrid. Under manager Roberto Mancini, the

Argentinian was favored to play as a second striker, behind center-forward Edin Džeko. Agüero marked his debut with two goals and an assist off the bench against Swansea FC. He continued this good run of form in the league, quickly becoming a pivotal player for City. On the final day of the season, Manchester City and rivals Manchester United were tied on points in the Premier League, with City leading on goal difference (giving them the tiebreaker over the Red Devils). Manchester United won against Fulham 1-0, meaning City had to win their match against Queens Park Rangers to win the Premier League. Though the team found themselves 2-1 down, Džeko and Agüero scored in injury time to win the game and Manchester City's first Premier League title. Agüero's last minute goal is seen as an iconic moment in soccer history, with the Argentinian taking off his shirt and celebrating with his teammates in front of the stadium.

City's first Premier League trophy gave the club momentum moving forward, with Agüero

winning Manchester City Player of the Year in his first season. Though the striker began to suffer from frequent knee and calf injuries, he has been deadly in front of goal when healthy. His impressive performances in the league linked him with clubs such as Real Madrid FC, but Agüero explained how he was content in Manchester. "I'm very happy at City, and I feel appreciated and loved here, which means a lot to me," he said in an interview. "It's been barely more than a year and a half since I've arrived, and sometimes I feel like I've been here for all my life." City retained their position in the top four, and with new manager Manuel Pellegrini in charge, the club won the PL again in the 2013-2014 season. Agüero eventually switched to a center-forward position, which suited the Argentinian's lethal finishing ability. In the 2014-2015 season, Agüero racked up 26 goals and eight assists in the league, which won him the Premier League Golden Boot, the award given to the player with the most goals at the end of the season.

In 2016, Pellegrini left City at the expiration of his contract, and renowned former FC Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola took charge. Premier League fans knew that Agüero was the team's talisman, and a world-class manager like Guardiola would respark the former's goal scoring. Although City did not achieve much in terms of trophies in the 2016-2017 season, Agüero remained their top scorer in all competitions for three consecutive seasons. In the next season, Manchester City won the Premier League for their third time in the decade, with Agüero their top scorer yet again, scoring 33 goals in all competitions. The Cityzens were dubbed "The Centurions" by setting an English top flight record for most points in a season. The following season, City won four domestic trophies including the Premier League, with Agüero playing a huge part. It was around this time that many were starting to recognize the Argentinian as one of the greatest players of the modern Premier League era.

Unfortunately, the last two

years have seen Agüero in and out of the squad, with the striker dealing with consistent injuries. With the rest of the club's attackers in their primes, Agüero has struggled to break into the first team squad. Thus, the Argentinian and the club have agreed that it is for the best that he finds a new club for the upcoming season. However, Guardiola still commends Agüero's service to the club, [explaining](#), "So it's the legend, the best striker this club has ever had for this century through the years, but is irreplaceable in the souls, in the hearts, in the minds of our fans, of our people, of the players [who] played alongside him and all the managers who worked with him." It's no secret that Agüero has been instrumental in the rise of Manchester City, playing his part in the goals and establishing himself in England with consistent performances. With many clubs, including FC Barcelona, looking to sign him, fans around the world hope Agüero can rechannel his past form and display the skill and expertise he once did in the Premier League.

Formula One

We Race as (M)one(y)

By KIKI CASO

After its abrupt lockdown just hours before the first free practice at Melbourne in March of 2020, Formula One (F1) returned in July with a new message. The "WeRaceAsOne" hashtag created by the sport was of no surprise, with the world battling the effects of the pandemic as well as civil unrest due to countless cases of police brutality throughout the US. Now, as the 2021 season begins, the issues that Formula One has tried to hide with a hashtag have become clearer than ever.

As not only the most successful driver but also the first Black man within Formula One, Sir Lewis Hamilton has become known for using his platform to push for many causes, including racial equality. As the season began, the Black Lives Matter movement was in full force. With the help of the other drivers, Hamilton created a video montage that was to be played just before each race while the drivers knelt (or in some cases simply stood) in front of the grid with an "End Racism" banner. The drivers also wore special T-shirts during this ceremony, with slogans like "Black Lives Matter" or "End Racism" on the front. This behavior was condoned by both F1 and the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). However, their views changed after the sport's visit to Mugello. After winning the Tuscan Grand Prix, Hamilton wore a shirt that said "Arrest the Cops Who Killed Breonna Taylor" on the front and "Say Her Name" along with a photo of Taylor on the back. The FIA quickly banned his actions and immediately changed the sporting regulation. Now, any driver who finishes on the podium must wear only racing attire until the end of all interviews. Not only did this regulation im-

mediately affect Hamilton, who finished on the podium 14 times out of the 17 grands prix he raced in, but it sent out the message that the FIA wasn't interested in Hamilton or any of the other drivers making any statements about anything other than F1 while on the podium.

This isn't the first time the sport has made it a point to silence those speaking out about the role of the sport in major injustices. Azerbaijan was added to the championship calendar in 2017 despite major protests from the general public due to the country's poor human rights record. The same happened in 2012 at the Bahrain Grand Prix, even after being canceled the previous year due to protests. This winter, the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix is set to join the calendar as well, with many expecting the new track to become the next Tilke-drome—even though it is only because they paid big bucks for a spot on the calendar. Not only is the track expected to be boring, but the addition of the Jeddah track to the championship has been labeled as an attempt by the Saudi Arabian government of sportswashing, in which a country will try to cover up human rights violations or controversies by hosting major sporting events. In fact, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, two major human rights organizations, have both condemned the sport for participating in what is being labeled as a PR cover-up for the country. Even drivers have been called out for their participation, with 45 organizations calling upon Hamilton to boycott the race, citing not only the country's human rights record but also its involvement in the Yemeni Civil War and the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi (a Saudi Arabian journalist and dissident). Formula One is set to have the largest calendar this year,

with a whopping 23 grands prix in the championship. However, many criticize the recent influx of cash grab tracks on the calendar. The safety of the new street circuit has also been called into contention. Formula One's electric sister championship, Formula E, hosted the Diriyah Grand Prix in February, during which the Saudi Arabian government was forced to neutralize a missile allegedly fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels over the nearby town of Riyadh. Formula One will always be forced to go to the tracks with the most money, but when a country is constantly forced to neutralize terrorist threats, it seems more than unwise to continue with an event there.

But money doesn't just affect where the drivers go. It also affects who gets race seats. The idea of teams taking on pay drivers isn't new. In fact, some of the most loved drivers in the sport, like Niki Lauda and Pastor Maldonado, fought their way onto the grid with their sponsors' checkbooks. But sometimes pay drivers take it too far, pretending their bank accounts can hide their actions from the cameras.

This year's standout pay driver has to be Nikita Mazepin. Even back in feeder series like F3, the son of Russian oligarch Dmitry Mazepin was known for crashing out and starting fights, even going as far as to give current Scuderia Ferrari Reserve driver Callum Ilott a swollen jaw and a black eye. After securing a seat on the 2021 grid with American team Haas, it was hoped that Nikita Mazepin would, for once, act professionally as is expected from all of the drivers. But before he even turned a wheel on track, he had already gotten himself into hot water.

A video was uploaded to his Instagram story in early December depicting him groping a woman he claimed was a friend

in the backseat of a car. #WeSayNoToMazepin instantly became a trending topic throughout the motorsports community. The Haas team immediately [issued a statement](#) calling the video "abhorrent," and the FIA and F1 [issued a statement](#) supporting the Haas team's decision to handle the matter internally. Nikita Mazepin initially posted an apology but quickly took it down and did not break his silence over the event until early March, in an [interview](#) in which he claimed to accept full responsibility for the incident and told reporters that he wasn't proud of his actions. When asked about what action he would take to educate himself, he simply said that "the racing should do the speaking, mostly." During his debut at the Bahrain Grand Prix, he made it through only two corners before losing control of the car and spinning out of turn three, one of the worst performances ever in the hybrid era.

The hashtag "WeSayNoToMazepin" quickly changed to the moniker "Mazespin" with media citing the rookie's claims that his racing would make up for his actions as foolish. In [leaked direct messages](#), it was revealed that he has not only acted inappropriately toward other women but also shown racism toward other drivers. For example, he [liked and responded](#) to comments which claimed that fellow rookie Yuki Tsunoda was a clown and that he "should be in a Kabuki theatre" instead of in a car. Haas has provided no further comments on Nikita Mazepin's actions since the original statement that they were "abhorrent".

The controversy surrounding his relationship with Haas doesn't just end there. The red, white, and blue car livery revealed by the American team earlier in the year seems harmless on paper. Except the red, white, and blue don't rep-

resent the United States at all. In fact, the colors are painted in the order of white, blue, and red, in large vertical stripes. This simple rendition of what is obviously the Russian flag has raised eyebrows within the paddock on the legality of the livery. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has imposed a four-year ban on athletes representing Russia in any sports, including motorsports, after it was revealed that Russian authorities erased and manipulated doping data stored in a Moscow laboratory to prevent the disqualification of Russian athletes from competitive events. Though the punishment was mainly targeted at keeping Russia out of the 2021 Summer Olympics and the 2022 Winter Olympics, it also prevents and prohibits Russian athletes from competing under the Russian flag, and should they compete, they would have to do so under a neutral flag instead. Though the livery was approved by the FIA, it has been received as a rebellion against the WADA ruling by the team's title sponsor, Uralkali, the potash producer of which Nikita Mazepin's father is the CEO.

More than ever, it seems that despite the individual efforts of teams, drivers, and even media personnel within the paddock, F1 has yet to become the diverse and morally responsible sport it tries to portray itself as. The deal between Hamilton and Mercedes-AMG Petronas to create a diversity foundation within the sport and the sport's sustainability strategy are a step in the right direction, but its venues and patrons still prove the sport's crippling lack of a moral compass when money is involved. While the sport needs the money from track hosting fees, and the teams need money from sponsors, F1 needs to realize it must be a racing spectacle, not a PR nightmare.

NCAA

From the Campus to the Court: Highlighting the NCAA's Mistreatment of Women

By **SUSIE MCKNIGHT and
ROXIE GOSFIELD**

Gender equality has been a topic of heated discussion for as long as anyone can remember. Debates about women's inferiority to men evolved into questions of women's suffrage, which have now grown into discussions about the pay gap and other injustices in the workplace. But despite how long we have been having the gender discussion, it is still shocking to see such blatant gender inequality in workplaces, especially in a major basketball league like the NCAA.

Apparently, according to the NCAA, a set of weights along with a few yoga mats is enough for women college basketball players to get an adequate workout at the most popular college basketball tournament, March Madness. Men, on the other hand, must have a full gym, complete with various dumbbells, weight racks, benches, bars, and plates in order to stay fit before and during the tournament.

Stanford University sports performance coach Ali Kershner

shared an image of the pathetic shelf of weights that the women were provided with for their San Antonio tournament on March 18, side by side with a photo of the men's full exercise room and gym that they received for their tournament in Indianapolis. Following her post, the disparity continued to be brought to light by various athletes, such as Sedona Prince, a player on the Oregon Ducks basketball team who [utilized](#) her growing platform on TikTok, as well as New York Liberty player Sabrina Ionescu, who held the NCAA responsible for the [unequal resources](#) provided to the respective tournaments on Twitter.

The NCAA then [responded](#) with a statement saying, "In part, this is due to the limited space, and the original plan was to expand the workout area once additional space was available later in the tournament." Regardless of the truth of that statement, the contrast in women's and men's equipment still lays bare the prevalence of gender discrimination in the NCAA.

The claim that the amount and

quality of equipment provided to the women's tournament were due to the lack of space in the bubble was quickly proven false. Videos were posted by various individuals at the tournament showcasing the large, empty space in the women's facility, which were quickly spread around social platforms. According to a [tweet](#) from a digital content creator for University of South Carolina women's basketball, Kendric Lindsey, the women's so-called gym was primarily empty space with the actual equipment taking up an insignificant fraction of it. It became clear that the NCAA simply used this excuse as an attempt to put down the rising backlash against its treatment of the women's basketball teams.

The publicity and controversy weren't all bad as they led to some benefits for the women's teams. Following the viral videos of the inadequate weight rooms, the NCAA resupplied them, providing a variety of bars, racks, and stands—a major upgrade from the single tiny stand of dumbbells. Viewership also improved sig-

nificantly for the women's tournament. Final Four weekend viewers [increased](#) by 14 percent compared to 2019 as Sweet 16 games saw a whopping 67 percent increase in viewership.

So, what can be done to hold the NCAA responsible? Lawfully, there is close to nothing. Title IX is an amendment that prohibits sex discrimination of any form in educational programs that receive federal funding. Unfortunately, a [Supreme Court case](#) in 1999 ruled that because the NCAA doesn't directly receive federal money, it is not subject to federal anti-discrimination laws such as Title IX. However, it is important to note that the NCAA receives dues from universities and colleges that receive federal funding, which should therefore make them subject to this law. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg shot down this argument, saying that the indirect federal funds do not make the NCAA liable under the amendment.

Following the backlash over the huge disparities in weight rooms, the NCAA's president,

Mark Emmert, hired NYC-based law firm Kaplan Hecker & Fink LLP to [conduct a review](#) evaluating resource allocation vs. gender. However, for many, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) included, this review simply wasn't going to cut it. In a letter branded as a commission on gender inequity in college sports, [the WBCA wrote](#), "The issues raised by the treatment of the teams in San Antonio are symptoms of a much larger attitude that women's sports are second class to their men's counterparts."

The NCAA's gender issue that has been brewing for years cannot be remedied by a single evaluation or a bigger weight room. It's clear that the NCAA must step back and truly reflect on the large, underlying problems that make way for the minor ones, like disparities in exercise rooms. While this situation isn't the first time the NCAA has been under fire for gender inequity, athletes everywhere are certainly hoping this time might finally be the last.

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hardest?" If they don't say [it's] me, [I'll be] mad, and I'll go back to my staff and tell them we've got to do more." Because Williams was willing to invest himself fully in his work and put in the necessary effort, he and his teams were able to enjoy success.

Though Williams was highly committed to winning on the court, he was equally passionate about his players off the court. He was a mentor who strived to build meaningful and lasting relationships with each and every

one of his players. "What I will miss the most is building relationships with players," Williams said. "Those bonds are always going to be there, and they are personal. They are not based on wins and losses but on something you gave them, something you tried to do for them, something you tried to establish in those kids that would affect their lives."

Though he experienced the highest degrees of success a college basketball coach could ever wish for, Williams described himself as someone who was constantly bothered by losses and his own flaws. He admitted that this

was the reason for his retirement, [stating](#), "I knew that the only thing that would speed [my retirement] up was if I did not feel that I was any longer the right man for the job [...] I no longer feel that I am the right man." Williams's feelings of inadequacy were likely boosted by the Tar Heels' struggles over the past two seasons, one in which the team held a losing record and the other in which the team was eliminated in the first round of the NCAA tournament for the first time in Williams's career. Though his recent struggles may have been the cause for his retirement, they should in no way taint his legacy.

As Mike Krzyzewski, the current head coach of Duke, [said](#), "Our sport was very fortunate to have [Williams] as long as it did. We have all benefited from his longevity in and commitment to coaching. His legacy is secure as one of the greatest coaches in college basketball history."

Hubert Davis was officially announced on April 5 as the next UNC basketball coach, becoming the first African American head coach in program history. Davis, a first-time college head coach, looks to follow his predecessor's steps and put his own touches on the program. "I don't feel pressure

because I'm not comparing myself to anybody," Davis [said](#). "Coach Williams is the greatest. I'm Hubert." Whether or not he feels pressure, however, Davis certainly has a tough job ahead of him as he looks to overcome the Tar Heels' recent struggles and return the program to its expected level of performance as a consistent championship contender.

Will Davis be able to reach the same heights Williams achieved or perhaps even surpass him? Maybe. But no one will ever replace Williams as the most iconic UNC coach.

Sports Editorial

Meet State-Title-Winning Quarterback... Seung Yu?

By **KRISH GUPTA**

"Football is a sport for the gigantic and muscle-bound.

A sport where you will find 325-pound defensive [linemen], 260-pound running backs, and even 220-pound quarterbacks. Then there's Seung Yu.

At just [5'6"], 145 pounds, the senior quarterback is ring leader for the High Point Andrews football team."

And so begins a [1991 article](#) from Greensboro News & Record, the local newspaper in Guilford County, North Carolina. That quarterback? No, it's not another 5'6"-er named Seung Yu. He is the man we all know today as Principal Yu. Yu led his high school to the North Carolina state title (3-A division), earning offensive MVP honors in the title match along the way.

In his senior year, Yu was the starting quarterback for T. Wingate Andrews High School, which boasts 11 [NFL alumni](#), including five-time Pro Bowl selection Adrian Wilson and College Football Hall of Fame running back Ted Brown. "My high school was really known for athletics," Yu said. "The culture was that if you were

going to join a team, you were joining high expectations, high standards."

The journey to the 1991 North Carolina State Championship was by no means easy. In the three years before Yu took the reins,

team was not expected to win [the state championship]. They thought there was going to be a pretty big drop-off," Yu said. "There was adversity we had to overcome."

At the beginning of the season, the team did have trouble put-

ting together the pieces. "We lost our first three games, so that didn't bode very well," Yu said. "There were calls for me not to be the starter." However, despite the initial challenges, teamwork and hard work at practices carried Yu and

his team forward through what would be a special season. "Unless you have the right chemistry as a team, it's really hard to win a championship," Yu said. The teamwork did end up paying off as Yu and his Red Raiders flipped the switch and went on a winning streak into the playoffs. From there, there was no looking back. "This is why I'm a big believer in momentum," Yu said. "We just got to a point where we just didn't expect to lose."

In the state title game, played in the University of North Carolina's football stadium, Yu put on a strong performance, winning offensive player of the game. "It was a great culmination to [...] end my football career, so to speak, to play at a big-time college stadium," he said.

As a Korean-American leading his North Carolina school's powerhouse football team, Yu experienced his fair share of obstacles. Yu said one important aspect fueling him was "dispelling the notion about being an Asian-American football player." At the time, Guilford County primarily lacked significant Korean representation. "I think I was one of two Asian students at my school," Yu said. "I remember even on the football

field, sometimes players and fans from the other schools would say something about [...] being Asian. They'd use some derogatory terms. [...] It was part of the dynamic of that time. I don't think I thought enough of it. [...] What I tried to do [was] channel that into how I would play."

Playing as a quarterback well under six feet, Yu adapted with his strengths in his playing style. "Lots of times I couldn't see over the line, so I had to see through the lines and/or make sure I knew I was throwing to a location. And fortunately, I had some great coaches who recognized that as well," he said. Though not a prototypical quarterback build, Yu was able to use his athletic skills in tandem with his quick thinking to reach success—so much success that he was able to secure a state championship for his high school.

Looking back, it wasn't the touchdowns, wins, or even the state championship trophy that resonate with Yu most about his high school football experience today. "My parents, who worked all the time, came to every one of my games," Yu said. "That's what I remember the most."



Sasha Socow / The Spectator

THE SPECTATOR SPORTS

NBA

Nikola Jokić: From Bomb Sirens to Cheering Arenas

By VERNON HUGHES

Raised in Yugoslavia during a period of turmoil and unathletic as a child, Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokić's rise to the NBA has been an unlikely one. Nicknamed the Joker both for his amicable and funky personality as well as the word's similarity to his name, Jokić is now one of the best big men in the NBA and has revolutionized his position with his playmaking. However, this Eastern European giant did not always seem destined for such greatness.

Born in the small city of Sombor, Serbia (then Yugoslavia) in 1995, Jokić grew up as the youngest of three brothers and lived with them, as well as his parents and grandmother, in a two-bedroom apartment. When Jokić was four years old, NATO bombed Serbia between late March and early June as a result of the Kosovo War. Jokić has spoken about living through these bombings, saying, "I remember things like sirens, bomb shelters, [and] always turning off the lights. We practically lived in the dark. Even at like 9:00 a.m., everything was turned off."

Jokić made the most of difficult circumstances by spending lots of his time playing basketball with his much taller brothers, which forced him to develop and rely on his technical skills. In fact, he played point guard in his younger years because of his technical abilities. However, Jokić was far from becoming the dominant player he is today since he was overweight due to his slightly unhealthy lifestyle, joking more recently that he was "a fat point guard" as a child. In an interview with ESPN, he claimed that he used to drink around three liters of Coca-Cola a day. He also loved

eating burek, an Eastern European meat-filled pastry, which further prohibited him from having a lean, athletic frame. His obsession with unhealthy foods did not cease after childhood. His former agent would motivate him prior to important games with the lure of chocolate cookies even when he became a professional basketball player in Serbia. Moreover, Jokić did not seem set to become a future NBA star in his younger years because he was teetering between horse racing and basketball, preventing him from fully focusing on the sport he would come to thrive in.

Despite having a questionable work ethic and dedication as a child, by the age of 17, Jokić had a professional contract with Mega Basket due to his undeniable talent and extremely tall frame. He would only appear five times in his first season, but during his second year, he played 13 games in the Serbian League and 25 in the Adriatic League, averaging over 10 points per game in both. Though his stats were not incredible, Jokić was playing against grown men, whereas most 18-year-old prospects in the US are finishing their senior years of high school or starting their freshman years in college, a leg up which the Denver Nuggets picked up on. Close to withdrawing from the 2014 NBA draft due to a lack of interest from teams, he was guaranteed by the Nuggets that they would select him in the second round if he was still available. By the time Denver had their second round pick (#41 overall), Jokić had not been selected, and Denver stayed true to their word by taking him. (Funnily enough, he slept through the draft back in Serbia, and his brother had to call him to give him the news.) Even though he recog-

nized this selection as an amazing opportunity, Jokić chose to remain with Mega Basket for one more year, during which he averaged

16.7 points, 9.8 rebounds, and 4.9 assists per game during his second year before putting up 18.5 points, 10.7 rebounds,

and tossing 8.4 assists on average per game. The next season he put up very similar numbers and made the All-Star game again as well as the All-NBA Second Team. He took the Nuggets one round further in the playoffs, losing in the Western Conference Finals to the Los Angeles Lakers, who went on to win the championship.

Heading into this season, Jokić was already considered one of the best centers in the league. Now, he is having by far the best season of his career. Averaging 26.2 points (10th), 10.9 rebounds (eighth), and 8.8 assists (fourth) per game, Jokić is the favorite to be crowned MVP. He also leads the league in Player Efficiency Rating, which takes into account a player's productivity per minute. By far the most impressive aspect of his game has been his playmaking. Being fourth in the league for assists per game and second in total assists as a center is almost unheard of. Jokić has changed the way that the center position can be played, and many fans have already started referring to him as the best passing big man of all time.

If he does go on to become MVP this season—or even possibly in the coming years as he is still just 26 years old—he will smash the record for lowest drafted player to win the award (Steve Nash and Giannis Antetokounmpo share that achievement as the 15th picks). Along with Nash, Antetokounmpo, Hakeem Olajuwon, and Dirk Nowitzki, Jokić would be only the fifth foreign player to win the award.

Is he the best second-round pick ever? Only time will tell. But for now, it is clear that he could very well be in the discussion. Not bad for a chubby kid from Serbia.



Altra Mahmud / The Spectator

15.4 points, 9.3 rebounds, and 3.5 assists per game across 24 games, swooping up the Adriatic League regular season MVP award.

Jokić took his skills to the States in 2015 when he finally joined up with the Nuggets. His rookie season, he finished third in the NBA Rookie of the Year Award voting and was nominated to the NBA All-Rookie First Team. That summer, he represented Serbia in the Rio Olympics, picking up a silver medal as they lost in the final to the United States. During the following two seasons, Jokić continued to im-

prove, averaging 16.7 points, 9.8 rebounds, and 4.9 assists in his third.

Jokić reached even higher heights during the 2018-2019 season as he continued to progress individually and made the playoffs for the first time in his career. Averaging 20.1 points, 10.8 rebounds, and 7.3 assists per game, he picked up his first All-Star appearance and made the All-NBA First Team. The Nuggets were eliminated in Game 7 of the Second Round of the playoffs, but Jokić averaged career highs in every department across his 14 playoff games by scoring 25.1 points, grabbing 13.0 rebounds,

NCAA

A North Carolina Legend

By TAEE CHI

Though the North Carolina Tar Heels suffered a devastating defeat to the Wisconsin Badgers in the first round of the 2021 NCAA tournament, their greatest loss of the season came when their head coach for 18 years, Roy Williams, announced his retirement on April 1. Williams, a Hall of Famer with 903 total wins, nine Final Four appearances, and three national championships, has built a truly legendary legacy from his 33 seasons of coaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Kansas. In order to fully comprehend the significance of Williams's retirement, one must first understand the immense impact he had on college basketball as a whole.

Williams's first coaching stint was in 1973 at Charles D. Owen High School in Black Mountain, North Carolina. There, he coached boys' basketball and golf for five years before moving to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his alma mater, to serve as an assistant for the illustrious UNC coach, Dean Smith. Williams's stretch from 1978 to 1988 as an assistant coach included memorable moments such as the 1982 NCAA championship match, a game between UNC and Georgetown

that featured a freshman named Michael Jordan—whom Williams had actually helped recruit—hitting a game-winning jumper to give Smith his first title. Williams's time as a UNC assistant coach was an invaluable learning experience. However, his dream was always to become a head college basketball coach. After 10 long years of assisting the Tar Heels, he finally got his chance at the University of Kansas.

Williams left North Carolina in 1988 to become the head coach of the Kansas Jayhawks. He coached at Kansas for 15 years (from 1988 to 2003), during which he had a record of 418-101. This statistic put him second on Kansas's all-time wins list behind Phog Allen, though he has since been passed by current Jayhawks coach Bill Self. Under Williams, the team had several notable runs in the NCAA tournament, including four Final Fours and two national championship appearances. Kansas was the most victorious team in the 1990s, boasting a record of 286-60. "He won an insane amount of games and put us on an upward trajectory," former KU guard Greg Gurely said. "Kansas fans should be indebted to [...] Williams forever."

Williams was offered to return to North Carolina in 2000, when former UNC coach Bill Guthridge

left the head coaching position vacant. Williams declined the first time, as he had grown attached to the Kansas Jayhawks. However, he couldn't resist a second offer three years later and came home to his alma mater in 2003. Having already established himself as a high-caliber coach during his years at Kansas, Williams brought immediate success to the Tar Heels. Chapel Hill claimed the national title as UNC took down Illinois 75-70 in the NCAA finals in 2005. A year later, in 2006, Williams became the fastest coach to win 500 games, and in 2007, he was elected into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. Continuing this pattern of success, Williams won two more championships with UNC in 2009 and 2017. He stayed with the Tar Heels until his eventual retirement and became the coach with the second most victories in UNC history. He is also the fourth all-time in wins among Division I coaches and has the sixth-highest winning percentage (.774) in NCAA history.

Part of Williams's immense success can be attributed to his coaching style. The chief tenet of his system was to maintain a rapid pace on offense, giving the team as many possessions as possible in a 40-minute game. Pushing the tempo can unsettle the defense and

lead to easier baskets, but it can also cause turnovers, bad shots, and overall inefficiency. Williams straddled this line between pace and efficiency better than most, if not all, college basketball coaches.

Arguably more important than his coaching system was his coaching philosophy and mindset. Williams was a fierce competitor who loved facing challenges and overcoming them. He always strived

to be the best, and he instilled this competitive will in all his players. Williams's work ethic was another factor that differentiated him from other coaches. He once said, "I tell every prospect I recruit that I'm going to try to outwork every other coach [...] I like to ask prospects, 'Who is recruiting you the

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SPORTSBEAT

Seven-time NBA All-Star **LaMarcus Aldridge** retired due to his Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, which causes irregular, rapid heart-beat, ending his 15-year career.

The **Baylor Bears** won the **NCAA men's basketball title** over the Gonzaga Bulldogs, denying them an undefeated run.

Stanford ended a 29-year drought, claiming the **NCAA women's basketball title** over Arizona.

Twelve top European soccer clubs are solidifying plans for a breakaway European club competition, the **Super League**, that would severely disrupt the economic structure of soccer in Europe and interfere with other competitions like the Champions League.

YouTube **Jake Paul** knocked out former **UFC fighter Ben Askren** in the first round of their pay-per-view boxing matchup.