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Editorial

Setting the Stage for the Spring Semester



BY Fruma Landa, Editor
in Chief

As I enter the last semester of my undergraduate career, I find myself reflecting on all that I have accomplished at YU. Growing up in the ultra-Orthodox community of Lakewood, NJ, attending college was not an assumed stage of life. Boys only learned a couple hours of secular studies a week, and while girls did learn more, they are taught that above all else, they should strive to be the best mother and wife they could be. Not a first day of class would go by without a classmate asking, "But why do we need to learn that to be a good mother?" We were not expected to have a career or use our schooling for anything other than to help our children do our homework.

I endured countless remarks trying to devalue my education, and underestimating my capabilities. Receiving answers such as "girls your age don't need to know that" were far from unusual. Instead of giving up, I worked harder. My dreams of a future career began to form as I spent countless hours a week reviewing my notes, making sure I mastered the material, along with reading numerous library books. Upon switching out of my Lakewood

school in 11th grade, few faculty in my new Modern Orthodox school believed that a girl from Lakewood could possess any significant secular knowledge. There were things I did not know, I couldn't figure out how to power down a computer and anything pop culture related was (and still is) foreign to me, but I did possess knowledge of secular studies on par with my new peers.

When I started my time at YU, I found that I did not need to prove my educational knowledge. No one needed to know I used to live in Lakewood, and thus no one judged my aptitude and skill. Over the course of my years at YU, I noticed that when I mentioned I used to live in Lakewood, many were too far removed from the community to understand the implications and form any judgments. Finally knowing I would not be judged based on my academic performance, my rigorous work ethic began to loosen up and I learned to enjoy my education. I became privileged enough to take my schooling for granted.

However, a short while ago, I returned to Lakewood for an old friend's wedding and, while waiting to wish Mazal Tov (congratulations) to the Kallah (bride), I met another old friend and we

began chatting. She told me she was still single and working as a secretary and asked what I am up to. When I told her I was a psychology major, a common major at YU, she looked at me with awe and praised my intelligence and achievements. She thought she was not capable of achieving a BA degree, a degree many Modern Orthodox individuals possess. However, contrary to what she may have believed, I was not smarter than she was — I just had different opportunities than she did.

We at YU have the privilege of furthering our education, an opportunity so many children in our Jewish communities lack. However, instead of receiving aid and compassion from the Modern Orthodox communities, they are often looked down upon and perceived as unintelligent. With often limited contact to others outside their community, there are many phrases and words which are commonly mispronounced among Yeshivish communities. No one deserves to be ridiculed for mispronouncing a word they never heard spoken or using badly formed sentences, yet I have witnessed it happening many times. We need to foster an understanding of the limited access to education religiously

right-wing Jews often face and learn not to judge them for it. We all deserve to live in communities that align with our ideals and no one should be turned away due to their educational background.

Now, I am a semester away from graduating YU with plans of graduate school. Having the choice to further my education is a gift. I have seen too many undergraduate students wasting away their education — taking courses not to learn, but to receive an A, commenting that they are in YU just to get married, paying other people to write their papers for them, and overall taking their education for granted. As we enter into the second half of the academic year, I challenge you to treat your education in a way that reflects the opportunity and privilege given to you.

News



The Glaubach Family Donates \$10 Million to The YU Career Center

BY Erica Rachel Sultan,
News Editor

During the week of February 1, Dr. Ari Berman, President of Yeshiva University, announced that Dr. Felix and Miriam Glaubach donated \$10 million to the YU Career Center.

The Glaubach duo has had a connection with YU for over 70 years. Dr. Glaubach is a long-time Trustee of Yeshiva University and RIETS (Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary) and member of the Board of Yeshiva College and Yeshiva University High Schools. As a result of their generous donation, the Career Center will be renamed The Shevet Glaubach Center for Career Strategy and Professional Development.

Designed to help students achieve

their career goals after graduation, the Career Center offers many opportunities for its students. The Center offers programs in mentorships, internships, career developments, connects students with alumni and future employers, and gives lessons on career-readiness topics such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, digital technology and global intercultural fluency. Susan Bauer, executive director of the Center, stated in Yeshiva University's press release, shared with the YU Observer, that the generous donation will allow students the opportunities to have meaningful successes after graduation.

Dr. and Mrs. Glaubach are excited to contribute to the development of the YU Career Center. Dr.

Glaubach shared in the Yeshiva University press release, "We feel that a gift to name the Career Center at Yeshiva University is the most impactful investment we can make. At this time of uncertainty, growing and strengthening the Career Center at Yeshiva University will bring confidence and stability to countless students and their families. By helping Yeshiva University students to have successful careers[,] we will enable them to be future leaders of Yeshiva University, the Jewish community[,] and leaders in the USA [and] Israel. This gift is an investment that makes our prior gifts to Yeshiva University all the more valuable. The highest form of charity is enabling others to support themselves, we look forward to graduates of the Glaubach

Career Center at Yeshiva University becoming business leaders and philanthropists in their own right."

Dr. Berman commented saying that Yeshiva University students' success after graduation is "one of our core strategic priorities," and that he is very grateful to the Glaubach family, Senior Philanthropic Advisor Susie Meyers, Executive Director of the Career Center Susan Bauer and VP of Development Adam Gerdt for all of their help in making this gift possible.



Newly Announced Joint Yeshiva University-Albert Einstein College of Medicine B.A./B.S.-M.D. Program

BY Shoshanah Marcus,
News Editor

In an announcement on the YU News Blog on January 19, 2021, the President of Yeshiva University, Dr. Ari Berman, and the President and CEO of Montefiore Medicine, Dr. Philip O. Ozuah, reportedly signed a new agreement launching a joint Yeshiva University-Albert Einstein College of Medicine B.A./B.S.-M.D. program. This program is intended to be “for highly qualified high school graduates ensuring their path to an excellent medical education and an impactful career in health care.”

In addition to the creation of this

joint program, the announcement included that “Yeshiva University and Einstein have also created a task force to study creating joint academic and career-related programs in health care and health sciences.”

Both Dr. Berman and Dr. Ozuah are excited for the fruition of this joint program. “I am pleased to partner with Dr. Ozuah as our vital institutions expand our collaborative efforts and advance Yeshiva University, Montefiore and our beloved Albert Einstein College of Medicine forward with strength and purpose,” said Dr.

Berman in the announcement. Similarly, Dr. Ozuah stated, “I have enjoyed working with Dr. Berman to lay the groundwork for an exciting new chapter for Montefiore Medicine, Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Yeshiva University.”

Yeshiva University has had fluctuating ties with Albert Einstein College of Medicine (AECOM) for many years. In 2015, AECOM transferred the financial and operational rights from Yeshiva University to Montefiore, after 60 years of YU control. Moreover, in 2018, Einstein gained authority to

grant its own degrees and YU was no longer the degree granting institution.

There is not much specific information about the program itself that is publicly available. Dean Bacon shared with the YU Observer, “The program will not begin until 2022 and the details still need to be worked out. Once that is done, we will have information to share with everyone.”

Dr. Miller Promoted to Chair of English Department After Dr. Shires’ Departure

BY: Shoshanah Marcus,
News Editor

Dr. Linda Shires, the chair of the department of English at Stern College, retired following the Fall 2020 semester after holding the position for over 10 years. Subsequently, Dr. Matt Miller has been promoted to fill this position.

Dr. Shires has been a Professor of English at Stern College since 2008 and has been the chair of the English department at Stern College since 2009. She shared her gratitude with the YU Observer saying, “As I leave Y.U., a special thanks goes to Dean Bacon, Assoc. Dean Orlian, and Jane Galland at Stern, to my exceptional colleagues in the English Department, both full-time and adjunct — always standing by each oth-

er, and to all our hard-working, committed faculty members in the Humanities.” Dr. Shires continued to reflect on her time at Stern College, stating, “While I’ve enjoyed creating new courses, I’ll especially miss teaching Holocaust Representation and classes in my publishing field of Victorian literature. Stern students stand out as kind, generous, and intelligent. It has been great fun to stay in touch with those who went on to become high school teachers, M.A. and Ph.D. students, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, editors, business leaders, and artists across the USA, Canada, UK, and Israel.”

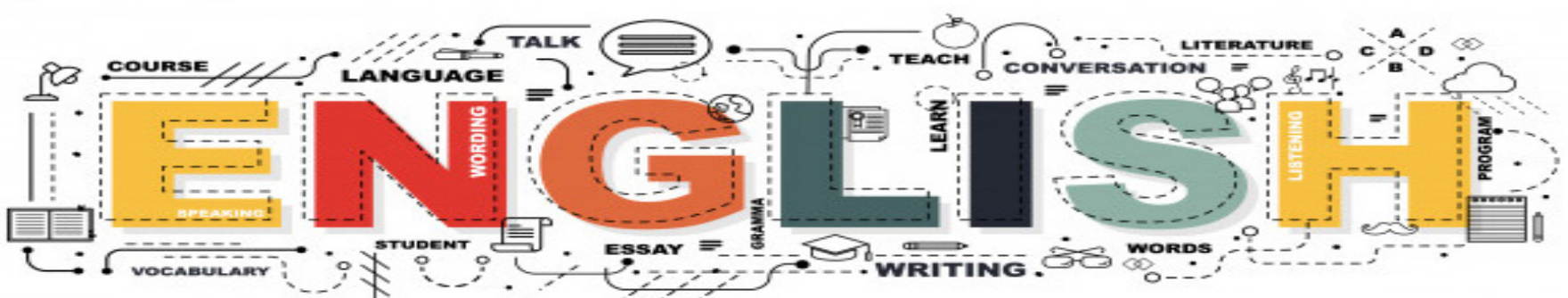
Dr. Shires acted as a mentor for many students, including those writing their honors theses. Rachel Liebling (SCW ‘22), one of

Dr. Shires’s mentees, shared, “Dr. Shires pinpoints exactly where you need pushing, guiding an expansion of your individual faculty for intense thought from that personalized starting ground. And, so you grow. While strictly adhering to scholarly accuracy, Dr. Shires equally encourages that you find your meaning, as ‘often the grand meanings of faces as well as of written words may lie chiefly in the impressions of those who look on them’ (George Eliot).”

Since 2008, Professor Miller has been working as an associate professor of English at Stern College. Miller shared his excitement with the YU Observer, “I am honored to be given the chance to play this new role within the English Department at Stern. While it would

be impossible to replace such a singularly effective Chair as Professor Shires, I will at least try my hardest to live up to the standards of fairness and hard work that Shires embodies. It is my goal to make this transition as seamless as possible for students and faculty, and I plan to continue in the same tradition that our English majors have known so far.”

Miller is excited to undertake this new position. He explained, “for now, I am just focusing on learning to do this job to the best of my ability; however, in the future, I look forward to pursuing new initiatives to keep the major in English at Stern at the forefront of fresh ideas and opportunities for our graduating classes.”



Update on YU's Covid Monitoring Program, Covid Cases Rise to 34 Between Jan. 16-Feb. 8 on Campus

BY Shoshanah Marcus,
News Editor

For the Spring 2021 undergraduate semester, Yeshiva University requires students on the Wilf Campus and the Beren Campus to be tested for COVID-19 two days a week. This new monitoring program is set in place due to increased capacity of students who are able to attend in person classes on the two campuses. At the very beginning of the semester, January 20, Vice Provost Chaim Nissel reminded in-person students of the program and reinstated the procedures it entails. Every Monday and Thursday, students are to get nasal swab testing done on their respective campuses. On the Beren Campus, testing takes place on the third floor of the 215 Lexington Avenue building. Wilf Campus testing takes place on the second floor of Furst Hall. Beren testing starts at 10 a.m. and goes until 3 p.m. and Wilf testing starts at 12 p.m. and goes until 5 p.m. In order to get tested, students are required to make appointments for their ten

minute testing. Once on the site, students are asked to schedule an appointment, or multiple appointments for the rest of the semester, give their name, email address, phone number, date of birth, and additional information if special requests need to be made.

At the testing cite, all students are required to comply to the Code of Conduct, wear masks, abide by social distancing guidelines — which Vice Provost Nissel reminds that social distancing means being at least six feet apart from others at all times — fill out the daily health screenings, and participate in the new monitoring program. In order to find the results of their tests, students must So far, Nissel has sent out email reminders the day before every screening takes place. Specifically on January 26, he sent an email to all undergraduate students in regards to the rising numbers of positive Covid cases on the Wilf and Beren Campuses.

The New York Department of Health's dashboard shows that

from January 16 to February 8, there have been 32 positive Covid cases (28 positive cases during the period of January 16-January 29 and 4 more cases during the period of January 30-February 8) on the Beren Campus and the Wilf Campus. Nissel starts his January 26 email by mentioning that while YU's procedures are working, the campuses also need the help of the students in order to stop the spreading of Covid. He then explains that most of the positive cases have been asymptomatic and these cases were identified through contact tracing done by the Covid-19 monitoring team. The team's process is to contact anyone who, within the past 48 hours of the positive test, was within six feet of someone for a cumulative total of 15 minutes over a 24 hour period. Students who live on campus are offered to quarantine at home or on campus.

As a result of the rising cases, Vice Provost Nissel says that YU will be fine-tuning their Covid-19 monitoring program. Still two

days a week for testing, one day will be a nasal swab, and the other will be the Abbott Binax Test. In order to take the Abbott Binax test, students are required to download the Abbott Navica app and create an account. Once that is done, the email instructs students to "Pull up the screen with your unique QR code and show it and your YU ID to the registration table. Make sure your name is recorded accurately. Present the QR code to the technician who will scan it with an iPad. The tech will then scan a test card to link it to your ID. The tech will prepare the test and provide you with a swab and a testing kit. You will swab your nose and complete the testing process according to the posted signs. When your test has been read and reported, you will be notified via email and the Navica app (within approximately 30 minutes)."

If you test negative for the Abbott Binax Test, which you are able to check the status of your test under the Results tab in the Navica app, "there is nothing further required

New Plans for Undergraduate Departments to Increase Inter-Campus Collaboration

BY Adina Bruce, Website
Manager

Directed by the office of the provost and the deans office, the English, psychology, music, physics, and chemistry undergraduate departments will be taking part in a "unification." This merger is characterized as an opportunity to increase intercampus collaboration and is scheduled to start in Fall 2021.

In a statement to the YU Observer, Dean Karen Bacon explained that this new direction for many undergraduate departments will give students on both campuses the opportunity to take courses by a greater variety of professors as well as "increased programming." She stressed that "[t]his is not a restructuring but a unification of departments to broaden and align the curriculum where appropriate and share faculty where appropriate."

After reaching out to various department heads about this development, the YU Observer received responses that overwhelmingly expressed uncertainty as to what the new policy would entail and how this would practically affect students. However, many faculty members seemed hopeful that

increased collaboration would give students new educational opportunities.

When asked to comment by the YU Observer, Dr. Matt Miller, newly appointed chair of the Stern College for Women's (SCW) English department, expressed, "this is still a pretty new idea ... [the members of the English department] are trying to work together to devise ways we can offer more diverse courses to both our midtown and uptown students, especially our English majors, while still maintaining the same basic framework as well as separate campuses ... we do hope to devise ways to take better advantage of our diverse uptown and midtown faculty to provide more educational opportunities."

Some departments such as math, political science, history, computer science and economics have already enacted collaborative policies. Dr. Marian Gidea, chair of the SCW mathematics department, explained how the respective SCW and Yeshiva College (YC) mathematics departments have already been working together "through coordinating their class-

es, having some faculty teaching in both campuses, and supervising student research." He expressed that merging departments serves to "offer students at both campuses an enhanced access to all faculty across the two campuses, a unified curriculum, and a broader variety of courses they can take."

The policy of merging undergraduate departments was proposed in 2015 by President Emeritus Dr. Richard Joel as part of sweeping cuts and restructuring following a severe financial crisis. At the time the proposed merger was announced with the aim of fully merging by 2018. That process was clearly never actualized.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put pressure on many university institutions, and a recent study by New York University's Professor Galloway on university financial predicaments even placed Yeshiva University in the "struggling" category. However, Dean Bacon remarked that this upcoming merger is not based on budgetary concerns, stating that "[t]he programs drive the budgets".

Some students are hopeful that this

development will result in positive changes. "I think this could be really nice for both campuses. There are a lot of really good physics professors uptown and downtown. I'm sure that learning from different teachers and encountering different teaching styles could only further our education," stated physics major Benjie Goykadosh YC '21. Other students, however, are skeptical; an anonymous SCW '24 student shared, "I find this decision sends a very clear message to both faculty and students involved in the affected departments - that YU cares more about money than improving education ... YU has targeted only their least popular departments. ... Merging may provide more variety, but it is ultimately a cost cutting measure, demonstrative of YU's complete neglect and lack of regard for the welfare of its 'less profitable' divisions."

As of now the impact of this policy remains unclear; however, Bacon promises more information will be released as the semester develops, stating: "We are excited about this work. As the semester unfolds, we will have more information about Fall 2021 plans"

Gender Inequality in the Workforce

BY Rivka Lasson VP of Economic Equality and Healthcare



Economic inequality and inequality in positions of authority are apparent issues when looking at the unequal distribution of workplace authoritative positions among the genders. JPMorgan, for instance, presents data which compares the percentages of women and men in leadership positions. They found that some fields appear to be male-dominated, while others are female-dominated. Regarding the education industry, 76% of teachers are women. Despite most teachers being women, the percentage of women holding the authoritative position of superintendent in schools is just 20%.

Further, women make up almost half of the S&P 500 employees, however, when it comes to S&P 500 CEOs, only 5% are women. Why is it the predominantly female industry of education and the half-and-half industry of finance holds so few women in positions of power? Is this inequality due to the stereotypical woman being groomed from birth to focus on girly things, being given dolls with which to play, while stereotypical males are given toy cars? Perhaps these gender roles being bred from childhood are great contributors to gender separation; or perhaps women desire to work in positions similar

to those of men, but are being restricted by societal rules.

This data shows that there are, in fact, more than enough women capable of holding such positions in fields with which women are very familiar; however, gender inequality is keeping these promotions from occurring. Therefore, gender equality in all fields is a cause that this country is striving for more now than ever. Too long has this country been on a rampant run of gender stereotypes manifesting themselves in the workplace, in positions that are based on skill rather than gender.

It is no secret that women are often thought of as “too emotional” to be in positions of power. Gender roles shape many decisions of hiring, and the first thing that employers look for is the mental capability of taking on specific roles. Far too often, women’s emotional capabilities mix themselves up in general mental abilities, thus adding a facet of professionalism that may not exist when dealing with prospective male workers.

A Stanford news article suggests several steps to this national problem’s solution. First, workers must be educated about the gender

bias in the workforce. Next, the workers must identify where such bias can stem from in terms of hiring and promoting. Finally, tools must be developed to lessen this bias and inequality. These essential steps not only promote female work ability, but shed a light on those who use other, unimportant ideas when hiring individuals for a given organization. To find out how gender roles really affect a workplace atmosphere, look at the employers and see if their strategy for employment is the same for male and female prospects. If they deviate from any of these steps, they need to repeat this sequence or be removed from the position entirely in order to fully comprehend just how to deal with employees regardless of gender, and maybe, through their own revelation, understand just how serious and rampant this issue truly is.

Sources:

<https://news.stanford.edu/2017/12/19/new-approach-reducing-gender-inequality-work/>
<https://www.jpmorgan.com/commercial-banking/insights/gender-leadership-gap-infographic>

The Death Of The S.A.T Subject Tests

BY Abigail Grigoryan

College Board, the nonprofit that administers the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement (AP) exams, announced on January 19 that it will no longer offer SAT Subject Tests or the essay section of the general SAT. This decision came due to the decline in the number of standardized test takers, largely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although this makes the college admissions process less influenced by test scores and more on academic character, this may lead to more stress for students since now only one final score is valued instead of what could have been a great Subject Test score. Many high school students used Subject Tests to compensate for weaknesses in their Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Math-

ematics scores to show their strengths in specific courses. While eliminating a piece of what many argue to be an inequity in the educational preparation, this creates more competition in gaining acceptance to top universities, which has never been more difficult since so many universities have already adopted “Test Optional Policies.” For students in the United States and especially international students, the SAT Subject Tests would no longer be an opportunity to demonstrate specific skills, which largely hinders students who must now discover other ways to express their knowledge within standardized testing. In addition to having to develop new means of expressing their strength through the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Mathematics sections, students now need to put more effort into their Advanced Place-

ment (AP) tests, which is a critical part of receiving college credit.

After news of the College Board discontinuing Subject Tests was released, many were relieved and started petitioning for the abolishment of the SAT itself. However, it is still the fairest thing about the college admissions process. Without standardized testing, colleges would have no way of comparing students from different schools academically because schools have varying grade inflation or deflation. On a 4.0 scale, there is no way that two students would be judged equally based on their profiles without seeing their proficiencies. Aside from extracurriculars and personal resumes, students have to compete with the Standardized Test scores of legacy students. Developing arguments that standardized testing has to do with racial and class discrim-

ination, completely undermines the sole purpose of the exams and the actual college admission process. From both sides, it is disproportionate but eliminating means that allows other students to excel, takes away from academic achievement. Not everyone is a great test taker which is why “Test Optional” policies are set in place but it is completely unfair for students that relied on Subject Tests to now have to resort to being reviewed on one score despite a possibility of having a greater Subject Test score.

A Call for Moral Clarity

By Rabbi Ezra Schwartz, RIETS
Rosh Yeshiva

There is no need for yet another voice to come forward and talk about how despicable Tuesday's attempted putsch was. There is no need for someone else to speak about the awfulness that the current occupant of the Oval Office brought about. I hope that those with more sway in the larger American community, from both sides of the aisle, will speak forcefully about this. However, whether or not they do so is not my concern.

My concern is for my community. Sadly, there is a genuine need to address those closest to me, people I daven (pray) with and with whom I share a commitment to Torah, mitzvos (Jewish commandments) and traditional morality. There is a need to address the Orthodox Jews who participated in the rally, those who celebrated the event even silently, those who sympathized with its goals if not with its implementation, and even those who in their Monday morning quarterbacking fell short of voicing uncompromised condemnation of the entire event. In short, what happened on Tuesday should force our community to recalibrate our moral compass and take careful stock of whether we are being true to hashkafas ha'Torah (the outlook of the Torah). I believe that the event needs to be reacted to with the strongest possible condemnation.

Let's think about some of the imagery from the event. We saw not only the disruption of Congress and the desecration of our halls of government, we also saw Confederate and Nazi flags raised; symbols of hatred, oppression and murder proudly flown in the halls of our government. But most disturbing of all we were witness to at least one Israeli flag flying next to these most odious symbols. Tuesday's attempted putsch runs counter to all the values Degel Yisrael (the Jewish flag) represents. The Israeli flag stands for thousands of years of longing for freedom. Degel Yisrael should be a modern articulation of a prophetic promise; that Klal Yisrael (the Jewish people) will

rise from slavery and oppression and champion the values of justice articulated by the Neviim (prophets) to the entire world. Degel Yisrael proudly flies against the hateful symbols of Confederacy and Naziism. It certainly has no place being flown in tandem with these most putrid symbols of hatred and oppression. Moving the embassy may have been very positive, peace with our Arab brethren is certainly wonderful; but for that nezid adashim, for that bowl of lentils, we cannot give up on the true meaning of Degel Yisrael and moral place Medinat Yisrael was founded to represent.

More than that, I am sickened by the image of my brothers and sisters, people wearing yarmulke (skullcaps) and tzitzis (ritual fringes), skirts and snoods, who were not embarrassed to align themselves with the most vulgar parts of America. I cannot fathom how Jews, Shomrei Torah u'mitzvos (observant of the Torah and its commandments), stand arm in arm with those wearing sweatshirts that state 6 Million Were not Enough. How can anyone with a beating Jewish heart march arm in arm with those who wear shirts glorifying Auschwitz?

I am deeply disturbed that so many in my community, even if they did not join in person, were sympathetic to the cause and therefore unwilling to condemn the rally even after we witnessed the desecration it brought forth. I am pained to read supposed condemnations of the event that come with a "but". The argument that anger against a biased media and against a society bent on subverting what they consider American values somehow justifies violence or at least places it into proper perspective, is specious. No anger can justify what happened on Tuesday.

Perhaps, (although this is factually incorrect) an election was wrongly decided. But in no rational way should this lead to ransacking the halls of government that we all suppos-

edly hold dear. When writers in Orthodox periodicals refuse to issue a full-throated condemnation of violence and instead create a false equivalency between the ransacking of government with localized political violence this past summer, this speaks to how far our communal values have deviated. We must do serious cheshbon hanefesh (internal reckoning). We must be able to say unequivocally that what happened on January 6 was an onslaught on American values and Torah ideals. Without any hesitancy, we must say that it was a travesty.

Even accepting that the election was decided incorrectly (which it wasn't), halacha (Jewish Law) demonstrates that we should accept a single erroneous decision rather than undermine the entire governmental process. The Sefer HaChinuch in mitzva 496 famously explains the mitzva of lo tassur, understood by him to mean that we follow Beth Din even when they issue an erroneous ruling, articulating a social contract theory. In order to maintain society, we must accept certain risks and even errors. A system that may at times be wrong is better than no system at all. Absence of a system will allow everyone to act on his or her own wishes. This would destroy society. The Chinuch presents an insurmountable question to any ben or bat (male or female follower of) Torah who possibly felt that attempting to overturn the election was proper.

As we read Parshas (the weekly Torah portion of) Shemos, we can't fail to recognize the moral clarity of first the meyaldos (midwives) and then Moshe Rabbenu (Moses our leader). The Torah extolls those who stand against oppression in all its forms.

It is worth noting the subtle difference between the way Moshe Rabbenu reacted to injustice compared to the approach of the meyaldos. The meyaldos attempted to appease Pharaoh and explain away why they were unable to

kill the Jewish babies. Their act of heroism was rewarded by Hashem (God). Moshe Rabbenu however develops an even clearer sense of morality. Moshe Rabbenu made no excuses. He could not tolerate any injustice, whether perpetrated against one of his Jewish brethren or a non-Jew. He develops from one who first was reticent to act justly (as the verse says, he turned here and there and saw there was no man) to one who acts on his sense of moral justice even when it came at great personal cost forcing him to flee Mitzrayim (Egypt). Moshe represents our ideal leader because he stands for pure morality and justice. The developed image of Moshe Rabbenu is unapologetic and unequivocal on moral matters. Like Moshe we must call out injustice. We must do so unequivocally and loudly. We must not apologize or make excuses. The attempted putsch was an unmitigated travesty and an assault on American and Torah values.



The Tragedy of the YU Pool

By Mitch Goulson

Before I arrived at YU, I never thought anything of swimming — well, I could not drown, but I couldn't really swim. While looking for an alternative to the gym during my first semester on campus, I decided to try out the pool as another workout option.

During a swim in late-September 2019, I noticed a young man, seemingly in his mid-20s, swimming back and forth in the pool without tire, flip-turning off the wall each time. Considering that I could barely do more than two laps without needing a minute break to catch my breath, I asked him for some advice. He showed me proper swim techniques, and I realized that I had no idea how to swim. After training for two months, five days a week, and 2,500 meters every night, I improved greatly and swimming took on a major part of my life.

As I continued swimming, I wondered why YU had a fully-functioning lap pool but no swim team. I dreamed of captaining the first-ever YU Swim Team, leading the team to wins in meets and working on my craft everyday. Despite the lack of lane ropes, pool flags or a working swim clock, I nonetheless decided that I would commit myself to spearheading YU's first-ever swim team.

I recruited students as well as coaches, and I held tryouts and tracked each swimmer's times. With the amount of time I dedicated to starting up this team, I essentially added the equivalent of a class to my schedule in my first semester. In fact, David Freedman, the man who taught me how to swim that one night in September, became the head coach of the team. For the next two months, our team of 14

people practiced for an hour every night for four nights a week, even incorporating dry-land workouts in the gym. I am incredibly proud of the dedication shown by the members of the team toward a goal that was not guaranteed, and for no additional credits.

Unfortunately, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns, I went home to Los Angeles, putting my efforts for the swim team on hold. While I remained quarantined at home, I continued to swim for exercise in my pool. In fact, I taught myself all four strokes and improved greatly as spring and summer passed. I yearned to return to YU in the fall and officially inaugurate the swim team in YU lore. I fantasized about balancing coping with online classes and swimming in YU's pool.

The pool remained closed when I returned to YU. Because of the pandemic and the safety issues that accompany it, I kept the swim team on pause and turned my focus to solely reopening the pool in a limited capacity for lap swimming. Considering the low risk of transmitting COVID-19 through a pool — according to the CDC, "the chlorine in the water should 'inactivate' coronavirus," — it baffles me as to why the administration adamantly refuses to open the facility as enforcing a two-swimmer-limit remains a more than viable option. Meanwhile, workout facilities such as the workout gym and basketball court, both of which carry a far greater risk for COVID-19 spread, remain open.

Many schools, including Binghamton University (NY), University of Maryland (MD), and Penn State University (PA) have

resumed lap swimming with restrictions such as social distancing and wearing a mask outside the water. Additionally, I personally know of various private areas to swim in my home state of California.

I have been in constant communication with the Athletic Director, Joe Bednarsh, about reopening the pool. I have sent him emails, asked him for meetings, and have been proactive in trying to understand why he would not commit to opening the pool while at the same time keeping the weight room and basketball court open. While he has been responsive, he has not given a single valid response as to why the pool should remain closed. Instead of simply telling me "yes, let's open it" or "no, let's revisit next year," he has run me in circles, telling me that it is feasible but continually noting that there are other concerns he has yet to expound upon.

After reaching out to YU's Medical Director myself about the safety of utilizing the pool, Mr. Bednarsh agreed that opening the pool for the second semester was "appropriate." However, nothing about his actions makes it at all clear that he has any intentions of reopening it.

It is not as if the pool is in no condition to be used. It is drained, cleaned, and otherwise treated as if it was open on a regular basis. The lane ropes that were purchased last year would make it simple to enforce social distancing in the pool. In a show of good faith and attentiveness to safety, I also argued that the other pool facilities I would ideally use — the adjacent locker room and sauna/steam room — were "wholly unimportant" and "should not be reopened out of an abundance

of caution."

Last year, I recruited student-lifeguards to be on duty and arranged their weekly work schedules. This semester, I have offered to not only recruit lifeguards, but to also create schedules for the pool, its cleaning, the lifeguards' hours, and anything else that would make the reopening process easier on the administration. Unfortunately, Mr. Bednarsh has not shown a willingness to meet with me nor to discuss avenues of how we could work together to open the pool, even at a limited capacity. He has not spoken to me in person nor over the phone, both of which I have suggested multiple times, offering to make time around his schedule to meet. Despite putting money into the pool in the form of a new pool clock, pool flags, and three lane ropes last year, it feels as though his investment was for naught.

Mr. Bednarsh has displayed great efforts in coordinating with the NCAA to ensure safe basketball and baseball seasons, recently releasing the basketball team's schedule, and announcing tryout dates for the baseball team via email. It would be greatly appreciated if he would allocate similar efforts to opening the pool, even if just for recreational swimming.

To swimmers, access to a pool is everything, and while my fellow students and I struggle with the shortfalls of online learning, a part of our lives is missing. Our semesters are being made more difficult by the absence of the pool which would help manage our stress in the middle of the pandemic.



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Chaos on Capitol Hill

By Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

For the past month and a half, President Trump has spread nonsense on Twitter, tweeting out that the election was a fraud and that votes were not counted properly. Twitter has taken a course of action, flagging a total of 200 tweets since the election, warning viewers that the tweet had been taken down due to falsified information regarding the election. While disputing the election, Trump has encouraged his supporters to attend his rallies as he spews false information. The thing is, Trump supporters believe him. They think that the election was rigged and that somehow the recount was also fraudulent. They are convinced that Trump won both the electoral college and the popular votes, both of which Joe Biden won.

On January 6, 2021, Congress was set to confirm President-elect Joe Biden as the official winner of the 2020 election. Matters escalated, however, as Congress was in session. Mobs of Trump supporters flooded the steps of the Capitol and breached security. These people successfully entered the building, and one person was shot and died later that day.

Members of this mob had successfully entered the Statuary Hall and were deploying chemical irritants. All members of Congress were required to exit their meeting hall and place gas masks on their faces. According to the Washington Post, "Spanberger, a former CIA case officer, said that it was a crisis she would only expect to see unfold in fragile countries halfway across the world. "It is a low for this country I never thought we would reach," she said. "This is what we see in failing countries. This is what leads to the death of democracy."

Shortly after chaos ensued, the National Guard was deployed, and D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) issued a city-wide curfew from 6 p.m. on January 6 to 6 a.m. on January 7. Before 6 p.m., Bowser made remarks directed at President Trump, saying, "We continue to urge the president to tell his supporters they are putting police officers, innocent

people in danger, and they need to go home." When the National Guard and the police had the area under control, the supporters would still not go down without a fight shouting racist and xenophobic remarks over a loudspeaker.

In response to this mob, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), who formally rejected Joe Biden as the electoral college winner, revoked that stance after seeing the undemocratic actions of these Trump supporters. President Trump, and his supporters, many of whom supposedly back Christian beliefs, have even been scolded by the dean and bishop of the Washington National Cathedral, saying to Trump, "Mr. President, there has been no fraudulent election. You called your supporters to our Capitol, you fed their wild fantasies and conspiracy theories, you whipped them into a frenzy; this is not acceptable."

What is utterly ironic about this whole situation is that while Trump was attempting to create chaos, Vice President Mike Pence was not. Trump asked Pence to block the election results. In response, "Pence on Wednesday [January 6] had issued a letter to lawmakers confirming that he did not believe he had the 'unilateral authority' to reject electoral votes in the race for the White House."

Around 3 p.m., Trump tweeted out a call to the mob at Capitol Hill to remain peaceful which is almost funny as he has been promoting this rally since his "Save America Rally" where he urged his supporters to head to the Capitol to demonstrate against Congress certifying President-elect Joe Biden's victory. Of course, peaceful assembly is not a crime, however January 6 was not an example of peaceful assembly.

One parallel that has been drawn most recently is the one between the Black Lives Matters movement this summer and this storming of Capitol Hill. In the summer of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement took the street in response to members of the Black com-

munity being killed by the police during arrests. Even though BLM was advocating for a worthy cause, and even though the grand majority of the marches were peaceful, the president still called all the marchers "thugs." Apparently, the same rhetoric does not apply to the Capitol stormers he called "very special" and "great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long." The bias and racism cannot be more clear than that. One group of people was protesting voting democracy, and another was protesting for basic human rights. One involves privileged far right conservatives breaking into the Capitol building, looting offices, and desecrating our democracy. Another involved minimal looting that took place at locations like Target and Walmart. The two are not comparable.

Suppose the situation were reversed and BLM was storming the Capitol building. In that case, I can assure you, not only would they have not been able to get in, but they would have been pepper-sprayed, arrested, and shot with rubber bullets on the spot, as that was the reaction when they were peacefully protesting. For example, at the Elijah McClain violin vigil in Aurora, Colorado, police opened fire with rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse a crowd of people listening to the violinists play in tribute of the young boy who died at the hands of law enforcement. Fast forward to January 6, when a group of white supremacists, Nazis, Proud Boys, and other civilians could, without any problem, without any confrontation whatsoever, stormed the Capitol and reached the point where they were looting the building and sitting casually in offices.

Personally, what really rattled me is that Jewish people are still supporting Trump and the supporters after an antisemitic sweatshirt was pictured in the Capitol building. The shirt read "Camp Auschwitz." Are these the people Trump calls "very special?" It was also the knowledge that Nazi's were within the crowd of supporters along with white supremacists, both

groups who have not only despised the Jews for generations, but other minority groups as well.

The attack on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on Wednesday was fueled by the fire Donald Trump has been burning ever since the election. Hopefully, peace can be restored on the Hill, and the atrocious and undemocratic behavior we have seen, where Congress members' lives are physically at stake, never happens again.

*** **

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Pornography in Jewish Law: Subjective Application

By Yosef Rosenfield

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

During the Spring 2020 semester, I took an excellent course with Rabbi Beny Rofeh titled “Psychology, Relationships, and Halakhah.” The class required that each student choose a number of personal challenges to complete over a few-week period, with the hope that we would grow spiritually, emotionally and/or physically from these experiences. The list of challenges included options such as asking two girls out on a date, eliminating two foods from your diet and writing your own eulogy. When I decided to complete the “no porn for 10 days” challenge, I felt guilty about the task being too easy for me. To remedy the situation, I modified the challenge to prohibit viewing anything with the intention of deriving sexual pleasure.

I thought of this as a halachic (Jewish legal) interpretation of the challenge, as the Bible states (Numbers 15:39): “And do not stray after your heart and after your eyes...” Now, Rashi (an early commentary) is not necessarily a reliable commentator when it comes to the simple reading of a text, as he was unaware that Hebrew words have three-letter roots. (Judah ben David Hayyuj’s 10th century breakthrough theories

on Hebrew grammar, in Morocco, did not reach Rashi in 11th century France.) However, what he writes about this verse is fairly intuitive: a person sees with his eyes, then desires with his heart, ultimately leading him to sin [with his body]. Thus, according to Rashi’s explanation of this phrase, the verse is telling us to not stray after our eyes, because doing so will lead us to then stray after our hearts — which now desire what we have seen — causing us to, in turn, act on those desires in a sinful manner.

Using this interpretation to inform our understanding of the text, it appears that the law regarding viewing sexual content is more complex than many might think. Perhaps most, if not all, Orthodox Jewish schools teach — or at least endorse — very specific guidelines for what is “appropriate” to watch and, conversely, what is deemed immodest and therefore forbidden to look at. In light of our textual analysis, however, a more accurate application of the law would seemingly be personalized to the individual. If someone has the ability to view hard core pornography and consciously decide to not get aroused, perhaps that is fine

according to halacha. But at the same time, if another person views erotic images with the intention of feeding his sexual desires, maybe that is problematic.

Furthermore, if we are to accept this halachic distinction between objective law and subjective application, it would certainly support the hashkafic (theological) belief that every leniency creates a stringency, and vice versa. For if we grant the mainstream opinion that certain visual content is universally forbidden, then explicit material in the movie “A Clockwork Orange”, for example, would indeed fall under the Biblical prohibition, presumably leaving less sexual content as entirely permissible. If we adopt the more literal interpretation, however, someone could be allowed to view the full nudity in this film — assuming the violent rape is not a sexual stimulus for him — and yet be prohibited from gazing sensually at images of his celebrity crush in a crop top. The latter approach would suggest a fairly subjective set of laws for viewing sexual material, an idea which is honestly somewhat disturbing when seeking immutable God-given truths in Jewish law.

Is there an objectively correct interpretation of Numbers 15:39? Does a fine line exist that separates personal sexual taste and universally provocative material? For any religious Jew who is dedicated to following halachah, these are extremely important questions. Regrettably, I don’t have any definitive answers.

FEATURES



STAFF WRITER PROFILES: ELI SAPERSTEIN

BY YOSEF ROSENFELD
ON BEHALF FEATURES
STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight some of the YU undergraduate students who have written articles for us. For the February edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Eli Saperstein.

Name: Eli Saperstein
College: Sy Syms School of Business
Major: Undeclared (as of now accounting and finance)
Year: Sophomore, second semester on campus
Where are you for the

COVID-19 pandemic? With Whom?: I am currently on campus in the Rubin dorms.
Currently reading: Brandon Sanderson's "Warbreaker" and Rav Amnon Bazak's "To This Very Day"
Currently watching: "Soul" and "The West Wing"
Currently listening to: "The NPR Politics Podcast" and "The Ben Shapiro Show", as well as the "Hamilton" soundtrack (on repeat).
Favorite way to social distance with friends: skiing, video calls
Any cool things you've done/hobbies you've picked up over the COVID-19 pandemic?: I have been listening to media from both sides of the political divide,

in addition to experimenting with cooking and baking recipes that I never had the time to use before.
What do you miss most about your pre-COVID-19 life?: Being able to make plans weeks in advance without having to worry about whether or not I or my friends will be in quarantine.
What is your favorite thing about YU?: The number of opportunities there are to get involved in campus life, especially those that would not be afforded to me at a secular university.
What's a quote/thought/piece of advice you have for your fellow students?: "It is what it is ... " — it's a famous quote, but in my family we have a slightly different saying: "It is what it is, but is it

what it could be?" This attitude has helped me accomplish things I never thought were possible. When there is a problem, see what you can do to actually change the situation before learning to simply deal with it.

Read Eli's past articles here:
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/10/interview-with-associate-dean-michael-strauss/>
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/11/unlearning-institutionalized-racism-with-sarah-adams-cornell/>
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/11/new-yorks-new-look/>
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/10/the-breakdown-of-civil-debate/>

CLUB PROFILE: THE NUTRITION CLUB

BY ELISHEVA ZAHTZ ON
BEHALF OF FEATURES
STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the February issue, the YU Observer is highlighting "The Nutrition Club"

Club Name: Nutrition Club
Heads: Suri Lipsky
Relevant Campus(es): Beren Campus
What is your club's mission statement?: Our club comes to connect nutrition students and to educate students about health, wellness and nutrition. We share tips, ideas, articles and events to support awareness and education.
Why is this club important?: Nutrition impacts everyone, and eating healthy is important for all of us. Having a space where people can come together and share their information and knowledge, talk about relevant topics and share our personal insights and experiences with other people allows for us to develop ourselves and our stanc-

es on nutrition in a well-rounded manner. Especially with so many students interested in Nursing and Health, this can be a great foundation for them. Medical students get surprisingly little education about nutrition.

What was your pull to get involved in the club?: I'm majoring in Nutrition and as an aspiring dietitian, I thought

this was a great network-

ing opportunity and way to meet people who were also interested in the field. But as I spent time, I realized that there was so much more to the club and I was learning and interested in the things being discussed with the other students. Not everyone is a nutrition major, and it's great to hear their perspectives and share our opinions with one another.

What are some things your club has done in the past?: We've co-hosted events with the Psychology Club talking about Nutrition and Mental Health and have had

Coach Gila come in to speak about the importance of healthy living. We had a speaker come in on behalf of Goodr last semester, to talk about saving food that would otherwise have been trashed, and using it to feed people in need.

What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?: We're hosting an event this February (on

the 8th) with the Shama-yim Vegetarian-

ism Club and talking about going vegetarian in a healthy way, and why you might want to.

What is your favorite OSL-provided food for club events?: Pizza always seems to be the crowd-pleaser! We also try to have food demos, before COVID, and have people making their smoothie bowls at the event and interacting with the food.

With COVID, how is your club adjusting?: Our WhatsApp group has grown, and we've switched from interactive events to more online speaker events, having people

come to talk to club members on Zoom. We've been trying to bring in more new and exciting people to keep things interesting!

What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?: Reach out to me [Suri Lipsky] and join the WhatsApp group! If you're looking to create an event, or have something you want to talk about, we're happy to help you plan it and get started!
Anything else to say about your club: Even if you're not majoring in Nutrition, there's always something new to learn. Come get involved, you'll be surprised by the things you learn from hanging out! This impacts everyone and it's important to develop an understanding of how nutrition affects you.

Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us at theyuobserver@gmail.com with your club name and the names of the club heads!

FEATURES

YU FACULTY PROFILE: DR. DAVID GLASER

BY BINA DAVIDSON
ON BEHALF OF FEAT-
TURES STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight a YU faculty member. For the February edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Dr. David Glaser.

Name: David Glaser
Department: Music
Educational Background/Qualifications: BA - Hunter College, CUNY; MA - Queens College, CUNY; DMA - Columbia University
Hometown: New York
How long have you worked at YU?: Long enough so that last year I had a student whose mother took my Sense of Music class. I started as an adjunct in the fall of 1995.
What got you passionate about your field?: I had been an avid listener, but hadn't thought about starting to compose until I heard a recording of Schoenberg's "Pierrot lunaire". I hated it the first time I listened to it. But as it was considered to be a seminal work of 20th century music, I decided to give it another chance, and another and yet one more. After listening once a day for about a month I began to understand it and hear what was great about it. It was intrigu-

ing enough that it led me to try composing. Once I started to see that I could create something out of nothing more than vibrating air, I was hooked.

What do you like about working at YU?: I really enjoy the size of the school and the smaller classes that I teach. I can get to know my students and really feel as if I'm mentoring them, teaching them how to think, rather than just transferring information to them.

How has COVID/Zoom

affected the way your classes func-

tion?: The downside, as we all know by now, is that it is exhausting and somewhat sterile. We can't exchange ideas as freely or quickly as we do when we're in person and I can't go off on as many of my (always fascinating) tangents. But I think we still manage in spite of the distance to connect.

If you could bring in any guest lecturer, alive or deceased, who would it be, and what would they speak about?: This was a surprisingly hard question to answer. I finally chose Charles Ives. He was an American composer who worked in the first half of the 20th

century. He had a very rigorous music education, first from his father (who was a bandmaster in the Union Army) and then at Yale University. He had a unique musical vision, far different from any one of his contemporaries. He realized that he couldn't maintain his integrity as a composer and still make a living from his music, so he went into business and built a successful life insurance company. Ives was a pioneer in developing estate planning. His music was redis-

Once I started to see that I could create something out of nothing more than vibrating air, I was hooked.

covered in the 1960s, and he is con-

sidered an "American original". He is a great model for anyone who wants to pursue a unique vision. **Do you have any advice for students interested in a career in your field?:**

Don't do it! I think everyone should study music, art and literature. But all of these fields, while giving you great insight into life and culture, as well as enduring pleasure, are just too difficult a way to make a living. Look at Charles Ives.

What is one thing you want students to know about you?:

As we're in one crisis now, I'll refer back to one at the beginning of



the century. I was teaching on Sept. 11. Needless to say, classes ended early that day. I walked down Fifth Avenue (I live in Greenwich Village) watching the smoke from the towers and wondering how and why this could happen. When I got home, after making sure the family was okay I went into the kitchen and started cooking. But before I decided on a menu, I slipped on headphones and cued up Bach's "Goldberg Variations". It was at that moment that I realized I needed a refuge, a place where everything was in order and made sense, a place to find one of the great monuments of human thought to balance the chaos outside.

Is there a YU professor you admire who you would like to see highlighted in future editions? Email

STAFF WRITER PROFILES: MATTHEW SHILAT

BY YOSEF ROSENFELD
ON BEHALF FEATURES
STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight some of the YU undergraduate students who have written articles for us. For the February edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Matthew Shilat.



Name: Matthew Shilat

College: YC

Major: Political Science

Year: Senior, fourth year on campus

Where are you for the COVID-19 pandemic? With Whom?: In my Flatbush apartment with my new wife.

Currently reading: "Through an

Opaque Lens" by Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Currently watching: "The Boys" on my own, rewatching "Psych" with my wife

Currently listening to: "Change On The Rise" by Avi Kaplan
Favorite way to social distance with friends: Chatting through WhatsApp, tagging others in posts and meeting up to hang out ... socially distanced, of course.

Any cool things you've done/hobbies you've picked up over the COVID-19 pandemic?: Traveling with my new wife and learning diverse new things in my spare time.
What do you miss most about your pre-COVID-19 life?: Seeing my friends more often, museums and restaurants being open, and learning with my havruta [Torah study partner].

What is your favorite thing about YU?: The environment has nurtured my Jewish growth, and the connections have led me to a

deeper understanding of Judaism and a richer, fuller life with my amazing friends.

What's a quote/thought/or piece of advice you have for your fellow students?: "The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, and God." — Ann Frank

Read his past articles here:
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/10/crisis-and-hope-event-voices-through-the-ages/>
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/12/crisis-and-hope-yu-voices-repairing-the-rift/>

FEATURES

WHAT WE LOSE WITH ONLINE LEARNING: STUDENTS REACTIONS

BY DINI
HIRSCHFIELD

Online learning has become the default mode of learning due to COVID-19. At YU, some students enjoy the less demanding aspects of online learning, while others suffer from the lack of social connection and severely compromised college experience. Although there are some advantages to online learning, the detriments outweigh any benefits this “new normal” may pose.

With online learning, students no longer have college as a social platform. Students also struggle to process class material as their focus is compromised by Zoom fatigue and distractions in their makeshift “classrooms.” Though she recognizes the efforts made by instructors to forge connections in their online classrooms, Dalia Adams (SCW '23) finds her online classes “impersonal” and is often distracted by her “roommates, cell phone, and noises in the [dorm] building.” Students also

find the many hours spent staring at their computer screens taxing: “I get many headaches from looking at the screen all day for many hours. It is also very hard to engage in the class when the professor is just talking,” shared Daniella Rubin, SSSB '23). It is clear that despite the professors’ best efforts, this mode of learning fails to offer the same quality of

education as in-person classes,

and students are losing out on a proper education.

Aware as they are that Zoom hardly fulfills the vision they had in mind for their education, students are doing their best to maximize their learning opportunities in this setting. One advantage is that professors are more accessible, and they are more understanding in some situations. Last semester in my English class, my professor extended deadlines as the class needed, so we could meet

with her more often and submit our best work. Many professors across the departments adopted this more lenient approach and are sensitive to student needs. Professors also use breakout rooms to foster an environment of collaboration and maintain the classroom community. As a new student at the Sy Syms School of Business, Liana Seidenfeld enjoys the way

“breakout rooms allow for collaboration

and new friendship[s].” Moreover, first-time students might be more willing to sign up for more clubs because all they need to do is join a WhatsApp group to be involved. Lastly, the online system allows students the time, energy, and opportunities for more internships on their resume since most companies transitioned to remote work.

The advantages of online learning do not make up for its shortcomings. The benefits we

attribute to online learning are our ways of making the best of a tough situation. Certainly, those who prefer a less demanding schedule appreciate the laxness of the system, but hardly anything about online learning is ideal for those who are invested in their college experience and education. For those who once enjoyed in-person classes and campus life, the compromised learning and lack of social life can be harmful to their mental health. We can commend our students and professors for turning lemons into lemonade, but focusing on the bright side fails to overcome the fact that this is not ideal. Nevertheless, Zoom is here to stay for now, and it is up to us to look ahead with a positive attitude. Professors and students must work together to find the best way to teach, communicate, and recreate the vibrancy of the classroom as best we can. Hopefully, through these efforts, students and instructors alike will find what works for them to get the most out of online college until it is safe to revert to fully in-person learning.

With online learning, students no longer have college as a social platform.



Stern College: In the Note

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ABOUT “STERN COLLEGE: IN THE NOTE”

BY SHIRA JOSHUA

I remember my first week at Stern clearly. As an international student, I had to adjust accordingly to my new environment and status. I was extremely excited and slightly hesitant at the same time. As I wasn’t from the area, I came alone without any family for support and without knowing anyone on campus. However, I came full of expectations of expanding my knowledge, succeeding, and forming new friendships.

Even with all my determination, I was having trouble taking notes during class, due to the language barrier. Therefore, I was forced to rely on generous

students who were willing to share their notes. I remember one of my more demanding courses was statistics. As my first quiz was approaching, I was in need of notes as the few people I had previously asked refused. As the day before the quiz came, I was very worried and stressed that I would not be able to get a hold of notes and study. Therefore, I decided to text everyone I “knew” (not many people) to ask if they know someone who knows someone that perhaps is willing to share her notes. Lo and behold, I found an amazing friend who was ever so generous and happily offered her notes so as to benefit others. No words can describe how thankful I was for this kind gesture and im-

pressed by the selflessness this student has exemplified. A few weeks later an additional statistics classmate of mine offered her notes, and at the end of each class, I ran to photocopy the notes, so that I can review the class material and study well for the quizzes and exams. I truly don’t think that these big-hearted students realize how much of a help they were.

One may ask why didn’t I choose to buy notes? I simply could not afford it. In Israel, where I come from, selling notes and quizzes is not a common practice, in fact it is looked down upon. The normal thing in Israel is to just share and help fellow students succeed. Although I understand the motive to sell notes,

the idea never sat well with me. I remember on one Shabbat, I, along with my friend Rachel Mauda and some others, sat in the Schottenstein Residence Hall lounge and contemplated how we can motivate other students and classmates to share their notes. After much thought, I came up with an idea to open a Facebook group as a platform to share notes and other study materials for free. Last summer, my friend Rachel and I met and worked to make this group a possibility. However, I didn’t have the courage to publish it yet as I was worried that people wouldn’t join or support it. Eventually, I decided to ignore

SEE STERN IN THE NOTE,
PAGE 14

FEATURES



DAF YOMI AT BEREN: WHEN EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION TURNS INTRINSIC

BY SHAYNA
HERSZAGE, MANAGING
EDITOR

Psychologists categorize motivations into two groups: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation describes one who is motivated due to possible factors such as a desire for praise, payment, or a good grade one may receive as a result of fulfilling an action. Meanwhile, intrinsic motivation describes one doing an action not for a reward, but because the individual finds satisfaction or pleasure in the action itself.

The dichotomy of the two categories of motivation is addressed in Masekhet (Tractate) Pesachim in daf (page) 50b:

“Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: A person should always engage in Torah study and performance of mitzvot, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvot not for their own sake, one gains understanding and comes to perform them for their own sake.”

According to this statement, a person should always strive to perform mitzvot (commandments) and learn Torah — even if they are not motivated by solely the mitzvah or Torah

learning itself. Rav believes that, in performing these actions for other reasons, a person may come to want to do them for their own sake. Thus, Rav argues that a person’s motivations to learn Torah and perform mitzvot may change; the motivations may start out extrinsic — for the sake of a grade, for example — and then turn intrinsic, out of love for Jewish values and Jewish texts.

Many Yeshiva Uni-

versity students have supported

Rav’s above statement in their own lifestyles. In some situations — such as in Judaic classes — Torah learning occurs out of a desire to graduate with good grades. However, the learning seldom remains within the confines of class. Whether there is class or not, chavrutot (learning in partners) continue to happen — not for a grade, not for payment, and seldom for social clout, but out of an increasing passion toward learning Judaic texts.

Additionally, the same intrinsic motivation is found among the Yeshiva University community with regard to doing

mitzvot. Many students grew up with mandatory prayer services in their schools, forming an extrinsic motivation toward prayer. Without a teacher marking off attendance on a checklist in the mornings, one may wonder how the synagogues of Washington Heights (the area which houses the Wilf Campus) and Midtown (the area which houses the Beren Campus) have groups of college students present each week. The answer is

Rather, this is an exhibition of extrinsic motivation that has turned into intrinsic motivation to do a mitzvah over time

aligned with Rav’s statement: what started out as an extrinsic obligation to attend prayer services has transitioned into an intrinsic motivation to engage in the mitzvah of prayer.

For several months last year, communal prayer services were closed worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Suddenly, not only was there a lack of overt extrinsic motivation, but there was even a lack of community. A person could stop praying altogether and no one else would notice. However, while some people lapsed in their prayers, others remained diligent — from home instead of within a

congregation.

Last week, I went to the Friday night prayer service in Schenk synagogue on the Wilf Campus. As per COVID-19 protocol, all congregants were required to have signed up prior to the Sabbath and, before entering, the congregants’ temperatures were checked. The temperature-checking process caused the flow of congregants to turn into a long line of people waiting to enter and engage in prayer services. As I waited in the back of the line, at the very end of the block, I felt a sense of awe and pride. There is no clear extrinsic motivation to attend Friday night services: we must wear masks, we must walk in the cold winter air, and there is no more post-services schmoozing (socializing) or possibility of a potato kugel. Rather, this is an exhibition of extrinsic motivation that has turned into intrinsic motivation to do a mitzvah over time.

Rav’s statement shows the possibility for growth and fluidity in motivation. We, as people, are constantly growing and changing. What begins as an extrinsically motivated task may become an intrinsically motivated part of a person’s life and values, whether or not that change is conscious. In the face of the

STERN IN THE NOTE

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the background voices in my head and to publish it. I was so surprised to see the wide support from close and far this group has gained. To date, there are more than 300 members and so many amazing students are starting

to share for free. I’m sure this group will expand even more and encourage others to change for the better. The aim of this group is to create a supportive space and platform for all students to share and gain and allow for study material to be more accessible. If one student will share her notes and five students, for example,

would benefit from that, then they may pay it forward as well, expanding the notes library and assisting others in their education. As humans, we all need help sometimes, and school can be that much easier if we can support each other. Although, it is true that the more students who join, the less money people would

earn. On the same scale, however, the more students who join, the less students will need to spend. The benefit is gaining immediate access to the required material with minimum stress. If you would like to support this group, please join the “Stern College: In the Note”!

FEATURES



ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND WE LIVE ON

BY SARAH BRILL, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

It is not a new concept that America was founded through the bloodshed and tears of the Native American people. Throughout history, this community has been undermined and underfunded by the government despite having native roots to this land. As we have progressed as a society, there has been more recognition of native people and their land. For example, many companies and universities state on their website what land their property is on, something which our university has not done. In order to gain more insight into the concept of land acknowledgment, I reached out to Summer Wesley, a Native American from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, with a few questions of my own about native land acknowledgment.

As an Ingenious person, why do you think it is necessary for people, especially large corporations and universities, to acknowledge the Indigenous land we are on?

Land acknowledgements are a first step in reducing Indigenous erasure and towards coming to terms with the ongoing colonization that we currently live under. Therefore it is important for institutions to acknowledge the people whose land they are on but they cannot and should never stop there. Additionally, there need to be real steps towards turning the current tide, to include not only immediate information to their audience with regards to ways that they can help or assist those communities as well as actively evaluating the internal dynamics of their institutions in order to

create equity and accessibility to such marginalized communities. Failure to take those steps reveals their land acknowledgments to be merely performative and ineffectual.

How can we go about honoring the land we are on in a respectful way and pay tribute to the tribes that might have once established roots there?

The best way to honor the land is to use it in a sustainable man-

ner. In my culture, we use the same word, "okla," for both land and people. The two cannot be separated.

ner. In my culture, we use the same word, "okla," for both land and people. The two cannot be separated. We belong to the land and have responsibilities to it. Institutions that wish to honor the Nations whose lands they are on should start by honoring the land, and also reach out to those people to find a way to benefit them. There is no one-size-fits-all solution where that is concerned, as each of our communities are different and have unique needs, so it is important that members of those communities lead the way. Unquestionably, each institution has an ethical obligation to strive to benefit the Nation whose land they are occupying.

When a large corporation or university does not honor the land the building(s) is on, how does that make you feel? Why?

The conduct of an institution speaks about their character. Failure to meet their minimum ethical obligation of respecting the land and honoring the occupied peoples reveals their colonial nature, which makes them fundamentally unsafe institutions for individuals

from marginalized communities. What else can, specifically universities, do to better understand the importance of both honoring indigenous land and respecting it?

Universities need to understand that this is not an academic exercise that they can legitimately claim to approach from a sterile, objective position; one allowing them to observe, absent obligation to make fundamental

decisive steps to change that or else their professions of "honoring" are hollow.

With our university not acknowledging the land all campuses are located on, we as an institution are lacking a sense of mindfulness and of ethical obligation. Nearly all universities in the New York City borough have acknowledged the land their university is built on by adding a separate page to their website outlining the territories on which they are built. Yeshiva University, I call upon you to do your civic duty. As Jewish people we know the concept of being kicked out of our homeland well, as illustrated throughout our history. Here the Native American people have been forced onto small reservations lacking government funding; the least our university can do is acknowledge the land:

Both the Wilf and Beren Campuses are built upon the Munsee Lenape land. In 1669, the Munsee and Esopus tribes attacked the Dutch colonizers settling their land, but failed. The Munsee were then forced to move and settle near the Delaware River, but later on, they headed west towards Ohio.

Knowing what land our school, graduate school, or workplace is built upon will help us better understand the Native American people and the war crimes committed against them. To live in the shadow of ignorance is not a path which most people take, and it is one that I hope our school does not, as the concept of living in exile holds so near to us.

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Travel the World, but at What Cost?

By Talya Danzer

Upon choosing aircraft transportation, there are many factors that must be taken into account. These factors include the risks of terrorist attacks, system malfunctions, and in the days of a pandemic, the risk of getting COVID-19; yet, it barely registers in one's mind that there are risks of DNA damage and cancer due to factors such as cosmic ionizing radiation and ultraviolet rays. If these factors pose a risk to those who fly sporadically, then all the more so to pilots and flight crew whose job it is to maintain and fly in an aircraft daily.

Are the genotoxic risks of flying worth the paycheck and the sightseeing? Is one getting exposed to more than just beautiful sights?

Radiation is one of the main genotoxic risks that plague flight crew members. Cosmic ionizing radiation has two types to which flight crews are exposed. There is galactic cosmic radiation; radiation in which particles are emitted from the solar system and interact with Earth's atmosphere and there are solar energetic particles, or solar flares. Compared to the average person who is exposed to around 0.33 mSv annually, aircrew are exposed to an annual amount of 3.07 mSv. Dosage exposure directly correlates with altitude, proving that the increased dosage intake in flight personnel is a result of the high altitudes reached when operating in an aircraft.

When exposed to copious amounts of cosmic radiation due to time spent in the air, there is an increased risk of DNA damage. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Prevention used the comet assay to detect both single and double-stranded breaks in the DNA of aircrew in comparison to a control group of ground staff. Although the findings in this study lacked statistical significance, there was a noted increase in DNA damage in the aircrew members. These findings were solidified by an additional study done by the Department of Health Risk Analysis and Toxicology at Maastricht University. Using twenty-three flight engineers and a control group, there was a significant increase found in the oxidative DNA damage in the flight engineer's peripheral



lymphocytes. The increase of oxidative stress or oxidative DNA damage is often a biomarker for diseases such as cancer.

Cosmic radiation exposure leads to an increased risk of cancers including acute myeloid leukemia, skin cancer, and prostate cancer as well as reproductive issues. Skin cancer, such as melanoma, was discovered at higher rates in flight personnel. Despite this consistency, however, it is unclear whether the cancer diagnosis is due to increased cosmic ionizing radiation exposure on the aircraft itself or due to the increased leisure time of flight crew which, due to time in the sun, allows for an increase in ultraviolet radiation exposure. In pilots, chromosomal translocation, or the unusual arrangement of chromosomes, was discovered at statistically significant rates in relation to the amount of time they had been flying. This was done using FISH, or Fluorescence In Situ Hybridization, to help locate where the DNA is bound. The frequency of chromosomal translocation in those who had been flying for a long duration of time was double the frequency of those who had flown minimally. These chromosomal abnormalities are associated with cancer risk.

In women, there is an additional cancer risk: that of breast cancer. The exposure to cosmic radiation paired with the disruption of one's circadian rhythm is a large contributor to the increased frequency of breast cancer observed in female flight crews. Using meta-analyses that comply with the meta-analysis of Observational Studies in Epidemiology guidelines, researchers were able to compile the statistical data from various scientific studies. Researchers were able to calculate a 95% confidence interval (CI), the range of values where a number likely exists, combined with the standardized incidence ratio (SIR). The SIR is the ratio

of observed cancer cases over the expected number of cases. Results from ten separate studies analyzed in the meta-analyses indicate that compared to the general population, the SIR was 1.40. Since the number was larger than one, that indicates a greater number of cases than was expected. The study concluded that around 40% of these cases can be attributed to the disruption of the circadian rhythm in flight attendants as well as cosmic radiation exposure.

Circadian rhythm disruption significantly alters the immune system as well as hormonal balance. Being a member of the cabin crew ensures light exposure at night, short and unusual sleeping hours, as well as time zone changes. In women, this can increase the tumor growth rate for breast cancer. Melatonin, which mediates one's circadian rhythm, inhibits breast cancer cell growth. The increase in tumor growth is due to the changes in melatonin release and cell metabolism. Mainly, the changes in circadian rhythm correlate with fatigue as well as mental health issues, none of which increase genotoxic risks.

Additionally, there are reproductive risks for crew members who are pregnant. Cosmic exposure as well as excessive standing time and heavy lifting may be linked to increased miscarriage rates during the first trimester. Targeting the exact cause of these reproductive problems is a work in progress, but one must be diligent to reduce their risks and exposure during pregnancy.

Flight crews greet passengers with big smiles and passengers are often jealous of an aircrew's ability to travel the world and get paid to do it. Beneath the smiles, however, the DNA damage in flight attendants is nothing to be jealous of. Despite there being an influx of studies done on the effects of cosmic radiation on

aircrews, the results indicate a need for further research. Cosmic and UV radiation are shown to not only damage DNA, but translocate chromosomes as well as increase the risk of certain types of cancer. Flight crews have a lot to consider when it comes to working in the skies. It is up to them to decide if the hazardous risk is worth the adventure this lifestyle brings. They may be the ones getting the paychecks, but it is their body that is paying the price.

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The Polar Vortex Is No Longer in the Poles

By Sarah Brill, Science & Technology Editor

Polar vortices are common in the North Pole. In fact, they happen almost every year. This year, however, as meteorologists anxiously awaited their news story of the night, an unprecedented event occurred: temperatures spiked in the arctic from minus 92 degrees Fahrenheit to 8 degrees Fahrenheit, thrusting warm wind into the oncoming polar vortex. Instead of just striking the North Pole as it was supposed to, this vortex split into two. One is headed towards North America, and the other towards Europe, where it is expected to strike at the end of January and beginning of February.

Regularly occurring polar vortices in the poles occur quite differently than that of the abnormal polar vortices headed towards North America and Europe. Typically, cold air is spun counterclockwise near the North and South Poles and it dissipates in the spring. Polar vortices have always occurred by the poles, according to the National Weather Service. To maintain the cold spin of air, there needs to be a stable temperature and the vortex

will travel along the jet stream. When these vortices occur, northern states and northern parts of Europe are affected by small snowstorms and colder weather due to some of the vortex expanding south along the jet stream. Stratospheric warming, however, can destabilize the polar vortex, pushing it off course.

The question remains: what caused this sudden change in temperature? It is no secret that the Earth is warming, the ice is melting, and climate change is happening before our eyes. In fact, according to National Geographic, "[i]n the past 30 years, the Arctic has warmed about twice as fast as the rest of the world, a phenomenon known as arctic amplifica-

tion." This unusual and irregular warming and cooling of the Earth's atmosphere has caused events from the wildfires in Australia and California, in addition to the warmest summer Antarctica has ever experienced. Now, an unnatural polar vortex is headed towards North America and Europe one of which is caused by climate change. It has been warned time and time again that if a shift in our mentality towards climate and the environment does not change, irregular events such as these will continue to occur.

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Man and Earth's Best Friend

BY Shani Lewis VP of Environmental Issues Dems

Everyone knows that a dog is man's best friend, but did you know that a dog is also Earth's best friend? Dogs have an enhanced ability of smell, in fact,



their sense of smell is 10,000 times stronger than a humans. Wildlife conservationists use dogs to help track down dangerous wildlife. Jaymi Heimbuch, a specialist in wildlife conservation, wrote that dogs are able to "[sniff] out invasive species like giant snails in the Galapagos or [detect] disease in beehives, dogs' noses can be put to work in searching out what shouldn't be there so that humans can act. Dogs are able to sniff out particular plant species, pointing ecologists to tiny patches of invasive mustard so that the plants can be

removed before they take over an area."

This is a tremendous aid to wildlife conservationists who, according to Heimbuch, are only able to identify dangerous species of plants by sight when they are in full bloom. Which is ultimately too late since most plants once they are fully bloomed will spread their deadly nature to the wildlife around them. In addition to finding dangerous plants in wildlife, dogs are also able to sniff out endangered species, helping conservationists find and protect these species.

According to CNN, the dogs are trained to identify the endangered species from their feces. Many species have been saved, such as the San Joaquin kit fox, gray wolves, cougars, bobcats, moose, river otters, American minks, black-footed ferrets and

even the North Atlantic right whale. With the help of dogs, conservationists around the world have been able to eliminate dangers to nature and protect wildlife that is endangered. Who knew man's best friend would also be a friend to Earth?

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The Role of Dippin' Dots in COVID Relief

By Leia Rubinstein

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is ready for use, but there is just one problem: it needs to be stored at a very cold temperature of -94 F. Specifically, it requires a "cold chain" — a system that keeps the temperature standard throughout the delivery process. Fortunately, a solution for how to maintain the cold temperature required of the vaccine has been found from an unlikely source: Dippin' Dots.

Dippin' Dots is a brand famous for its ice cream in the form of tiny beads. But what does the popular summertime treat have to do with COVID-19 relief? As it turns out, Dippin' Dots uses special freezers that can get as cold as -122 to make the shape of the ice cream beads. Stan Jones,

the chief development officer for Dippin' Dots, explained that in order to get the special shape of Dippin' Dots, the ice cream must be pelletized. Ingredients are mixed and then dripped into the freezer to create their characteristic shape. They are then stored and sent out in freezers at -49 .

Dippin' Dots actually developed these special freezers with the intention of using them for medical purposes in addition to storing their frozen treat. As of 2012, some are already implemented for use in storing vaccines that use pelletization. Jones received inquiries about purchasing some of their freezers for the coronavirus vaccine and is prepared to sell them, but warns about the safety precautions that must be taken into consideration.

Jones informs that the same freezer should not be used for both food and vaccine to prevent contamination. Any freezer that Pfizer-BioNTech would purchase must never have been used for Dippin' Dots and reserved only for vaccine storage.

Also, Jones explains that the freezers utilize dry ice, a solid form of carbon dioxide that is -109 . Dry ice, however, comes with certain risks, such as burns or frostbite if touched with a bare hand. In addition, if warmed up, dry ice can sublimate into carbon dioxide gas and cause anyone around to suffocate. Dippin' Dots delivery workers undergo special training to stay safe on the job and Jones recommends similar training for the delivery of the vaccines.

In this late stage of the

COVID-19 pandemic, there is finally an end in sight with the creation of a vaccine. However, simply having the vaccine is not enough; there is also the issue of transporting the vaccine for delivery across the country. Thankfully, the Dippin' Dots company freezers may be the solution to this problem, and will speed up the process of eliminating the coronavirus.

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COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution: Where We Are Now

By Shoshanah Marcus, News Editor

After months of creating and testing vaccines, the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines finally have FDA approval.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines have been distributed to people across the globe since December 14, 2020. Both vaccines require two doses; however, the second dose is administered three to four weeks after the first dose depending on which vaccine was administered.

When it comes to determining who should receive the vaccine, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes suggested priority vaccination lists, and then each state makes its own plan based on these recommendations.

The CDC claims that supplies of the vaccine will be limited at first, which is why they have gathered an Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to make recommendations as to who should receive the vaccine first. As of now, the CDC recommends that the first phase be divided into three subphases. According to the CDC, "initial supplies of

COVID-19 vaccine be allocated to healthcare personnel and long-term care facility residents," which is referred to as Phase 1a. On December 22, 2020, the CDC recommended that Phase 1b, consisting of frontline essential workers and people aged 75 years and older, and Phase 1c, consisting of people aged 65-74 years old, people aged 16-64 years with underlying medical conditions, and other essential workers, be distributed. The CDC stated on their website that "[a] vaccine availability increases, vaccination recommendations will expand to include more groups" and included that "[t]he goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as large enough quantities of vaccine are available."

According to USA Today, "about 7.2% of people in the US have received at least one COVID-19 shot. About 1.6% of people have received both doses of the vaccine. About 40.8% of the shots distributed haven't been used yet." These statistics, along with a map that depicts how many people have been vaccinated with the first and second dose in each state in the United States, are consistently being

updated on a regular basis on their website. The CDC has compiled a similar map depicting the total doses administered, total doses distributed, people receiving one or more doses, and people receiving two doses as reported to the CDC by state per 100,000 people and by total count.

The World Health Organization (WHO) published a series of articles on the development of the COVID-19 vaccine with the latest article addressing how to fairly distribute the vaccine. The WHO established the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility in collaboration with the ACT-Accelerator vaccine partners the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. The COVAX Facility's goal is to "[bring] nations together, regardless of their income level, to ensure the procurement and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines" and aim to accomplish this through two phases. During the first phase of distribution of the vaccine, the vaccine will be given to participating countries until 20% of the population is vaccinated. Frontline workers in the health-care and social fields will be

given priority during this phase. If vaccine supplies continue to be limited in the second phase, participating countries will receive vaccine doses based on an assessment of their risk. Additionally, the COVAX Facility promises that there will be some doses allocated as a "humanitarian buffer ... to serve as a provider of last resort for if/when national, government-led processes fail to reach certain populations."

Overall, large organizations such as the CDC and WHO may have many recommendations for how to effectively and fairly distribute the vaccine, but each state and country will need to determine for themselves how to best allocate their resources.

Where have all the insects gone?

By Tova Shmulewitz

As a child, I would point out butterflies and other insects flying around, while simultaneously running away from bees and other imminent "threats" buzzing around my head. But as I aged, my interactions with insects happened less frequently as they once did. This is not because I stopped noticing them as I matured, but because of a serious issue facing the world today.

Insects have slowly been decreasing exponentially over time. Some scientists have called this phenomenon an "insect apocalypse." According to reports, the Western Bumblebee species has declined by 93% over the past few decades, and 25% of all bee species have disappeared.

Insects may seem annoying to us, but they are vital parts of the food chain and integral to our ecosystem. Insects are at

the bottom of the food chain making them a source of nutrition to animals such as fish and birds. They also play a vital role in the pollination of crops and plants. Pollination is essential in maintaining plant life and crop growth. Without food to survive, the birds and fish will not survive which could very realistically lead to major problems for us humans at the top of the food chain. This applies not only to meat-eaters, but also vegetarians and vegans, as insects are also needed for plants and crop growth.

So what is leading to this extinction of insects? Environmental factors such as climate change are often cited as a leading cause of extinction alongside human-caused global warming. Climate change is actually cited as one of the main reasons for the declines. One study has shown that in a forest in New Hampshire, beetles have de-

clined 83% since the late 1970s. The reason for this is due to the steady increase in warm temperatures resulting in a decline of snow during cold seasons. Deforestation, fires, and droughts are other human-caused reasons why insects are going extinct. Another reason for the insect decline is our increased use of pesticides and chemicals which results in habitat changes for the insects. Research has shown that monarch butterflies have been rapidly declining in areas where they usually migrate to during the cold season to stay warm. This is because chemicals have killed off some plants needed for the butterflies' survival.

There are some things that we are able to do to stop this rapid decline. We need to decrease the use of pesticides and raise awareness about climate change. Helping the environment can help the insects. We all need to do what we can, before

this problem becomes a real threat.

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Business

Wall Street vs. The Internet

By Jake Sheckter

Over the last couple of weeks, too many of us have been yelled at by friends, family, and absolute strangers to invest our life savings into GameStop stock, to “hold the line,” or that their methods will surely take them “to the moon.” If you have no idea what this all means but have been caught in the crossfire of day-traders and memes, you should know that you are not alone. GameStop, a company that sells physical copies of video games, used to be a bustling hub for gamers of all shapes, ages, and sizes. However, due to recent years of online video game downloading and disc-less gaming consoles, GameStop has become the obsolete dinosaur we find in the shadowy corners of dying shopping centers. This steady decline was apparent in the company’s stock price as it fluctuated (roughly) between \$20 and \$50 for almost a decade between 2007 and 2017, before falling to less than \$15 in 2018 and 2019, and finally hitting close to a \$3-\$5 rock bottom over the last two years.

So, what is going on? Essentially, millions of average people made a huge bet against some enormous financial institutions, and won, even if only temporarily. Practically speaking, this means we are witnessing one of the largest wealth transfers from the financial ruling class to the middle and middle-upper classes in recent history, so it is, understandably, the only thing on everyone’s minds.

How did this come to be? A large subgroup on the discussion board website “Reddit” named “r/WallStreetBets” came to the conclusion that GameStop’s stock was undervalued. Spanning the next few months, r/WallStreetBets singled out a major fault in the strategies of a few massive hedge funds which had bet many millions of dollars that GameStop’s final days were approaching. These ‘Redditors’ would then buy incredible amounts of GameStop stock at their extremely low prices, continue to purchase more as the prices rose, which resulted in quickly forcing what is known as a “short squeeze” that not only drives the price up but



cleans out the pockets of hedge fund managers along the way.

What is “shorting”? Shorting is a bet that a company’s stock will decrease in value. An investor (borrows and) sells shares at a specific (high) price, betting that in the near future the price of that stock will drop. The investor will then later be able to buy the stock at the predicted lower price to “cover” their shorts, therefore “closing” the deal and profiting the difference between the price they sold at (originally) and their recent low buying point. By shorting a company (which huge hedge funds do all the time), downward pressure is forced on the stock price. This means that an already struggling company can get knocked down even further, solely because some giant hedge fund invests millions of dollars shorting it to make a quick buck. So what happens when a shorted stock soars skyward instead of decreases? This is called a “short squeeze” and to sum it up, the short seller can lose a whole lot of money.

A company named Melvin Capital Management very quickly became this short-seller loser after shorting millions of dollars in GameStop stock. Melvin Capital Management, along with Citron Research and a few others, made an unfortunate bet that GameStop would continue to decline (to around \$2 or \$3 dollars) and therefore allow them to take out a huge profit, as they normally would. But this was not like any other time. In a flexing match of the strongest wills, Redditors pumped up the stock price (to over \$443 dollars), according to GameStop’s Stock Ticker (GME), while the hedge funds kept doubling down and shorting the stock even further, hoping they would come out on top

with a low price to cover their positions (which never came). It is significant to note that this scenario is very rare due to the fact that short-sellers would need to short more shares of a company than actually exist (in our case, over 140% of existing shares were shorted).

This means that even if every short seller wanted to close their positions, they wouldn’t be able to because the shares technically don’t exist. What makes this case different is that Redditors caught on early and decided to take Wall Street on a run for its money. Redditors bought and refused to sell their GameStop stock while short-sellers couldn’t cover their shorts without forcing themselves into billions of dollars in losses because the stock was excessively over shorted, practically backing themselves into a corner from which they couldn’t escape unharmed.

This resulted in an internet and even America-wide “us-versus-them” mentality. If you bought GameStop and refused to sell to anyone, consequently “holding the line,” you became part of a much larger, internet-frenzied, whole. If you caved in and sold your shares before the collective took GameStop “to the moon,” you were deemed a traitor who helped out the hedge funds. Over the last weeks, Melvin Capital has lost close to a reported \$3 billion dollars to this short squeeze.

What does this all mean? With tensions rising as trading platforms like Robinhood halted trading and later only allowed GameStop stock to be sold, not bought (taking the hedge funds’ side), the market instability of certain stocks has only been increasing. We are witnessing the democratization of

financial information, to a certain extent. It is extremely apparent that a large portion of the group that makes up r/WallStreetBets has had enough with the growing inequality, and is tired of seeing massive Wall Street corporations continue to step all over “the little guy” to make a quick buck.

For decades, the middle-class people of America have followed a narrative stating that the large banks and towering hedge funds should be the entities to control the economy and get wealthy throughout. Meanwhile, the average working citizen is stuck with stagnant wages, record consumer debt, and financial advice telling them to wait until the end of their lives to retire. WallStreetBets claims that this major, societal swing will transfer power to the masses and away from the hedge funds, giving middle-class America hope for a change in their story to come.

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The Awakening of the Semiconductor Industry

By Judah Esses

The semiconductor industry powers much of the world's technology, from making it possible for loved ones to talk face-to-face from across an ocean to executing millions of trades in the market every day. However, "over the last 15-20 years, the semiconductor industry has recorded growth at an annualized rate of less than 5%." With this lack of growth and the increase in chip production prices, the industry has been quiet. But, due to the coronavirus, which has brought a shift to the cloud and increased the number of people working from home, the demand for chips has skyrocketed. This sudden catalyst has led to sudden competition in the industry, and in such an unstable economic environment, these companies need to be competitive. This has led to a huge influx of mergers and acquisitions over the past year, which has helped companies increase market share, reduce costs, and boost productivity.

Over the last year, the industry has recorded more than thirty mergers and acquisitions — the two largest deals combined for a value of more than \$60 billion. In July, Analog Devices (ADI) agreed to acquire Maxim

Integrated Products (MXIM) in a deal worth \$20.9 billion. In September, Nvidia (NVDA) agreed to buy the U.K.-based Arm Holdings in a deal valued at \$40 billion. Although there was a pause in the action as the coronavirus lingered through the streets, it didn't take long for people to realize that there was a lot of debt available for companies to borrow, and the interest rates were low. This recognition is what partly led to a buzz in the industry despite the pandemic's negative effects on the economy. As these mergers and acquisitions occur, we see consolidation. This helps the smaller firms who are struggling with rising costs for designing. Also, packaging and testing are becoming unaffordable for most companies, especially for the smaller firms who have not achieved economies of scale yet. Furthermore, the industry's consolidation is also benefiting the larger firms by cutting costs and becoming more diverse in their services.

Although the forecast for the semiconductor industry seems bright, there is a red flag. China is pushing the world to avoid doing business with Taiwan, and semiconductor production

is dangerously dependent on Taiwan. According to Jan-Peter Kleinhans, director of the technology and geopolitics project at Berlin-based think tank Stiftung Neue Verantwortung, "By dominating the U.S.-developed model of outsourcing chip manufacture, Taiwan is potentially the most critical single point of failure in the entire semiconductor value chain." The biggest semiconductor production company in the world is the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). With TSMC being a dominant manufacturer in terms of both market share and production capabilities, any disruption would cause a ripple in the industry. Thus, as the Biden Administration settles in, it is critical for the industry that they take a tough stance on China's agenda with Taiwan.

Because of the demand for chips due to the pandemic, many are skeptical of what the semiconductor industry will look like as things go back to normal. Although the need for chips may not be as high, the industry still has room to grow. However, it will grow differently than it had in the past. Instead of solely focusing on

chip production, semiconductors can now shift their focus to software, chip, and eventually brand themselves as a systems company. A great example of this is Nvidia. Instead of merely focusing on building chips, they have become one of the world's leading systems companies. If other large companies take advantage of their market share in the industry, they can be heading in Nvidia's direction.

All in all, the industry has started to pick up again, and there is a lot of room for growth now that companies are taking advantage of the current situation. Nonetheless, it is important to keep the situation with China and Taiwan in mind because it can have a major effect on the industry. After a record year of mergers and acquisitions, I think we can expect to see similar numbers as the industry consolidates. As a result, the more prominent names will branch out and offer more diverse products. Overall, although it is an industry that has been lacking growth, the world is a very different place than it was last year, and this has woken up the semiconductor industry once again.

Bring out your inner
journalist.

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reporter for the
YU Observer.



to join us, contact frumalanda725@gmail.com

The “Benefits” of the Covid-19 Pandemic

By Amalya Teitelbaum

Amongst the horrors of the pandemic, earnings have skyrocketed for Facebook, Tesla, and Amazon. While people have been losing their jobs, struggling to make ends meet, and desperately applying to receive money from the government, on the other side of the scale we have the tech giants. These companies recently released results showing just how much their sky-high share prices have soared. In fact, Congress accused tech companies of having “too much power.”

Many companies have seen a major increase in sales throughout the pandemic as people race to find efficient ways to go virtual; such as school, work, and entertainment. This increase in sales doesn't show a sign of stopping anytime soon. For instance, the past elections had Americans racing to Facebook for information. Mark Zuckerberg himself stated

that because the pandemic continued into the election season, Facebook's role in providing accurate election information and removing voter suppression on the app is more important than ever. Due to the pandemic, Facebook now unfortunately, or fortunately depending on your opinion, boasts 2.7 billion monthly users on Facebook alone and 3.14 billion monthly users across its family of acquisitions including Instagram and WhatsApp.

Nevertheless, the United States economy and the wealth of these companies during the pandemic have a strong negatively correlated relationship. On the day that the U.S. announced the overall economic growth had collapsed by a record-setting 32.9%, Amazon casually reported a profit of 5.2 billion dollars for that same quarter and sales of 88.9 billion dollars, 40% higher than last year.

I am so happy for them.

With Amazon leading the charge, Facebook is racing behind in a close second place. Facebook sales, which comprise nearly all of Facebook's revenue, rose 10%, bringing their revenue to \$18.3 billion in the second quarter. As a result, Facebook shares jumped 8% in extended trading. I do give some credit to Mark Zuckerberg though, who unlike Amazon, continuously pushes for the support of small businesses and stressed these businesses' role in the expanding online marketplace, which has increased tenfold because of the pandemic. For example, he has publicly criticized calls for company regulations in targeted internet advertising. This “would reduce opportunities for small businesses so much that would probably be felt at a macroeconomic level,” he said. “Is that really what policymakers want in the middle of [a] pandemic and

recession?”

The closing of small businesses greatly contributes to the growing wealth of these Tech Giants during the pandemic. If you walk down any street in Manhattan it would not be difficult to understand why. You can not take 3 steps without a bright yellow “Going out of Business” sign or a neon red “Closed” sign glaring down at you. Without the ability to go to a store and back to their apartment and back within the hour people are forced to turn to sites such as Amazon for their shopping. because many people are unable to leave their homes due to quarantine, prevailing health issues, and common sense which tells them to restrict going to stores during a pandemic they are forced to an online shop. Ultimately, whether we like it or not, we find our fingers typing in A-M-A-Z-O-N.

Is Bitcoin the Newest Favored Investment?

By Shaina Levin, Business Manager

In 2008, the idea of cryptocurrency was created by a man who uses the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto with the goal to decentralize the money system. In 2009, Nakamoto formed Bitcoin, which quickly became the most popular and widely used cryptocurrency. In recent weeks, there has been much buzz surrounding cryptocurrency — and Coinbase's impending IPO (Initial Public Offering) has only added to the excitement. Taking a step back, one must ask: what is Bitcoin, and is it worth investing in?

The current money system in the U.S. relies on the U.S. dollar (USD) which has been given a legal status by the government. This system is considered a centralized system, in which people trust the banks which keep a ledger of who owns what amount of money on their systems, and this record helps prevent people from copying their money. In other words, this centralized system helps avoid what they call the “double spending problem.” The Federal Reserve, the United States' central bank, is the center of where money is printed and recorded to effectively run the economy.

Despite the currency system

being longstanding, there are still many problems with a centralized system. For example, there can be corruption of authority, as the banks have control over your money and can withhold or freeze your accounts at any time. The people have trust in a bank, who essentially has complete control of their money.

Bitcoin is a form of cryptocurrency, in which the currency is digital by nature. Bitcoin creates a decentralized system which solves the “double spending problem” through the use of complex algorithms to prevent the duplication of currency. Bitcoin includes a transparent and pseudo-anonymous ledger. This means the owner of the Bitcoins has access to seeing all transactions taking place with Bitcoins, but hides the identity of the individuals behind the transactions. By using Bitcoin, users have complete control over their money. The exchanges eliminate the need for a middleman, as banks are not required.

A common and secure website to buy Bitcoins is Coinbase.com. This platform comes as an app as well as the website, and it allows you to exchange either money or another form of cryptocurrency for Bitcoins, think similar to Robinhood but for cryptocurrency. Users are required to create

a “wallet,” which allows them to keep track of their money and can be purchased from the Coinbase website or app. Once a user transfers Bitcoins to their coinbase wallet, they will have complete control over their bitcoins.

Bitcoins have become the leading form of cryptocurrency used, but is it worth investing in? While this form of currency is becoming more popular and widely accepted by the likes of companies such as by Microsoft and Expedia, there are still potential risks in investing in this form of currency. While Bitcoin is impossible to duplicate, eliminating the “double spending problem,” it still has risk of theft and fraud.

It is also important to point out that their password protection can cause one to get locked out of their account, losing their Bitcoins. According to Nakamoto, Bitcoins were created to be accessible to all without being controlled by a central authority. This is done through the complex algorithms that allow a user to create his or her own save key only known to them. If someone forgets their password, they have only ten attempts before their Bitcoins are gone forever.

For example, Stefan Thomas is a man who invested in Bitcoins

before it became popular. He has now accumulated over \$220 million worth of Bitcoins, but since 2012 he has not been able to gain access to their account. He has two more attempts to get into his account before losing all his Bitcoins forever. While he has reportedly “made peace” with the situation, this is a major risk a person is taking when investing in Bitcoins.

Additionally, Bitcoin is extremely volatile and the return on investment is not the classic dividends, earnings, or investments. It's earnings are dependent on how much someone will pay for that Bitcoin investment in the future.

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Are Marketers Telling Lies or Telling Stories?

By Beatrice O'Campo

That's the question Seth Godin asks in his book "All Marketers are Liars". (All marketing and advertising majors, keep calm: We're storytellers). Is there a lie within that story that both us and the customers believe? Yes. Is that story absolutely essential to successful marketing? Also yes.

Let me explain.

Recently, I discovered a brand of candles called Homesick. An ad showed up on my Instagram feed declaring that Homesick made a candle for every state in America. There I was, sitting in my New York apartment and missing my home state of Alaska. I clicked on the ad and bought a \$35 Alaska scented candle.

Homesick says they make candles to remind you of the memories and places you love and miss. There's a USA candle that smells like apple pie and a New York City candle that smells like "spring days in Central Park, cement and expensive department stores." There are scents like "Grandma's Kitchen," "American Summer," "Book Club," "Love Letters" and "Holiday Stroll."

Does my Alaska candle smell like "glacial water and spruce"? If you made me smell it blind, I'd say no. (Glacial water doesn't even

have a smell, and I know this from firsthand experience.) But slap a picture of Alaska on the front of the candle and give me the experience of unwrapping the custom packaging, and I'm sold.

So sold, in fact, that I now have seven Homesick candles in different scents. My boyfriend thinks I have a problem. In reality, Homesick tells a good story, and I, the consumer, tell myself the lie: That these candles really do smell like places and times I miss, and therefore I should pay triple for them what I would pay for a similarly scented Glade candle.

Not only does Homesick tell a story, it lives and breathes that story. The packaging is luxe, unique and high quality. The website is full of soothing, nostalgic words like "love," "family," "childhood," "home" and "happiness." The candles themselves come in sleek glass containers with minimalistic labels.

Compare this to Glade candles. You can find them in any Duane Reade. The packaging is flimsy. The labels on the front look cheap and gaudy. The scents, when you get right down to it, are probably close to identical. Does it matter to me, the erstwhile consumer? Nope.

Godin notes that as much as the consumer likes to think she is making purchases based on facts, the opposite is actually true. The consumer makes decisions based on knee jerk reactions to how a product makes her feel. Homesick candles make me feel fancy, safe, and excited. Glade candles make me feel cheap and bored. To heck with the data: I'm shelling out an extra thirty bucks.

We can see the same thing taking place everywhere. Data shows that recycling is actually more expensive and uses more greenhouse gases than just throwing all our trash away. But we fight tooth and nail to keep recycling in our cities because it makes us feel good and clean and assuages our guilt. Data shows that granola is actually full of sugar and fat, but fancy juice bars in LA sell pounds of the stuff because it's associated with hiking, health, and a down-to-earth lifestyle. Data shows that minivans are safer and get better gas mileage than Mercedes G Wagons, but minivans have been labeled as the official car of soccer moms and the G Wagon is the car of the Kardashians. So, you guessed it: We scoff at minivans and covet G Wagons.

All this is to say that, if you're a

marketer and you want to be great, you need to learn to tell stories. Don't just give people the data and facts about what your product does. That isn't enough. You need to tell them a story that will make them associate a good feeling with your product. Ben Shapiro famously said, "facts don't care about your feelings." In marketing, the opposite is true. The feeling is the main thing that matters.

This does not mean that we can make up stories to trick the consumer into buying our products. We need to remain ethical and authentic. Our stories should merely be a frame that the consumer views our product through. Back to the Homesick example: By itself, the Alaska candle just smells like pine. But then Homesick tells me it smells like my home. Suddenly, I smell Alaska in that candle.

The story makes the product. More than that, it makes the product desirable. If you can figure out how to tell an authentic story about what you're selling, you'll do well.

(And you'll probably get me to spend a ton of money on it.)

SSSB Club Profile: TAMID

By Nathan Hakakian on behalf of the YU Observer

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one SSSB club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the February issue, the YU Observer is highlighting "TAMID."

Club Name: TAMID

Heads:

Presidents- Jon Leff & Alex Volchek

Director of Recruitment- Alex Brody

Director of Education- Meir Tolchin

Director of consulting- Rachel Doretsky

Director of Fund- Liz Pavel & Kenny Book

Director of Operations- Jessie Weinberg

Relevant Campus(es): Syms Beren, Syms Wilf

What is your club's mission statement/ why is this club import-

ant?:

TAMID is a highly competitive program offering a unique opportunity to expand your network, receive hands-on business experience, gain exposure to the Israeli economic landscape, and possibly partake in a once in a lifetime summer experience in Israel. Beginning with an interactive classroom curriculum, the program soon progresses into three different tracks- Consulting, Fund and Tech- this gives members hands-on experience with companies in the heart of the start up nation. Membership to the TAMID Group is also a chance to build your capacity as a leader by learning from TAMID students both at YU and across our national collegiate network (60 campuses strong).

What are some things your club has done in the past?

TAMID has brought in top business speakers such as Austin Rief

the COO of Morning Brew.

TAMIDxYU also has consecutively sent 5-10 students to partake in the TAMID Fellowship in Israel each summer.

Hold weekly meetings for the Education, Consulting and Fund tracks.

What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters? We are excited to announce a new tech track.

Strengthen our curriculum. Create more networking events with other TAMID chapters. Continue to bring in top speakers.

With COVID, how is your club adjusting?

Our weekly meetings have been moved online.

What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?

TAMID consists of students from

all majors and backgrounds which forms one tight-knit group of passionate, dynamic and dedicated students, if this sounds like something you'd be interested in, you should definitely apply!

Anything else to say about your club:

Applications are out now and are due Jan 31st @11:59pm: To Apply

We are also holding an info session on Thursday, Jan 28, at 8:15pm!

[Link to join](#)

Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us at theyuobserver@gmail.com with your club name and the names of the club heads!

Bridgerton: A Modern Take On England's Regency Era

By Batia Segal



What is Bridgerton?

Bridgerton is a drama series set in the Regency era of England and follows the lives of the high status Bridgerton family. There's a special focus on the family's oldest daughter, Daphne. The series opens with Daphne getting ready for the new social season of arranging matches for marriage while the town is buzzing about the show's narrator and town gossip, Lady Whistledown. Lady Whistledown sells gossip papers about London's high society and her identity remains a mystery throughout the series.

After getting ready for her debut, Daphne enters the ball of awaiting potential suitors. The night begins decently, but Daphne's older brother, Anthony, pushes away every man that approaches Daphne because he does not see them as fit for his sister. Because of this, Daphne is no longer viewed as desirable. Later on, we are introduced to the Duke of Hastings, Simon. Unwilling to get married, he has the opposite issue as Daphne since people keep pestering him to settle down. After a couple of clumsy encounters, Daphne and Simon decide it is a good idea to pretend to date to make Daphne seem more desirable and Simon seem unavailable, giving them both what they want. As the cliché of romantic dramas tend to play out, from here on out, their tumultuous romance begins. What makes the series different from others is that Bridgerton

adds a modern flavor to the Regency era of England. It achieves this mainly by incorporating the common cliché of "love trumps all" and twenty-first century ideas of feminism into early nineteenth century England.

One thing that I really loved about Bridgerton is the theme of love trumps all. Although a common trope, Bridgerton brings this idea to an era when love is undervalued as an integral aspect of a marriage. In the Regency era, marriage is simply seen as a business arrangement to either maintain a family's social status or climb higher on the social ladder. For instance, Simon does not want children for the most of the series. We later learn that the reason is because his father treated him so badly that he refused to produce an heir for his father as a way to get revenge against him. Now, he meets Daphne and eventually falls in love with her. Him falling in love with her gave him the outlet to be able to overcome his childhood trauma and break away from his father's hold. On the other hand, Daphne's main concern is to marry someone she loves, even if that person cannot give her children. For instance, she marries Simon knowing that he "cannot" have children. In this case, her love for Simon trumps her other personal desires.

Another thing I appreciate about the series is their emphasis on the importance of

honesty and communication in a relationship. For example, when Daphne marries Simon, she is under the impression that he cannot have children which is false. Simon tells her this in order to not reveal the true reason for him not wanting to have kids. Because he keeps this secret, they run into many issues, but if they had open communication they would have had the opportunity to work through the problem together.

A notable character in the series is Eloise, Daphne's younger sister with the ambition of becoming a writer. While Daphne is symbolic of the girl who wants what the Regency society expects of women, Eloise is symbolic of the girl who wants the exact opposite. She wants to go to University, become educated about the world and be self-sufficient without the need for a man. Unlike today where many women can choose to do as they please, Eloise lives in an era where she is not allowed to go to University or has barely any say in how she wants to lead her life. In other words, Eloise is the twenty-first century girl who is forced into nineteenth century norms. I particularly liked this character because despite not having the resources at her disposal she always maintains a certain curiosity about the world around her and is ambitious about finding answers to her questions. For example, her search to find the true identity of Lady Whistledown, she takes her time to

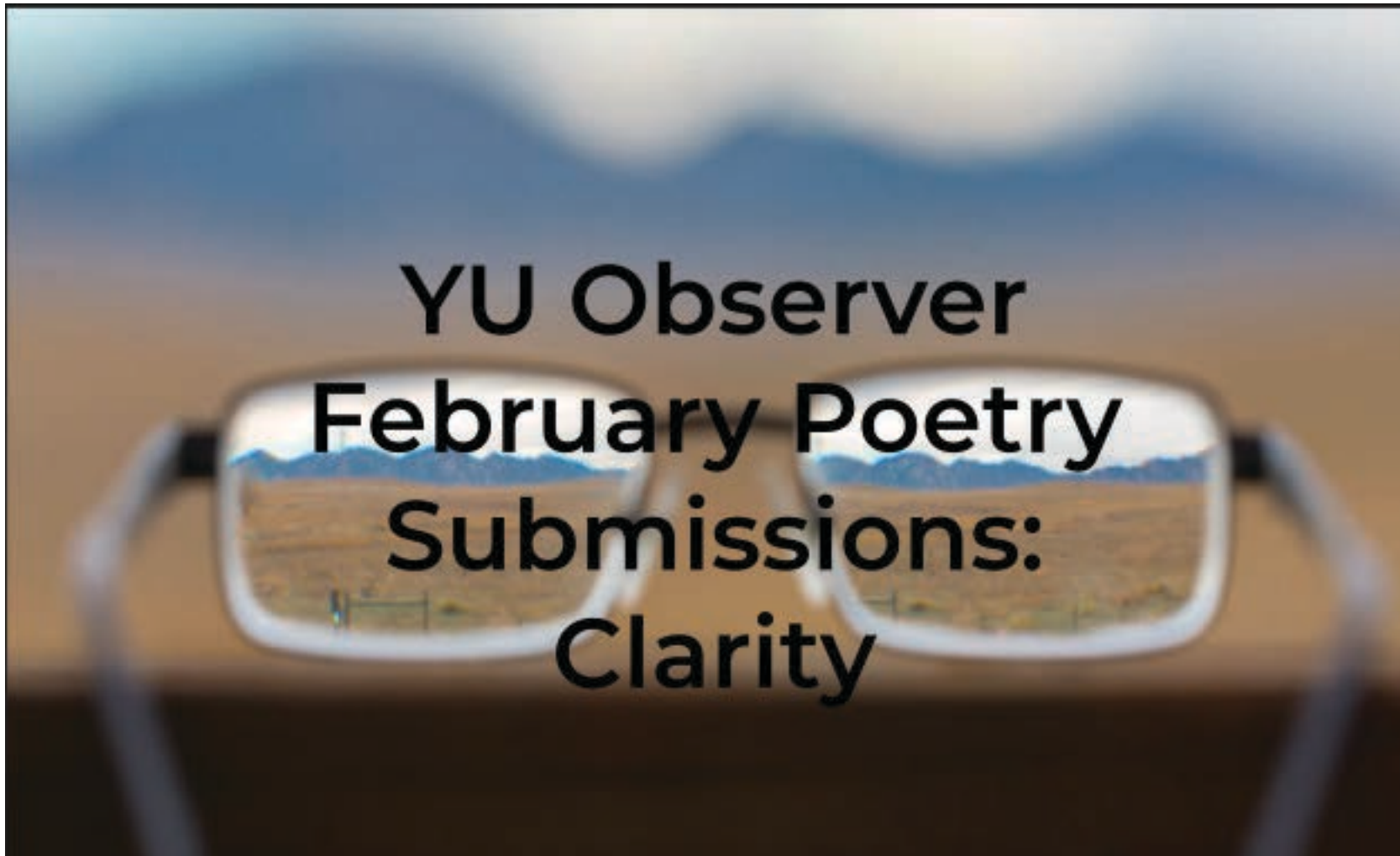
look for clues and tries to trick her into revealing herself, but to no avail.

Another thing I think is worth mentioning is the fact that both Daphne and Eloise both actively "choose" the way they want to live their life. This trait is more obvious of Eloise because she is overtly contrasting societal expectations, but it is important to note that Daphne does not simply conform either. Daphne chooses who she wants to marry, despite her brother wanting to choose for her. Some may argue that she is not really choosing, rather she is a product of the constricting society and is simply blending in. This is not the case. It is clear from the way that she rejects Anthony's suggestion and chooses to stay with Simon. From this example alone we learn that Daphne is as much a "feminist" character as Eloise.

Conclusion

All in all, Bridgerton is a wonderful series full of amazing actors and interesting characters. The production value is phenomenal from the sets to the costume designs to the orchestral versions of modern music. I highly recommend it.

YU Observer January Poetry Submissions: Clarity



What Did Simon Really Say?

By P.D.

YU Observer January Poetry Submissions: Clarity
Each month, the YU Observer sends a call to YU students for poetry submissions following a specific theme. This month, the theme was "Clarity", and our honorable mentions include P.D.'s piece, "What Did Simon Really Say?".

What Did Simon Really Say?
By P.D.

Simon says don't stray after your heart.
Don't watch movies.
Don't listen to music during Sefira. You're out.

Get married.
Don't have premarital sex.
Simon says perform yibbum. We're out.

Simon says don't eat pork.

Simon says don't eat milk and meat.
Simon says don't eat chadash. Who's out?

Judge people favorably. We're out.
Don't be gay. I'm out.
Simon says love your fellow as yourself. Who's out?

Do you want to see your writing published? The theme for

March's poetry submissions is "Chaos". Send all submissions to theyuobserver@gmail.com by March 15 .

Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog by Casper David Friedrich

By HaKohein

YU Observer January Poetry Feature: Clarity
Each month, the YU Observer sends a call to YU students for poetry submissions following a specific theme. This month, the theme was "Clarity", and we are featuring HaKohen's piece, "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog by Casper David Friedrich".
Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog by Casper David Friedrich
By HaKohein

Impervious to Khione's last bar-

rage,
the wanderer's content to be alone.
To his numb nerves, the frost is a mirage.
Atop the sea churn Daedalus's bones.

The waves spray up and douse his tired soles,
his tired soul doth hardly feel the chill.
His vacant eyes reflect, then find, Sheol;
the first time since he's set off

he's stood still.

While Friedrich thought he saw the hand of God,
the wanderer sees only due relief.
The great, gray sea which once did leave him awed,
will be the resting place of his belief.

Behind him lies a dream,
before him- sleep.
The once-a-wanderer falls to the deep.

Do you want to see your writing published? The theme for March's poetry submissions is "Chaos". Send all submissions to theyuobserver@gmail.com by March 15 .

Disney's "Soul" Really Touched My Soul

By Sarah Brill, Science & Technology Editor

Disney-Pixar's latest animated film, "Soul", debuted on Disney+ on December 25 and became an instant phenomenon. Disney is no stranger to tackling difficult subject matters, from racism in Zootopia to single parenthood in Nemo. That being said, this was not the typical Pixar movie with hints of sarcasm and comedy thrust at the audience. This time, Pixar tackled a subject matter that many mainstream television companies and movie companies can barely hold a candle too, and they did it, in my opinion with elegance and classic Disney magic.

This movie follows the life of

jazz musician Joe (Jamie Foxx) who receives his first real professional gig after months working as a part-time band teacher. That dream is suddenly crushed when he falls into a pot-hole and his soul is sent on a conveyor belt to the



beyond. He is helped in his journey of trying to get back to

the physical world by another soul called 22 (Tina Fey). 22 must find her spark while Joe must find his way back to his body. This movie shows the audience that everyone is born with an innate gift and it is up

to him or her to discover that

gift and share it with the world. The movie also teaches us that even if that given spark is never expressed, one can find their own spark through truly living life. The world will constantly throw obstacles at us, and if we don't learn to adapt we will never truly live. These themes are difficult to conquer and Disney does that by means of animated and abstract characters; as is Disney's modus operandi.

There has been some backlash surrounding this film from people who state that it doesn't hold the essence of Disney or that it is too mature for a Disney film. Movies are changing, but the world around us is changing

"The Prom" Review

By Sarah Brill Science and Technology Editor

This review contains spoilers.

"The Prom", a Broadway musical made movie in 2020, emulates the epitome of a homophobic small town in the middle of nowhere, Indiana. Full of musical numbers, motivating speeches, and references only your grandmother will get. This movie combines cringy teenager drama with topical issues such as acceptance and love.

The movie-musical starts off showcasing the problem at hand: Emma Nolan (Jo Ellen Pellman), a gay teenager living in rural Indiana, is prevented from attending prom with her girlfriend. Emma and Principle Tom Hawkins (Keegan Michael-Key) are stuck fighting Mrs. Greene (Kerry Washington) who heads the PTA and is mom of Alyssa Greene (Ariana DeBose), who we soon find out is Emma's girlfriend.

Meanwhile, in New York City, egotistical Broadway actors and actresses are looking for a lost cause to boost their morale and popularity. These four self-centered starstruck celebrities head down to Indiana, and, through a series of musical numbers, props, and lights, end up helping Emma step into her

own spotlight. With quite a few hiccups along the way, these down-on-their-luck Broadway stars help Emma get the prom she deserves.

The downfall in this truly brilliant film production was Barry Glickman, played by late night talk-show host James Cordon. Barry is a gay man attempting to not only help Emma through her downfalls and setbacks, but to also reestablish and enhance his relationship with his mother after hearing that Emma has no relationship with hers because she is gay. The character Barry is unproblematic, however, the actor James Cordon who is a straight man is. The movie is trying to establish the fact that the LGBTQ+ community is continually oppressed, but then they juxtaposed this oppression and struggle with a straight male character portraying something he himself has never gone through. There are many gay singers who have been on an off Broadway who could have been casted, making the fact that the organization chose a straight male problematic.

Regardless of this setback, "The Prom" shines a light on those teenage boys or girls or gender non-binary people in a forgot-

ton town in the middle of the country who are hiding in their closet afraid to show their true selves to the world. "The Prom" shows that anything is possible. Turning an entire town on your side is slightly unrealistic but nonetheless, it gives voice to those who struggle and fight to

show their identity on a day-to-day basis.



“Wonder Woman 1984” — Review

By Efrat Malachi

“Greatness is not what you think. Pace yourself and watch.” A pep talk young Diana receives from her mentor and aunt, Antiope, before stepping off into a competition. The paradox here is its lack of practice by the film’s makers. “Wonder Woman 1984” was supposed to be a blockbuster, instead, we got a lackluster movie. It officially premiered on HBO Max, a streaming service, on December 25 after being delayed several times due to COVID-19. Anticipation was overdue and the hype was unparalleled across social media platforms. Unfortunately, you don’t need to be a film critic to catch the plot holes and worn-out rhetoric. Let’s be clear, standing independently it was a good movie, though coming off the heels of the 2017 film, also directed by Patty Jenkins, it wasn’t what it should have been. “Wonder Woman” was excellent, soaring beyond everyone’s imagination. The bar was now raised to a height that even the superhero had trouble reaching. The first scene opens with a spunky, youthful Diana Prince running through the woods, accompanied by a voiceover of her present self (Gal Gadot) as she reminisces on “the magical land of my youth” (Themyscira). We trail behind as she gets ready to compete in an Amazonian Olympic of sorts. Spoiler, she was in the lead going against warriors twice her age and size but met defeat. On the verge of victory, she was pulled back because of haste and ego. Antiope needed to teach her a lesson she would never forget — “you took the short path...no true hero is born from lies.” The motifs, truth versus lies and personal versus universal interests, gather momentum as things unravel toward the climax. Though, they were the only elements cleverly and consistently echoed throughout. Bringing attention to the first of many issues, the Amazonians failed at imitating Gadot’s Israeli accent. The characters prove they can speak with a foreign tongue but it was not authentic to the actress’ and difficult to understand. The second issue: some underdeveloped ideas were scattered and paced improperly, as if the directors expected audiences to make the

thematic connections on their own. Watching a movie should be an enjoyable and effortless escape, not another homework assignment. The third: problem, way too many plot holes. I don’t think the ambiguity was intentional but if it was, there was no purpose for it. While villainous Maxwell Lord can only grant people one wish, some are given two? There’s no answer as to why. Another questionable decision is having Steve Trevor return in someone else’s body. A magical wishing stone is not limited to logic, so when Diana wishes her lover back there’s no reason to jump through hoops. We see Chris Pine’s face on the screen but in the mirror he’s a man left unnamed. It unnecessarily overcomplicates, subtracting from the story. Largely, the movie focuses heavily on the grand scheme that it neglects to prioritize the small yet significant details that fans haven’t forgotten about. It’s been 3 years since the first movie but 60+ years for Wonder Woman herself. Where has she been all this time and what has she been up to? We jolt into 1984 with a melancholy Diana working as a scientist at the Smithsonian Museum with no insight as to how and why; a simple timeline or a few brief flashbacks would have been enough to catch us up. We meet her co-worker, Barbara Minerva, who initiates a genuine friendship with Diana but later transforms into an un-

likely and unconvincing adversary. The character just seemed rushed and needed more time to grow, as well as the relationships introduced along the way. The foreground was wealthy while the background stood vacant. The film had incredible potential but was overshadowed by clichés and grandiosity when it should have been overpowered by Wonder Woman’s journey. The movie lost the superhero’s meaning, especially with the sad ratio of action to non-action sequences. It almost felt like a new genre was made if you married romcom and action; neither would approve of this union. Putting critiques to rest, there still are delightful parts we can praise. One, the light humor and political jokes relieve the imbalanced intensity of the film. Two, Gadot and Pine again bring such elegance and presence to the screen. Three, the costumes were brilliant and Gadot’s makeup and wardrobe for the final showdown were superb. Four,

the superpowers she gains, like flying, is a nice touch at the end. All the little screws outperformed themselves but the bigger bolts were placed crooked, therefore the machine did not perform optimally. Overall, I would give this film a 6/10 but I’m hoping the third installment for the “Wonder Woman” trilogy (underway) will have her mother, Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta’s blessing, “one day you will be all that you dream of and more.”



The Mandalorian Season Two Review: Reimagining Mandalorians

By Sarah Brill, Science & Technology Editor

Spoilers for Season Two of “Mandalorian” below.

Season one of “The Mandalorian” left off with Mandalorian, also known as Mando (Pedro Pascal), tasked with delivering the “child,” termed by the fandom as Baby Yoda, to the Jedi order. A holding theme throughout the two seasons is the concept of loyalty to an organization or a being. For the Mandalorian, that loyalty lies with living the way of the Mandalorian and returning “the child” to the Jedi. Both loyalties are challenged throughout the entirety of season two, as we see Mandalorian grapple with “the way” along with his own feelings towards the “child” who we soon find out is named Grogu.

The second season starts off with a parallel to the original Star Wars trilogy (books 4-6) on the planet of Tatooine where the Mandalorian confronts a marshall wearing Mandalorian armor. This is Mando’s first real test of loyalty, as he has been

taught that the only people to wear the armor are those who have earned it. Mando’s loyalty is tested again in the following episode where he finds the so-called Mandalorians to help him transport “the child” to the Jedi order only to find out that these Mandalorians disrespect “the way” in which he was brought up. Throughout the season, we see Mando discover other Mandalorians, including Boba Fett (Temuera Morrison), who have more experience or who are from the planet of Mandalor itself who do not follow the same “way” he is accustomed to. It changes the way the audience views the way the community of Mandalorian are portrayed in the first season while also allowing Mando to grow as a character.

Throughout season two, we also notice Mando’s relationship with the “child” grow. When confronted with the prospect of giving him up to the Jedi Ahsoka (Rosario Dawson) presented originally in the

“Clone Wars” series originally, Mando is hesitant and untrusting of this new character. Ultimately, Mando leaves with “the child,” now introduced as Grogu, as the Jedi Ahsoka stated Grogu was not ready. Unfortunately, the task to return Grogu to the Jedi was not an easy one, as Mando once again confronts Moff Gideon (Giancarlo Esposito) who has his own plans for Grogu.

If “Mandalorian” season two is not on your Disney+ watchlist, it should be. This “Star Wars” spinoff is nothing less than extraordinary as the writers, Jon Favreau and George Lucas, have both outdone themselves. From the character devel-

opment in “The Mandalorian,” to the themes of loyalty and trust, this is a stellar follow-up to the first season.



As a Written Leaf: The Little Friend

By Elyanna Saperstein

“The Little Friend”

By: Donna Tartt

Genre: Historical Fiction

Total score: 7/10

Book in five words: Sixties, small town, murder portrait

If you love: Any of Donna Tartt’s previous work, long atmospheric novels, and the phrase “It is what it is” — this is the book for you. If you hate: simplistic dynamics, modern city drama, and short books — this is the book for you.

Donna Tartt first appeared on the literary radar with the release of her debut novel “The Secret History”. Recently, her novel “The Goldfinch” has received attention from critics and fans alike. Today, I will be reviewing her Pulitzer prize-winning book “The Little Friend”.

Having read “The Goldfinch”, I went in with high hopes. “The Goldfinch” stands out for its beautiful portrait of adolescence,

buttressed by action-packed subplots that reveal the depths of a youth’s inner life. In contrast, “The Little Friend” feels distinctly more disjointed. The main plot of a girl seeking to avenge her younger brother’s murder is intertwined with the subplot of her completely female family (the male figures are all long gone) and their foibles. Though the characters are beautifully portrayed, there is little to no development among the adults. The protagonist’s mother is emotionally incapacitated after her son’s death throughout the entirety of the novel. This staticity is emblematic of all the adult characters. Furthermore, while the decadent descriptions that have made Donna Tartt iconic are present, it is hard to say how they concretely contribute to the story.

The book, despite its length (over 500 pages), fails to find a satisfactory conclusion. The novel

sets up several major conflicts such as the murderer’s identity, the character flaws of the adult characters, and the protagonist’s journey, yet resolves none of them.

I rated this book as highly as I did, not due to its plot, but for the writing itself. Never one to lose herself to overflowing verbosity, Tartt manages to impart the intense spirit of both the time and place she tries to capture. She does this without resorting to either stream of consciousness descriptions or lengthy passages. If you are willing to enter the book, the atmosphere will quickly overshadow any of the critiques. It allows you to forgive the exposition on characters that never really change — though they are continuously revealed through the book.

Despite the lackluster finish, there is a silver lining to the

overall lack of character development in this novel. While we usually expect characters to shift and grow throughout a narrative, the refusal of the characters of “The Little Friend” to do so sends a different message.

Very often throughout our own lives, we expect others to change. Whether it’s a parent, sibling, or friend, we assume that people’s actions are symbols of growth instead of manifestations of the person they already are. The characters in “The Little Friend” don’t change. Rather their characters reflect differently under different lights. They become neither better nor worse people. They do not end braver, stronger, or weaker. They simply are put in different situations to which their core selves react. There’s a certain sense of realism that sets this story apart from others.

Finding the Common Denominator in Art

BY Yosef Rosenfield



To procure a drawing from before 1950 and one from after 1950 — this was my task for my Fall 2020 “Principles of Drawing” final with Professor Carla Aurich. First, I came across “Armor” (1891) by Odilon Redon. Redon was a 19th century French symbolist painter whose later work anticipated Dadaism and Surrealism. “Armor” is a charcoal drawing of a woman in a spiked helmet that covers her mouth area. What struck me was the timelessness of this image: during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the house wearing a protective mask made everyday errands feel like I was going out to battle. This, of course, was far from Redon’s mind in the year

1891; his drawing, rather, could have possibly represented a fear of female sexuality — with the subject’s masked face symbolizing a repression of women’s sexual identity and desire. I also found a much more recent piece, from around 2015, titled “Untitled Study for Untitled (Policeman).” This work by American artist, Kerry James Marshall, who is known for his depictions of black figures, was a timely selection. The rough pencil sketch shows a man in a police uniform distinguishably sitting on the hood of what is presumably a police car. This drawing is no doubt a product of its time, a statement amidst the rising tensions between cops and

the black community. As the title suggests, the sketch is not meant to be a stand-alone piece, but is a mere study for a more significant work of art. There are even multiple outlines for the policeman’s cap that are visible on the paper, and it was precisely this “history of a drawing” that first caught my eye. Comparing and contrasting the two drawings, I noticed some obvious differences between them. Redon’s “Armor”, for example, is a charcoal drawing, whereas “Untitled Study for Untitled (Policeman)” is drawn in pencil. Furthermore, Redon takes a fairly detailed approach to his drawing, while Marshall’s sketch features many simple

marks and lines. At the same time, however, each piece does portray an individual person, albeit from different angles — with “Armor” being a profile and “Untitled Study for Untitled (Policeman)” facing its subject head on. Both works use some degree of value, and — technical characteristics aside — they strategically depict their respective subjects in a certain position or state in order to convey a sociopolitical message. This shared quality fascinates me and perhaps reveals a common denominator that connects even the most disparate pieces of art.



Moral Clarity: It Depends Who's Looking: An Open Letter to Rabbi Schwartz

By Herbert Burack

Dear Rabbi Schwartz:

I read your opinion piece in the YU Observer. In the words of the great English detective, Sherlock Holmes, "Watson, you see but you do not observe." It seems that you, as well as Rabbi Blau (see his opinion piece in the Jewish Week a few weeks ago), have emerged from your spiritual bubble on Amsterdam Ave. and crept into the public political landscape. From the outset, you state that "there is no need for yet another voice to come forward and talk about how despicable Wednesday's attempted putsch was..." and yet like all rabbinic speakers who begin their sermons with a "short d'var (words) torah", tend

to be long-winded and just plain long, you too, opine with just another long-winded diatribe. You sit there on your mighty throne pointing fingers at the Orthodox, "who were not embarrassed to align themselves with the most vulgar parts of America." You accuse writers in Orthodox periodicals who "refuse to issue a full-throated condemnation of violence and instead create a false equivalency between the ransacking of government with localized political violence this past summer." Where were you all summer long when American cities burned? Oh yeah. The violence came from rich, white ANTIFA and BLM radicals but

since they weren't Jewish, and therefore not our problem, the world be damned! The truth be told, the Orthodox who went down to DC, went there to peacefully protest the perversion of America's greatest invention: a free and untainted election, no matter who won. The fact that low-life elements of society, White Supremacists, and Nazi sympathizers were there as well, had no bearing on the protest. The majority of people, from all walks of life, came there to protest something that was stolen from all of America. If there was ever a call for moral clarity as you state, I wonder what Rebbe Akiva (who sup-

ported Bar-Chochva, with all of his flaws, in the wars against Rome after the destruction of the second Temple) and the son of a prostitute, Yiftach (who was hounded out of Israel due to his flaws and was called back due to his military prowess by the people, to fight against the nation Amon), would have done in this situation. But then again, we already know the answer.

Herbert Burack
Teaneck, NJ

Re: A Call For Moral Clarity; Let's Talk About Democratic Values and Jewish Values.

By Yisroel Bass

Dear Rabbi Schwartz,

Thank you for your observations and call for moral clarity following last week's events.

I feel however that your analysis and message gives too much attention to countering a fantastical scenario that has no grounding in reality (i.e. the election was stolen), rather than addressing the core of the issues at play. The reasons that you felt it necessary to rebuff this claim as if it were true, while admitting that it is not, is a testament to what has been called a "reality crisis".

The real issue that should be addressed by our Orthodox

communities and clergy is that we, as observant Jews, are no less susceptible to anti-democratic, authoritarian, cult-of-personality, and supremacist ideology than any other ethnic or religious group.

That Jews who were raised from (religious) or identify now as observant were participating in the insurrection is disgusting, but not surprising. For many years, especially preceding the current administration, "safe space" has been given at our shuls and institutions for authoritarian, supremacist and even genocidal discourse, with no accountability nor censure.

Let me be clear that free speech is

not the issue here, but rather the fact that the sort of speech that is inherently violent, when allowed to fester and normalize for years, will lead to violence eventually, and this is no surprise.

As Jews, we need to demand of our clergy and institutions a recognition that we have a fascism problem and that our history as victims of fascism does not nullify its power of attraction. Like Trump himself, the ideologies manifested in his supporters share a common thread of appealing to our basest desires and longings for security, importance, power, pride and leadership. Those desires cut across class and religious lines and can be found manifesting

themselves around the world.

That from Jews should be functioning on a higher moral plane goes without saying, but your call for moral clarity does not give us a roadmap. How do we combat these base desires that transform at best into non-participant sympathizers or at worst, into insurrectionists locking arms with actual Nazis? Musar (rebuke) is not enough. Disgust is not enough.

Yisroel Bass,
Director, Yiddish Farm Education Center
Goshen, NY

Reply to "A Call for Moral Clarity", 1/8/21

By B. Rempell

I object to Rabbi Ezra Schwartz's stance in the strongest possible way. In fact, I am outraged by his sharp moral critique of Orthodox Jews for "aligning themselves with the most vulgar parts of America" (his words) during the Capitol rally on January 6. Respectfully, does the rabbi not know his history — both ancient and modern? There are numerous examples throughout our history of Jews aligning themselves with unsavory or downright evil elements, either by intention or necessity. One clear example was Jewish partisans who fought in coordination with the Soviet Red

Army against the Nazis in WWII — while knowing full well of the Soviets' dedication to snuffing out Yiddishkeit (Judaism) and oppressing Jews in its territories.

As Jews, we must take our moral and ethical stances (including those which have a political element) based on our own beliefs ALONE — without wavering depending upon who is standing with us. To illustrate an extreme example, surely the rabbi would not be in favor of Jews constantly changing their positions whenever neo-Nazis announce that they share the same views — doing so

would enable a dangerous form of manipulation.

To be clear, I am not defending the violent assault on the Capitol, which was unequivocally wrong. I am, however, defending and supporting the Jews who attended the peaceful portion of that rally in support of election integrity — a cause which many Americans of diverse persuasions view as moral and just.

It is sad and extremely disturbing that the rabbi did not consider the above before writing his piece of drivel in the last issue

of YU Observer. As a result of his shameful words, my family will be withdrawing its ardent support of Yeshiva University after many generations. We will not support an institution which has a senior leader who lectures our community with such a misguided and nonsensical critique.

-B. Rempell
Brooklyn, NY

Reimagining the Derech for the Next Generation: In Response to Rabbi Noson Shmuel Leiter

By Shifra Isaacs

The following is a response to a letter by Rabbi Noson Shmuel Leiter warning against government bills which encourage the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in schools. A few days after this response was written, the Jewish Link removed Rabbi Leiter's article from their website.

The gradual acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in Western society has presented an unforeseen challenge to traditional Orthodox Judaism. In some Orthodox communities, young adults are taught to view homosexuality not as a sexual orientation, but instead as a form of evil inclination that channels physicality toward sin. In this view, homosexuality is simply a difficult test administered by God; Jews must either pass by conquering their physical desires or fail and suffer the spiritual consequences. This view of sins is common in the Jewish tradition; idolatry and heterosexual adultery are framed similarly. However, this perspective is toxic for young adults growing up in the frum (religious Jewish) world today.

Our culture is sexually repressive, which is understandable considering that Torah frames sexual contact as moral only within the confines of an acceptable Jewish marriage. However, this repression contributes to some unhealthy outlets in our culture. The repression of LGBTQ+ identities can lead to depression, self-hatred, and even self-harm and suicide. This repression becomes apparent in our early teens. Adolescence is the time when some people begin to question their sexuality. Although this process is always complex, the difficulty is exacerbated by the Jewish laws of shomer negiah (refraining from physical touch between people of different genders). Many high school students who come from Orthodox homes sneak out to explore their sexuality with members of the opposite sex.

For adolescents in the LGBTQ+ community, this process of questioning sexuality becomes even more confusing. As a queer Jewish woman who attended a right-leaning modern Orthodox yeshiva high school, I can speak to this point from personal experience. In my school, which was not as overtly homophobic as a

Bais Yaakov (religiously right-wing school for girls) or similar environment, we were constantly told both explicitly and implicitly that homosexuality and gay thoughts are abominable and pitiful.

The Yeshiva system believes that single-gender schools solve the problem of premarital sexual contact. This perspective completely ignores LGBTQ+ people, and it actually makes Jewish school even more difficult for closeted gay high school students. Experiencing attraction to the same gender can feel oppressive in a single-gender school.

My teachers constantly talked about how "the gays" were inevitably going to hell, or how sorry they felt for families whom God "tested" by giving them LGBTQ+ children. These teachers never imagined that the very children they pitied were sitting in the room holding back tears and internalizing an insurmountable force of homophobia that would haunt them for years to come.

My opening questions to Rabbi Leiter are the following: What is your goal when you push for the exclusion of LGBTQ+ people in yeshiva and other Jewish environments? Why do you assume that LGBTQ+ people are not sitting in your shiur (Torah lecture) as you denigrate them? Do you think that these attitudes provide LGBTQ+ Jewish people any incentive to stay in such an oppressive culture?

Is it not clear that you are pushing potential Torah-observant Jews far, far away to a point where they cannot bring themselves to listen to a word you say? Do you understand that, once they have been conditioned to bury their feelings and swallow their "abominable tendencies," they will stiffen up the moment you enter a room because they are so terrified of being seen? Do you not see that we, your students, your sons, your daughters, your fellow Jews, your future, are the ones you are terrified of? You fear your own children, even though we've been here all along.

To spread Rabbi Leiter's anti-LGBTQ+ messages is to push the Orthodox Jewish community several steps backward. First, proponents of Rabbi Leiter's message must understand that LGBTQ+

youth are not some ambiguous other who exist outside Jewish circles. You probably know at least a few people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or otherwise queer. For many LGBTQ+ people in the Orthodox community, it is never safe to come out. They risk potentially going to hell, being disowned by their families, or worst of all, becoming the subject of gossip at simchas (celebrations) for the next decade or so.

All joking aside, the rejection of LGBTQ+ youth is correlated with higher suicide rates among other serious mental and physical health issues. Studies show that 68% of teens experience rejection after coming out to their family. LGBTQ+ youth from highly rejecting families are over 8 times as likely to attempt suicide compared with LGBTQ+ youth from accepting families. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth from highly rejecting families were over three times as likely to use illegal drugs, and over three times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and other STDs compared with LGBTQ+ youth from accepting families

Rejection hurts, especially when it's perpetuated by your own community for reasons you cannot control. Rabbi Leiter may think he is fighting to uphold morality and prevent Jewish children (who are all assumed to be heterosexual) from being corrupted. This is a noble goal in theory, and I do on some level appreciate his sincere attempt to protect me because it shows that he cares about the spiritual well-being of Jewish youth. However, what he is actually doing is perpetuating the cycle of internalized homophobia, increasing the probability of suicides in the LGBTQ+ Jewish community, and failing to acknowledge that he is fighting against his own people.

Despite the all-too-common homophobic rhetoric in Orthodox spaces, things are still improving for Jewish LGBTQ+ youth. In the summer of 2019, I marched with Jewish Queer Youth (JQY) and Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) at World Pride in New York City. It was one of the most empowering days of my life; I saw Jews from all denominations accepting and supporting one another. It was also one of the few times I felt seen and safe in a

Jewish space.

More recently, on December 20, YU hosted a Zoom panel called "Being LGBTQ+ in an Orthodox World." Over 700 people participated in the call, where current students and alumni told their stories of coming to terms with their LGBTQ+ identities and how they navigate Jewish spaces. Some remained Orthodox while some became non-observant. This call represented progress for me in the modern Orthodox world. Despite all the disasters of 2020, this moment was a beacon of hope that showed me positive steps are still possible.

My final question for Rabbi Leiter is this: Do you want the next generation of Jewish LGBTQ+ youth to stay in the community and maintain Torah values? If the answer is yes, please embrace them instead of pushing them away. Please stop telling them they are irreparable problems and abominations. Please invoke "V'Ahaveta L'Reiecha K'mocha," the value of treating a neighbor as kindly as you would like to be treated, and show them the respect, compassion, and kindness you would give to anyone else without a second thought.

There are horrible people in this world who steal, rape, and murder, and yet the LGBTQ+ community are often considered the worst kind of sinners. The only crime these LGBTQ+ youth have committed is love. If you want Mashiach (Messiah) to come sooner rather than later, stop combating love with hatred.