



CUNY REFUSES TO IMPLEMENT EQUITY RAISES



SEE PAGE 3

Administration withholds \$1,000 equity pay-increases to office workers

Photo credits: <https://www.aft.org/news/>

ANN POWERS TALKS AT QC



SEE PAGE 4

NPR pop critic speaks on career path, challenges and meeting Taylor Swift!

YANKEES AND CUNY PARTNER UP



SEE PAGE 5

Yankees collaborate with CUNY in effort to boost diversity.

TYLER GORDON'S "ICON COLLECTION"



SEE PAGE 11

Artist goes viral for painting of VP Kamala Harris.

OP-ED: Be kind to your essential workers



Photo: The New York State Senate

Samantha Galvez-Montiel
Editor/ Reporter

The pandemic has affected businesses, social lives, and the mental health of others. Unfortunately, as a result of this added stress in our daily lives, there has been a number of people who might not prioritize treating one another with respect. It's important for us to think about how we can better support one another and treat others with kindness — especially essential workers and those in the service industry.

Workers such as Sadia Rahman who is a junior at Queens College studying psychology and a manager at Petco, have voiced the common struggles as an essential worker during this pandemic. “The pandemic has changed the face of working pet retail forever, we no longer can have intimate conversations with our guests, lost essential support for our pets like dog training, veterinary services, and grooming,” Rahman stated.

“I have gone home stressed and anxious every day hoping I don't unknowingly spread COVID-19 to my family, working the frontline to provide, as a manager, I couldn't avoid missing work and had to remain calm and reassuring in the face of extreme uncertainty for my fellow employees,” added Rahman.

The employees who clean buildings and stock grocery stores are now the workers keeping our economy alive. But this group is more likely to come into contact with Covid-19 because they cannot work from

home, and there are a number of them that unfortunately encounter customers in a way that comes across as rude, angry or disgruntled.

As a pharmacy technician who works in a supermarket, I've had my fair share of interaction with customers who believe masks are the most inconvenient thing in the world. All throughout social media, we see other essential workers get treated worse whether it being spit on or yelled at for a mandated mask store policy.

Vox wrote an article covering the struggle essential workers have to go through during this pandemic while dealing with public mistreatment. They stated how a social worker in Queens stated how she thinks one-third of her department was out sick, largely due to Covid-19. The day before Vox spoke with her, a nursing manager had snuck her downstairs and disguised her as a nurse so she could get a N95 mask. She's struggling to find child care for her kids.

The coronavirus crisis has exposed many ugly truths about how underrecognized and underappreciated essential workers are, not just during a pandemic but on a daily basis. Please remember to be kind to your essential workers because they are risking their lives every day to provide service for you while still going through the daily struggles that the pandemic has brought upon us. Let's be supportive of all the hardworking people who put themselves at risk each day to help others.

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CUNY refuses to implement equity raises



Photo: <https://www.aft.org/news/union-protests-equity-violations-university-breaches-contract-staff-pay>

Jayla Cordero
Editor/ Reporter

Members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the faculty-staff union at the City University of New York (CUNY), protested in front of CUNY's offices on February 15 demanding that administrators reverse its decision to withhold \$1,000 equity pay-increases to office workers, who are mostly women and people of color. They're called "equity" raises because the Union negotiated the raises to ensure that lower-paid members of the Union see an increase in their pay.

A total of 1,295 office workers who work in the Assistant to the HEO (Higher Education Officer) were expected to see the equity raise on Thursday, Feb. 11 but, the day before this change was enacted, the University called the PSC's President, Barbara Bowen, to say

that the raises wouldn't take effect. In addition to HEO employees, 1,300 lecturers were also notified that the equity increases promised to them on April 1 will also not be paid on time.

When asked what might be the purpose for the CUNY administration's sudden decision to withhold this pay raise, PSC's director of communications, Francis Walter Clark, replied, "We've heard them use the financial situation at CUNY and the fact that it would be difficult to program the raise", but he added how this explanation is illogical because, "One, they have a signed contract that they must honor and two, CUNY has hundreds of millions of dollars in unspent federal stimulus money and these equity raises would be a tiny percentage of it."

Bowen explained that the Union has historically carved out from

its agreed-to across-the-board increases the "equity" raise, which amounts to about \$1.2 million, to address racial and gender inequity. "This is contractual money; this is money that we bargained for. If we hadn't applied this money to this title [HEO] of employees, it would have just gone into across-the-board increases," said Bowen. When asked if this matter is a coincidence that women and people of color were targeted for this mishap, Clark stated, "The equity increments were bargained explicitly to narrow inequities of race and class at CUNY. They knew that when they signed the contract when they assured the union in December that the equity raises would be paid and when they decided in January to not pay the equity raises."

So, what is being done in the meantime to provide necessary funds to low-paid, full-time CUNY

staff? Clark states that, "Union members and leaders are pressing the Chancellor to reverse his decision. The union has presented a grievance based on the blatant contract violation and is following that process as well."

Some may wonder, is this the message that defines working for CUNY? That being given a low salary basically means not getting paid at all? Clark stated, "When he signed the latest contract in 2019, the chancellor said that the agreement reflects 'the University's strong and unwavering commitment to its faculty, both full-time and part-time, and staff across our 25 colleges.' Where is that unwavering commitment now?"

Ann Powers: The queen of pop... writing

Arwa Ali
Editor/ Reporter

As the industry of journalism rapidly shifts alongside cultural norms and an expanding digital landscape, no one can speak to its evolution better than renowned writer and music critic Ann Powers. With a career that spans over forty years, Powers has witnessed how journalism has changed throughout her diverse professional endeavors. On Monday, Feb 22, Powers met with several Queens College students for a Zoom panel in which she shared her inspiring life journey and the unique perspective that has made her one of the most respected and relevant writers in modern journalism.

Born and raised in Seattle, Washington, Powers got her start early as a journalist for *The Rocket*, a bi-weekly alternative-music publication for Pacific Northwest readers. It was the first time she felt the adrenaline rush of interviewing her favorite local artists. She noted at the panel how being immersed in the punk scene at a young age reaffirmed why she loved writing about the genre in the first place. "By attending shows and expressing what I had seen, it solidified the experience for me." Powers continued to pursue her passion for writing in college, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing from San Francisco State University, followed by a Master of Arts in American literature from the University of California, Berkeley.

Post-college, Powers spent her 20s in San Francisco, California, where she found her niche as a popular music and culture columnist at the *San Francisco Weekly*. Powers accredits San Francisco as the nesting place for developing her writing style, music taste, and love for artistry. During a time when she was still grappling with whether or not she wanted to focus on creative writing or serious music writing, the city taught her that she can mesh the two. "I came to realize that I could write creatively about music." This was also a period in her life where she became highly interested in cultural studies as it pertained to gender,

race, and the LGBTQ experience- all of which informed her writing. To this day Powers believes that "music speaks culture", therefore possessing a deep understanding of the role an artist's identity/community plays in their art has always been at the center of her work.

After spending many formative years in California, Powers moved to New York City in 1992 where she worked as a pop critic for *The New York Times*, as well as an editor for *The Village Voice*. Although she had found much success in the cutthroat world of New York journalism, Powers aimed to broaden her horizon by becoming a senior curator at the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) in Seattle. By the end of her tenure at the museum, she was ready to dive back into the hustle and bustle of a newsroom, which resulted in her becoming the Chief pop critic at the *Los Angeles Times* from 2006-2011. She has since remained a contributor for the *Los Angeles Times* and serves full-time as a music critic for NPR.

From Taylor Swift to U2, one of the perks of working for such notable publications has meant getting the opportunity to interact with some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry. Powers is particularly fond of a time where she was invited to spend an evening with Prince in 2009 for an early listen of his three new records. Prince had brought her into his LA home where he insisted they listen to each song in a different location: his car, his bedroom, and a limo. Powers was so awestruck by the whole experience that she couldn't help but make the opening line of the *Los Angeles Times* piece she wrote: "Did that really happen?"

Powers' impressive career has given her a level of insight into the future of journalism better than most might possess. "What I see is a field that is expanding in very nontraditional ways, a field where you have to think differently about what it means to be a writer."

Powers also made it evident that an aspiring writer's path in the industry doesn't need to reflect hers. "You don't have to start your career at NPR. Maybe



Ann Powers' Zoom panel offered an in-depth look at a driven, successful journalist in the field of music criticism.

Photo: Nashville Scene

you're in Kansas City, work at, or start a small publication there. There are many different ways to be in this career and think beyond what gets a lot of shine on social media. If you have the drive to express your love of culture and music, and that really motivates you, it's a great time to be a journalist."

New York Yankees partners with CUNY to support diversity in the sports management field

Jessica Alexander
Reporter

In February, the New York Yankees announced that they are partnering with CUNY and adding them to their New York Yankees Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The Committee's goal is to "identify, engage and address issues related to equality, racial justice, and inclusivity" according to an article published by the Major League Baseball (MLB).

First formed in September, the Committee is focusing on creating diversity and inclusion within the Yankee Organization, providing their mentees with education, enabling and fostering socio-economic development, and creating health and wellness awareness. The Committee has partnered with CUNY largely due to how diverse its student body is across all of its colleges. According to the MLB, over half of CUNY students come from households where neither parent graduated college, while eighty percent of CUNY students identify as people of color. By having CUNY partner with the New York

Yankees Sport Management Mentoring Program, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee hopes to bridge this gap between New York residents and the MLB. The committee expects to be extremely collaborative and willing to directly impact the people who need the most help.

Chancellor Felix V. Matos Rodriguez recently released a statement addressing this historic partnership. He stated: "CUNY understands the value of collaboration and team building to achieve important goals, which is why we are thrilled to partner with the New York Yankees. This new program will provide CUNY students with the opportunity to explore a variety of careers that exists within a professional sports organization while growing their professional network, as well as gain access to internship and job opportunities in this exciting field."

The CUNY Athletic Conference (CUNYAC) Commissioner, which is the office in charge of all of CUNY's college sports teams across the five boroughs, went on record stating: "We are thrilled to expose our students and student-athletes to career opportunities

with one of the biggest brands in global sports and our NYC neighbors. We're excited for all the planning to do for the benefit of our CUNYAC population."

CUNY University Dean for Continuing Education and Workforce Development, Angie Datta Kamath, spoke to the power of a partnership of this nature. "The sports management and broader sports entertainment industries are growing and have so many opportunities for our students to excel in like business, data analytics, operations, health, media and marketing. We are excited about this partnership. We hope to offer the mentoring at least twice a year and focus on hiring opportunities as they come available throughout the year."

The Knight News' own Sports Editor Holden Velasco believes that "the sports media industry needs major tweaking, particularly in its diversity and especially when it comes to the under-representation of women. It's encouraging to see the New York Yankees investing in CUNY students. Not only am I speaking from a personal level, but more so from a professional level."

Velasco went on to explain how "the industry needs young blood with the grit and grinds CUNY students possess. The fact that the Yankees are giving CUNY students opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be there is huge." He knows that "the selected students will make an everlasting impression on the sports media industry. Overcome and adapt. That's what they're used to."



Photo: abc7ny.com

Cuomo administration severely underreports COVID-19 death toll in nursing homes

Sammy Ali
Reporter

New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo is facing a storm of criticism for not being transparent with the COVID-19 death toll in nursing homes across the state. This comes after New York State attorney general, Letitia James, issued a scathing report accusing the administration of underreporting up to 50% of COVID-19 deaths.

The 76-page report alleges the Cuomo administration did this through only publicly reporting deaths of residents who died on site, excluding residents who contracted COVID-19 in a nursing home but died elsewhere. Some believe this could've been intentional, in an attempt to minimize criticism towards the administration's controversial March 2020 directive that required nursing homes to admit and re-admit patients with COVID-19.

On February 11th, the New York Post reported that Andrew Cuomo's top aide, Melissa DeRosa, admitted to state lawmakers that the administration withheld data from the public in fear of prosecution and political warfare under the Trump administration: "Basically, we froze, because then we were in a

position where we weren't sure if what we were going to give to the Department of Justice or what we give to you guys and what we start saying was going to be used against us and we weren't sure if there was going to be an investigation. ... That played a very large role in this."

In light of these damning reports, a coalition of Democrats and Republicans in New York have rallied together backing investigations into the administration's handling of nursing home deaths. Most recently, representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez joined the coalition and called for a full investigation: "Thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers lost their lives in nursing homes throughout the pandemic. Their loved ones and the public deserve answers and transparency from their elected leaders, and the secretary to the governor's remarks warrant a full investigation."

In a press briefing on February 15th, Cuomo expressed regret for his administration's handling of nursing home data, but insisted there was no cover-up: "The void we created by not providing information was filled with skepticism, cynicism, and conspiracy theories that furthered the confusion," he said. "I take responsibility. We should've provided more information faster." However, many

are questioning the governor's sincerity after New York Assemblyman Ron Kim--one of many outspoken democrats on the issue-- alleged he received a threatening phone call from Cuomo. According to Kim, Cuomo threatened to destroy him and his career if he continued to publicly criticize the Governor.

Amid the controversy surrounding his administration's handling of nursing home deaths, five women--four of whom worked closely with the governor-- have come out to accuse Cuomo of sexual harassment and making unwanted advances. Rep. Cortez, who had previously just called for an investigation, now believes Cuomo should resign. This is just one of the growing calls for the governor's resignation. Prominent political figures like Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and Mayor Bill de Blasio also find Cuomo unfit to govern. Prior to the two most recent allegations, Cuomo apologized and said he didn't know he was making women feel uncomfortable. He also denies touching anyone inappropriately and is rejecting calls for his resignation.

According to Queens College (QC) Assistant Professor of Urban Studies Natalie Vena, the culmination of the nursing homes scandal and the growing

number of sexual misconduct allegations could permanently taint Cuomo's political future. "Now we have to add the sexual harassment allegations into the mix. I do think all of this hurts his shot at reelection, especially since I believe more and more people are going to come forward about his professional and personal misconduct. He is still very powerful, though, and I am not sure what voters will ultimately do with this information. But I think a skillful challenger could use the marks against him to great effect."

In the early months of the pandemic, Cuomo was praised for his leadership and response to COVID-19. He won an Emmy, and published a best-selling book entitled "American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic." Now, as he hopes for re-election in 2022, only time will tell how much his reputation as a strong national leader during the pandemic has been tarnished.

Photo: The Buffalo News



Cuomo's tenure in jeopardy after further harassment allegations

Jonathan Leon
Reporter

Andrew Cuomo is facing pressure to resign from his position as governor of New York after several women have accused him of sexual harassment.

Lindsey Boylen, age 36, was the first to accuse Cuomo of sexual harassment on Dec. 13, 2020. Writing on Twitter, she explained, "Yes, @NYGovCuomo sexually harassed me for years. Many saw it, and watched." According to ABC News, Boylan accused Cuomo of inappropriate behavior on three different occasions. The first sexual harassment encounter took place in Jan. 2016, where Boylen's boss informed her that Cuomo had a "crush" on her. This was the first in a series of what Boylen contends were incidents of untowardness on the part of the governor.

Charlotte Bennett, age 25, was the second to come forward against

governor Cuomo with sexual harassment allegations. Bennett was a former aide to the governor, for whom she had worked since early 2019. Bennett told The New York Times that on Jun. 5, she had a private meeting with the governor in his state Capitol office, where he allegedly asked her uncomfortable questions about her sex life and if she ever had sex with older men. Bennett also felt uncomfortable, scared, and thought that the governor wanted to sleep with her. After this incident, Bennett resigned on Nov. 2020.

On Mar. 7, 2021, two more women accused Cuomo of sexual harassment. Karen Hinton, a former press aide, claims that Cuomo would frequently hug her in a manner that would make her uncomfortable. Hinton alleged that during a trip to Los Angeles in 2000, she and Cuomo were in a dimly lit hotel room where he hugged her in what Hinton described as "very long, too long, too

tight, too intimate."

Ana Liss, a former aide for governor Cuomo, also accused him of inappropriate behavior during her two years working there. Liss began working for the governor in 2015, where she explained his behavior towards her. Liss explained that he would often ask her if she had a boyfriend, called her names such as "sweetheart," and described a time where he touched her lower back and kissed her hand.

Governor Cuomo has since denied all the allegations and said he would not resign as it would be "anti-democratic". In certain instances, Cuomo defended himself and apologized if he made anyone feel uncomfortable, saying that it was a customary greeting to hug and kiss people. In a press conference on Mar. 3, 2021, Cuomo addressed the sexual harassment allegations saying, "I feel terrible that these people felt uncomfortable, felt hurt, felt pain from

the interactions, and I'm embarrassed by it. And I feel bad from it. I'm not in this business to make people feel uncomfortable. I'm here to help them... I feel badly that I did (hurt people), and I'm going to learn from it."

Democrats and other politicians, including New York State Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, have come forward and supported the six women, insisting that the allegations should be taken seriously while an investigation goes on. Although Cuomo has stated multiple times that he will not resign, if he were to be impeached by the New York court of appeals, Lieutenant governor Kathy Hochul would take his place and serve until 2023. Until the investigation is over, many New Yorkers are questioning whether Cuomo should serve out his third term.

Steve Behar hopes to return district 23 to the political arena

Johnny Sullivan
Editor/ Reporter

When District 23 City Councilmember Barry Grodenchik leaves office later this year, he will leave behind some sizable shoes to fill. Steve Behar, Grodenchik's own counsel, hopes to be the one to fill those shoes. The Knight News sat down for an interview with Behar in which he discussed his platform, his motivation, and the current political landscape.

Behar got his start working a wide variety of jobs. He spent time in numerous global financial offices and was a corporate counsel for Toys R Us. After a while, he decided that "I wanted to get more involved in my community". Behar was inspired by the work he did at the private firm he established providing corporate finance and securities services to small business, citing the "certain satisfaction that comes from helping people" and explaining that "There's more business involved in helping someone with a small business trying to grow." This drive to help others brought Behar back to politics. He had already earned an undergraduate degree in political science and interned with the State Senate, but he still wanted to "get more involved in my community politically",

which led him to work for Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign.

More recently, Behar served as campaign manager and aide to Councilman Grodenchik, who is retiring after 5 years serving the district. Behar had only glowing things to say about his colleague, lauding him as "...just a solid guy (who) really cares about his community." Indeed, Behar knows the outgoing councilman as well as anyone, having worked with him to draft legislation and provide other advice whenever necessary.

Asked what the foremost issue facing the District was, Behar wasted no time in responding: "The answer's the same for the district, the city, the state, and the country... we're in a health crisis." Behar has felt the impact of the pandemic firsthand; he battled the virus for 4 weeks, of which a week was spent in the hospital. He believes that it is impossible to remain naïve about the dangers that COVID presents: "I understand that this virus is a beast... This is the first thing we've got to get a handle on, to make sure that our kids are going back to safe schools and that we get through this health crisis."

In fact, Behar feels uniquely qualified to represent District 23. His roots are in Bayside; his family has lived in the area for 50 years. "There's a history out here of

Eastern Queens being forgotten both on the City Council level and at the Mayor's Office, and with my experience... I think I'm the only choice," Behar explained, pointing out with chagrin that "The Mayor, in 8 years, has been in the district twice... it's totally unacceptable."

Although he pays meticulous attention to the goings-on of his district, Behar is well aware of the state of national politics. A Democrat, Behar sympathizes with conservatives and Republicans who are ashamed of their party's fealty to Trump. He asserted that "I'm all for working across the aisle and doing things in a bipartisan manner. However, certain things just aren't acceptable. When you have the President of the United States calling Mexicans rapists and drug dealers, there's just no discussion there." Behar holds out hope that widespread bipartisanship may one day be possible in a post-Trump political landscape, but he recognizes that that might be some ways away. He had this to say of the opposing party: "Unfortunately for sane Republicans, it is impossible for them to win a primary without catering to racists. I tell my friends who are sane Republicans, you need to fix your party!"

Ultimately, it is his local, political, and financial experience that Behar

believes will be his biggest strength in the election come June. "No one else in this race has the experience to go into City Hall on day one and be ready to govern," said Behar, hoping to be the holistic advocate for the issues of Eastern Queens that he knows he can be. "I think there's a clear delineation between me and everyone else in this race."

Photo: Steve Behar for City Council



NYPD releases secret misconduct records

Vaishali Patra
Reporter

Earlier this month, the NYPD published its "NYPD Member of Service Histories" database, which is composed of a large quantity of complaints against its officers recorded over decades. These records are now publicly available on the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) of New York City website.

The complaints date back to the year 2000, and only compose four categories of police misconduct: Force, Abuse of Authority, Discourtesy, and Offensive Language. This leaves out a large chunk of cases, involving police misconduct, simply because they "fall outside of the CCRB's jurisdiction", according to the CCRB website.

Until recently, Section 50-a of the New York State Civil Rights Law protected the disciplinary records of police officers, firefighters, and prison officers from being released. This was protested by activists for years, the movement gaining momentum after George Floyd's death

in 2020. It ultimately led to the law being repealed in June 2020.

Police unions, along with fire department and correction facility officers, had been trying to keep the misconduct records hidden. In February 2021, a federal appeals court rejected these efforts and allowed the records to be made public. Despite this, some police officers have been unwilling to take accountability for their actions. Ed Mullins, president of police union Sergeant Benevolent Association, stated, "I stand by my words [...] I offer no apology!" in reference to the offensive language he used against a councilman who called for the defunding of police. Mullins added, "I rightfully called him a 'first class whore' for his unscrupulous moral values."

Misconduct by the NYPD has not only been increasing in the past few months but has also getting support from the government. A report by Human Rights Watch last year pointed out that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, "held a

news conference with the New York Police Department (NYPD) Commissioner Dermot Shea." In this conference, they "applauded" the police response to Black Lives Matter protestors in Mott Haven, a low-income neighborhood largely populated by people of color. In a recent official statement, the Mayor said, "Good riddance to 50-a" while completely disregarding the superficiality of his words.

Meanwhile, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) has released a statement saying that the NYPD database release gives police unions "exactly what they wanted." The profiles of accused police officers of "only include guilty findings from formal charges, leaving the overwhelming majority of police misconduct cases exempt from public scrutiny." NYCLU also called this move "a slap in the face to every New Yorker that took to the streets."

In New York City, police officers continue to use chokeholds even though they are banned. Local news organization

The City reported that "The CCRB has received 880 chokehold complaints since [Eric] Garner's death in 2014 through June 30, 2020." Most of these complaints against police officers are either not pursued or are done away with a lenient punishment.

The nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice that took place last year are the largest ever recorded in U. S. history. Yet, the federal and state governments have consistently failed to provide any substantial change.

QAnon: In too deep?

Sammy Ali
Reporter

One would imagine that extremist organization QAnon's conspiracies would begin to dwindle after President Joe Biden's inauguration. However, the extremist group is only expanding, and according to Rolling Stone, their latest conspiracy theory predicted a false reality in which former president Donald Trump would be inaugurated on March 4 as the 19th President of the United States.

The conspiracy-movement that delineates Donald Trump as a seemingly-religious prophet can be traced back to 2017, when an anonymous person named "Q" posed as a top White House official and created conspiracy-filled blog posts for the website 4Chan. These posts centered around a falsehood that the US is run by a cabal of democratic, Hollywood pedophiles, and Donald Trump is diligently investigating them. According to Q, this cabal engages in satanic-like rituals such as drinking children's blood and running a child sex trafficking ring. Since the emergence of Q, he's attracted a sizable, loyal following. Unfortunately for many, it's rather easy to submerge gradually into the world of QAnon.

Although it takes one's mind there, falling into the Q void typically doesn't start with bizarre conspiracy theories. For many, the cycle starts when coming across far-right social media posts that include believable disinformation - something not too implausible but nonetheless untrue. When interacting with these posts, people will communicate with each other and spread 'research' that they've done, that furthers said disinformation. In doing this, a bond is created that gradually takes people further down a conspiracy rabbit hole.

According to Queens College (QC) sociology professor Joseph Cohen, these bonds can help make it easier for people to digest Q theories: "I am not a specialist on conspiracy-focused social movements, but my understanding is that people will join a group because they value the relationships -- the people they talk to about Q, the friends they make through Q communities, etc. -- and will often profess faith to an ideology, but they are doing in part to defend their friends and proudly stand for the group that they are affiliating with."

To rationalize the many falsehoods QAnon followers are invested in, they tend to remind themselves of the movements' purported mission: to end child sex trafficking. But if saving children was the goal, why not contribute to an anti-trafficking organization? QAnon hasn't actually saved any children and many fear the movement



Photo: NY Times

is antithetical to the very real problem our country has with human trafficking.

The McCain Institute - one of many organizations fighting human trafficking - released a statement on October 21 condemning the QAnon trafficking conspiracies. "Anybody — political committee, public office holder, candidate, or media outlet — who lends any credibility to QAnon conspiracies related to human trafficking actively harms the fight against human trafficking." Two weeks later, Georgia's 14th district elected the first QAnon follower to Congress: Marjorie Taylor Greene.

QAnon adherents obsessively analyze, research, and decode Trump's language. For example, any time Trump says

the number "17" in a speech, some Q followers interpret it as coded language because Q is the 17th letter of the alphabet. Some will even count the number of flags surrounding The White House at any given moment, or decipher the wording Trump uses in his tweets.

This obsessive behavior is effectively tearing families apart. Hofstra University Religious Studies professor Ann Burlein believes this creates a barrier in which we cease to have civil discourse: "It tears families apart because there's a way in which we cease to be able to talk to each other any longer, which is a real problem for our country. We don't have to agree with each other, but at this point, we can't even agree to disagree. You can't agree to disagree with people who believe the election was stolen.

This makes that dynamic very hard."

From the outside, it seems impossible to talk to or understand QAnon followers. However, one thing is certain: January 6 taught us that we must take this extremist group seriously. QAnon's popular catchphrase, "where we go one, we go all", was proven through the Capitol riots. And as the rest of the country heals, QAnon conspiracy theories will not disappear - they will merely change shape.

Anti-Asian crimes on the rise

Bruna Ragona
Reporter

Following the start of the pandemic, Asian American communities have been largely impacted across the United States. Due to rise in anxiety and fears surrounding the novel Coronavirus outbreak, Asian businesses have been hit extremely hard. People have begun avoiding Asian businesses out of fear of contracting the virus, causing many businesses to shut down. But where did the stigma begin?

Many believe it is from misinformation about the virus itself, and the use of language used by former President Donald Trump while he was still in office. Trump's use of slurs when referring to the virus, such as "China-virus" and "KungFlu" invoked fear centered around Chinese-Americans. Since February 2019, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have become targets of countless hate crimes across the United States, with the majority of the victims being Asian elders and women.

"It is very scary for us Asian people. I try to be careful all the time. I don't feel safe," says Satomi Moreira, a Japanese international student at the Spanish American Institute, living in Astoria, New York. For many people like Satomi, their reality and sense of public safety has completely shifted since the start of the pandemic.

CUNY LaGuardia Community College student Keanu Costas, who is currently a commercial photography

student, shares that he and his family "... [doesn't] take the subway at late hours anymore." While Keanu is one of countless students in the U.S. taking remote classes, allowing him to have to take less public transportation trips, it isn't the same reality for others. For many people, taking public transportation is unavoidable.

Eric Wang, a Chinese citizen who lives in Flushing, shares that he has heard from friends that "many Chinese businesses are closing earlier to avoid taking late public transportation." Mr. Wang, like many within Asian communities, depend on exchanged information to stay up-to-date with the ongoing issues: "Chinese people share information with each other, like through [I]nstagram. In China we have WeChat, so they show and put some news up there." Alliance

amongst Asian communities has been beyond helpful in staying updated. Most people are finding out about anti-Asian crimes through friends/family and social media outlets like Instagram.

The lack of coverage by big news outlets, has become a huge concern for Asian Americans. Keanu shares the reality of most, "I found out through [I]nstagram, and other Asian American friends. I didn't find out through the news." For many, Asian Americans, the lack of news coverage is concerning. Some believe by not appropriately covering and informing citizens of the occurrences and correcting misinformation, it ends up fueling the anxiety amongst Americans.

While major news outlets have lacked media coverage, many people have taken upon themselves to try to bring awareness

of the issue through social media. Many celebrities, such as actress Olivia Munn, have taken responsibility upon themselves to use their platforms to reach a wide range of followers, in hopes of help in regards to the ongoing xenophobic attacks. Munn turned to her Twitter platform to request that her followers help identify a man who had attacked her friend's 51-year old mother in Flushing, Queens, causing her to get stitches.

Social media outlets have done what many Asian Americans believe that the news media took too long to do: Bring awareness to the misinformation about Covid-19, and provide support to the Asian communities.

Photo: NBC News



The Significance of the George Floyd Act

Vaishali Patra
Reporter

On March 3 of this year, the United States House of Representatives passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. The bill for this act was introduced by Representative Karen Bass in June 2020, at the height of the Protests to introduce police reform across the country. Among other conditions, the act serves to limit qualified immunity, makes it easier to convict law enforcement officers for misconduct, and maintains a national database of complaints against the police.

For nearly a year, George Floyd's image has been immortalized through art and graffiti across the world. His name has been chanted in the streets along with calls for justice. However, despite the simultaneously historic and sensitive act of naming a law after him, it is important to consider the

symbolism this particular action holds for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Shortly after passing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, House Democrats held a news conference that was streamed live on national television. At this event, Jerrold Nadler, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, confidently announced that the bill "will clearly not defund the police, that is not the intent of the bill." It is speculated that this comment was made to garner bipartisan support during a politically tumultuous time. However, in doing so, he was also discounting a central demand of the movement.

Speeches such as these have awakened a certain frustration in many who recognize a pattern in the Democratic Party's style of governance. Many believe the party commonly invokes rhetoric of helplessness—of their hands being tied, or their efforts diverted by the Republican party—as a way to avoid confronting

the flaws in their party. While those who represent the Democratic Party are quite adept at generating a sense of poignance through their speeches, it is questionable whether many promises made in these speeches will be brought to fruition.

As the current leading party, it is integral that the Democratic politicians currently in power do not place the blame of failure upon the circumstances surrounding their efforts. In the past this has often been the case, a prime example of such being how former President Barack Obama responded to confrontations shortly after ordering drone strikes in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. When this massive act of violence was discussed in an interview with *The Atlantic*, the President had claimed to be "doing the best that we can in a dangerous world." However, as more and more actions become compromised, "the best" does not always seem nearly good enough.

Similarly, current President Joe Biden's term has not been entirely effective in terms of taking proper action. This has already been evident in the president's earlier failure to enforce a \$15 minimum wage. Now, this issue has presented itself once more in the form of the George Floyd Act. While the Democratic party attempts to establish that they have done their best in addressing the protests and Nancy Pelosi assures us that the Bill is "worthy" of being named after George Floyd, the minor reforms the bill introduces do not lead to any systemic change.

European disunion as vaccine rollout stalls

Kasia Lipa
Reporter

Last November, Pfizer and Moderna announced that their vaccines are over 90% effective against the COVID-19 virus. Soon after, many countries began administering their first vaccinations. The flurry of news reignited hope across the world as everyone was eager to return to their lifestyles prior to the pandemic. The top four countries leading the global race to vaccinate are Israel, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union trails behind, receiving sharp criticism for their slow efforts in vaccine distribution.

Before the vaccines were available, the European Union (EU) set up a scheme to allow the purchase of vaccines on behalf of the member states, to which all 27 members agreed. During the first wave of the virus, many member states introduced export controls of protective equipment. At the time, this restriction angered countries which were hit more severely by the virus, such as Italy. This along with the want to avoid competition amongst wealthy countries (i.e. Germany) to less wealthy countries (i.e. Bulgaria) is

the reasoning behind the EU's actions.

Alexander Stubb, the former Finnish prime minister, stressed the importance of unity between countries of different sizes and economies on Twitter. He tweeted that, "Small EU states would have had virtually no negotiating power with the big pharmaceutical companies. Big states would have swept the doses ... This would have led to frustration and delayed Europe's capacity to get out of the pandemic."

Yet despite this collective decision on unity, the EU faced supply shortages. At the beginning of the new year, AstraZeneca told the bloc at short notice that they would not be able to meet the signed commitment of 300 million doses. They could only deliver a fraction with no plausible explanation. It didn't stop here; Pfizer, at the same time, temporarily delayed shipments for the next few weeks as the pharmaceutical firm worked on increasing capacity at its Belgian processing plant. The EU signed a deal with Pfizer for 600 million doses.

The reduction in vaccines irritated nations like Poland and Italy, who threatened legal action against the pharmaceutical companies as the number of cases surged in many parts of Europe.

However, many members of the EU took it upon themselves to search for doses, despite their agreement in mutually approving the vaccines available in the market and the negotiations to the bloc. Hungary approved and bought Russia's Sputnik V and China's Sinopharm. Other smaller countries, like Croatia and Czech Republic, are considering doing the same. Even the wealthy nations secured controversial deals; Germany set a deal with Pfizer for an additional 30 million doses.

The hunt for doses became dangerous as some senior government officials were sent unsolicited, fraudulent offers; though, some seemed legitimate. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, commented, "... in a crisis like this you'll always have people who seek benefit or profit from the problems of others and we see a growing number of frauds and fraud attempts." The uncertainty during this pandemic fed into opportunities for scammers to prey on the most vulnerable, whether it was selling fake N95 and KN95 masks on Amazon and eBay or asking for personal information with unemployment-benefit scams.

However, given the slow vaccine deliveries, it may not hurt to further investigate some of these offers. Cesare Buquicchio, a spokesperson for Italy's Ministry of Health, said, "If these



The European Union's joint approval of allowing the bloc's commission to handle the purchases of the vaccines on behalf of the member states backfired as the shortages of vaccine supply encouraged some countries to venture for vaccines on their own.

Photo: Politico

doses are legally purchased and there was a fully regular process, we could also consider purchasing it ... we could rediscuss this at a European level." Given the great lengths some members of the bloc have taken to provide the vaccine to their citizens, it may not be as surprising if this is one of the routes Europeans take.

If you are eligible, willing to get the vaccine and a resident of New York, please check [covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov](https://health.ny.gov) for information about the approved vaccines and the instructions on how to register for a vaccine at New York State-Operated Vaccination Sites.

FDA committee endorses Johnson & Johnson single-dose coronavirus vaccine

Gloria Stoyanova
Columnist

Last March, the U.S. shut down in response to the coronavirus, since then, a third vaccine has been approved by the FDA for emergency use. Unlike the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, Johnson & Johnson's vaccine consists of only one dose—allowing citizens to achieve full immunity quicker than with the previous two. Like Moderna, Johnson & Johnson also received funds to accelerate its vaccine production program under "Operation Warp Speed".

Johnson & Johnson's vaccine uses different methods to provide immunity to the coronavirus. Pfizer and Moderna delivered RNA into your cells to instruct them to create the spike protein—essentially allowing the body to make its own vaccine. To define RNA, it can be said that it is transcribed

from DNA which contains our genes.

Johnson & Johnson delivers DNA, rather than RNA, using an Adenovirus vector. These harmless viruses simply transport the message to target cells where these instructions are provided. Unlike normal adenoviruses, the Johnson & Johnson adenovirus cannot replicate inside your cells and cause disease. The spike protein is made from the instructions and allows your immune system to react to this foreign protein, without coming in contact with the coronavirus. Mild side effects were reported with Johnson & Johnson's vaccine, including headache, reaction site swelling, nausea, and fever.

One of the many benefits of this vaccine includes lower storage temperatures. Pfizer's vaccine needs to be stored at -80°C and Moderna's needs to be at -20°C , whereas Johnson & Johnson's vaccine can be stored at 4°C —comparable to your household refrigerator. This advantage allows small pharmacies to start

scheduling vaccine appointments without the need for new extra-cold freezers. The one-dose requirement will appeal to home-bound seniors who have been reluctant to travel during the pandemic.

Johnson & Johnson has distributed 4 million vaccines during the first week of March and hopes to fulfill its goal of delivering 20 million vaccines by the end of March. The company also announced plans to work with Merck (normally considered a rival) to speed up the production of its vaccine. The approval of this third vaccine will help the United States vaccinate its population of 330 million much faster. The government has announced that it expects to have enough doses to vaccinate every American by the end of May. Part of this success can be attributed to President Biden's executive order of the Defense Production Act—an effort meant to speed up the production of coronavirus vaccines and personal protective equipment.

Recall that the coronavirus is an RNA virus, meaning it mutates faster than similar DNA viruses. When a person is infected with an RNA virus, replication of the virus is robust and leads to more mutations. This is where new variants like the UK variant and the South African Variant come from. Getting vaccinated early on not only prevents you from severe disease, but also stops the virus

from replicating and thus mutating. Some of these variants do make the current vaccines less effective, though that should not discourage you from postponing a vaccine if you are eligible.

According to data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S is currently administering about 2.15 million vaccines per day. At this rate, herd immunity, when at least 75% of the population is vaccinated, should come sometime during the summer. This week, the CDC also released guidance for individuals who have been fully vaccinated. These people can gather in small groups with other vaccinated people without the need for masks or physical distancing. In addition, fully vaccinated people can gather with low-risk members of a single household without taking the standard precautions. Should a vaccinated person be exposed to the coronavirus, as long as they are asymptomatic, they do not need to quarantine or get tested. As usual, masks are recommended in public and when visiting individuals who are high risk. Hopefully, by next fall, a majority of people will be vaccinated and most activities should feel like they did before the pandemic.

Please direct any questions to gloria.stoyanova99@gmail.com or gloria.stoyanova99@qmail.cuny.edu

The comet that killed the dinosaurs possibly from Jupiter

Jessica Alexander
Reporter

It is widely accepted that something like an asteroid hurtled towards Earth millions of years ago wiping out almost all life on Earth and completely killing off all dinosaurs yet, a new study conducted at Harvard University suggests that it may be a comet from Jupiter that created such devastating conditions that wiped out the dinosaurs.

According to Science Focus, asteroids are defined as a band of debris between Mars and Jupiter and smaller than comets. It was thought that an asteroid's impact was the reason for the extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago. Comets on the other hand are defined by their ice and rock center. They are thought to be the leftovers from the formation of the solar system. Previously, scientists thought the Chicxulub impactor, the asteroid that crashed off the coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula triggered tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions thus wiping out the dinosaurs.

The study from Harvard suggests

that the Chicxulub impactor was really a comet originating from an Oort cloud. An Oort cloud is defined as a shell of icy debris from the edge of the solar system. The Chicxulub impactor Oort cloud was probably bumped off course by Jupiter's massive gravitational field during orbit.

The gravitational pull of Jupiter threw the Oort cloud off its original course and into Earth. Jupiter's gravity pulled this particular comet into its orbit that brought it close enough to the sun. the sun's tidal forces caused the comet to break apart. The resulting fragments entered Earth's orbit and one happened to land in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula.

"Jupiter, the most massive planet, kicks incoming long-period comets into orbits that bring them very close to the Sun," according to Amir Siraji, the undergraduate co-author of the Harvard study told Science Focus.

"As they pass close to the Sun, the comets – nicknamed sungrazers – can experience powerful tidal forces that break apart pieces of the rock and ultimately produce shrapnel-like chunks of a comet...You can get what's called a tidal

disruption event, in which a large comet breaks up into many smaller pieces. And crucially, on the journey back to the Oort cloud, there's an enhanced probability that one of these fragments hit the Earth."

Siraji and Professor Avi Loeb, the other co-author of the Harvard study, explains the likelihood of "long-period comets hitting Earth up by a factor of about 10, thus showing about 20% of long-period comets become sungrazers." Their study suggests that certain circumstances allowed for a comet to reach Earth to

have a high enough impact that killed off dinosaurs. They used statistical analysis on top of creating gravitational simulations to test their theory.

As well as new probability numbers backing up this new theory, an analysis of the Chicxulub crater indicates the rock creating the impact was composed of carbonaceous chondrite which is a meteorite rare among main-belt asteroids and a material that helps make up our solar system but probably spread amongst long-period comets. Only 10% of asteroids are composed of this type of material.

Their hypothesis explains the composition of the largest known impact crater to hit Earth. Further research is being conducted to study similar craters and some on the Moon to determine the composition of the impactors.

Photo: <https://www.amnh.org/dinosaurs>



Tyler Gordon is going viral and combating bullies, one painting at a time

Allison Burnett
Reporter

After going viral for his painting of Vice President Kamala Harris, Tyler Gordon is debuting his virtual art exhibit, "The Icon Collection," featuring many paintings of celebrities and notable figures. The exhibit, sponsored by VR-All-Art, allows users to view various paintings from Gordon in a virtual museum, while also providing options to purchase his work. It is an opportunity to re-experience museums and doubles as an intimate look at Gordon's phenomenal talent.

The exhibit opens with his iconic painting of LeBron James — which was featured on the cover of Time magazine. Next to the painting is a time-lapse showcasing Gordon as he paints the iconic piece of LeBron. In addition, it includes paintings of prominent figures in the black community such as Muhammed Ali, Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Jackson and John Lewis. His piece titled "Women Leaders"

showcases powerful women such as Michelle Obama, Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey and Aretha Franklin. This exhibit also features his viral painting of Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden.

The Vice President was amazed by Gordon's work, so much so that she actually surprised him with a phone call, thanking him for the painting, as shown on CBS News. Harris also took her appreciation to Twitter, addressing Gordon directly in a Tweet saying "Oh Tye, what a wonderful, wonderful thing you've done! I know your artistry and this gift — you know it's a very special thing to be an artist like you are. It's a gift you give so many people. People you'll never meet are going to be so touched by the work you do."

Gordon was born deaf and did not speak until the age of five. After undergoing surgery to hear in one ear, he developed a speech impediment which resulted in him getting bullied by his peers. He has noted that art is his way of combating bullying. It is also

why he created his foundation, Tongue Tied, designed to help young children fight back against bullying while also receiving assistance for speech disabilities.

The Knight News spoke with Queens College students about Gordon's work, asking about using art as a means to combat bullying. "Art can also be really influential in raising awareness against bullying whilst also providing a safe space for the victims of it," says Ahona Islam, senior English major. Fellow senior and early childhood education major, Christine Herndon also notes that art can "influence change and spark the

artistic and open mindedness of another individual" while also allowing viewers to "have the opportunity to see the world from the artists' perspective which opens the path to unity and inclusion."

It is evident from the impact of Gordon's work that his art is providing a means for individuals to appreciate his artistry and to relate with some of the struggles Gordon has faced in his past. As the exhibit notes, Gordon was the runner-up for Time Magazine/Nickelodeon's first Kid of the Year Awards. He is an artist with a bright future.



Prodigy Tyler Gordon with his monochromatic portrait of Vice President Harris.

Photo: Time for Kids

Recapping the bizarre 2021 Australian Open

Christos Kladefiras
Reporter

Out of the ordinary couldn't even begin to describe what the 2021 Australian Open was. From strict travel restrictions, hotel issues, a city wide lockdown, to a huge underdog story, this year's Australian Open was a roller coaster of an event.

The Australian Open was the first of the "Grand Slams" in the last year to occur with full participation of the top-rated players. "Grand Slam" tournaments are the four most prestigious events in the sport of tennis, with the five being: the Australian Open, US Open, French Open, and the Wimbledon. Unlike the Australian Open, the US and French Opens earlier this year had many opt-outs.

It wasn't just the players who have had problems with playing under the circumstances. The Australian government had very strict protocols regarding players traveling to the country. Every player had to quarantine for two weeks after arriving before they would be allowed to play.

The players resided in hotels near Melbourne Park; the stadium where they would eventually play. Many, however, found their stay unpleasant. Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva had to swap rooms because of a mouse complaint, to which Putintseva found another mouse in her new room. She took to Twitter to air out some of her grievances. She posted, "it's actually a lot of them! Not even 1 in my room now (face palm emoji)."

It wasn't only the players who struggled dealing with the circumstances, as the fans also had to endure them as well. The number of fans allowed was limited to around 50 percent capacity, which gave a feeling as if something were missing. There was also a moment when the Australian government had to lock down the city due to a minor outbreak. They notified fans and players that the fans were no longer going to be allowed inside the stadium. Many fans went to the stadium anyways, knowing they would have to leave mid-game.

One of the players that a lot of fans wanted to see was Serena Williams. This

was due to the fact that Williams needed to win the Women's Grand Slam in order to tie Margaret Court with most Grand Slam victories in women's history with 24. Williams, who was ranked seventh in the Women's Division, made it to the semi-finals and faced Naomi Osaka, who was ranked third. Osaka, who was the favorite to win the tournament, ended up conquering Williams 6-3, 6-4. With mutual respect, the two embraced and moved on. Osaka faced off against America's own Jennifer Brady. The match was over pretty quickly, with Osaka picking up her fourth Grand Slam with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over the Pennsylvania native.

The heavy favorite for the Men's Division was Novak Djokovic, ranked at number one. He faced Stefanos Tsitsipas who was ranked fifth and defeated him en route to make it to the semi-finals, where he had an interesting match as well, against a largely unknown opponent.

Aslan Karatsev, the Russian player, was the lowest ranked man in the tournament, ranked at 114 and was the fairytale story of the Open. Because Karatsev wasn't sponsored by any big company, he didn't bring many clothes with him to Australia, so he had to borrow some from other players. He was able to beat 18th ranked Grigor Dimitrov, as well as number eight ranked Diego Schwartzman, and others to reach the semi-finals against Djokovic. The fact that



Photo: TennisNet Gojkovich

Karatsev made it that far is a miracle.

The fairytale was for naught, however, with Djokovic defeating Karatsev in three sets, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2. Djokovic would go on to the finals to face fifth ranked Daniil Medvedev. The competitive match came to end with Djokovic winning in the third set and receiving his 18th Grand Slam championship.

Through all the struggle and the possibilities that came about in the Australian Open 2021, the highest ranked man and the highest ranked woman came out as the eventual winners, adding to their illustrious careers. One, an eighteen-year veteran, the other a 23-year-old champion who's been on the rise. Both earned their spots on top of the mountain during unprecedented times.

Vincent Jackson: Possibly the latest NFL victim of brain trauma

Chloe Sweeney
Editor/ Reporter

Former NFL player Vincent Jackson was found dead on Feb. 15th at a Homewood Suites hotel in Brandon, Florida.

Just a week after Tampa Bay fans celebrated the Buccaneers' Super Bowl 55 victory, they were devastated with the news of the passing of their former wide receiver, Vincent Jackson. On Jan. 11th Jackson checked himself into a Homewood Suites hotel right outside Tampa. Jackson's family reported him as missing almost a month later on Feb. 10th. However, officers were able to locate and speak with Jackson on Feb. 12th, so they decided to drop the report. Just three days later, Jackson was found dead in his hotel room by a housekeeper.

Jackson began his NFL career in 2005 after being drafted by the San Diego Chargers, with whom he would play for seven seasons. In 2012, Jackson made his move to Florida to play another five seasons with the Buccaneers. He officially

retired from the game in 2018. Jackson recorded 540 receptions for 9,080 yards, scored 57 touchdowns, and played in three Pro Bowl games in his career.

Based on Jackson's autopsy, it's believed he may have struggled with chronic alcoholism. Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister commented on Feb. 17th, "We haven't got the toxicology report back so I can't say with any certainty that that was it... But a lot of longstanding health conditions contributed to his passing because of some alcohol abuse." Chronister shared that Jackson may have even had a condition known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. CTE is a neurodegenerative brain disease, meaning it progressively gets worse over time. The fatal condition is largely caused by traumatic brain injuries and blows to the head. It can leave lasting effects such as memory loss, personality changes (commonly increased aggression), and depression. CTE is widely common amongst contact sports, especially football. Unfortunately, the disease can only be definitively diagnosed in an

autopsy, so it's always discovered when it's too late. Over 100 players have been found to have battled the disease, many of whom developed dementia, depression, and/or committed suicide. The first case of "footballer's dementia" was four-time Super Bowl champion Mike Webster, who suffered from depression and dementia after his retirement. Researchers who examined his autopsy in 2002 said his brain had gone through the equivalent of 25,000 car crashes.

Webster's CTE diagnosis was discovered by Dr. Bennet Omalu in 2002; Dr. Omalu would go on to publish a scientific article about. Expecting the NFL to want to meet and learn more about his discovery, Dr. Omalu was stunned to find out that the league was actually calling for the article's retraction. Yet, the NFL's battle was lost, and Omalu went on to release a second publication on late Steelers player Terry Long's CTE diagnosis. In 2012, the league donated \$30 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for brain research in attempts to quiet critics who said the NFL didn't care about its players. However, \$16 million of the donation went unspent, as the NFL/NIH relationship soon fell apart. NFL officials disagreed with NIH for awarding part of the fund to a researcher who stood in support of NFL veterans filing lawsuits against the league. It wasn't until 2016 that an NFL official finally recognized that there is evidence for a direct correlation between



Late Vincent Jackson in his Tampa Bay Buccaneers gear.

Photo: Getty Images/George

football and CTE for the first time.

Members of the NFL community, both fans and players, are disappointed in the league's long-time lack of recognition and support for their players who suffer(ed) from CTE and its debilitating effects. Ryan Leaf, a retired NFL player, said in a video on Twitter on Feb. 16th, "The NFL doesn't f----- care... Once you're bad for the brand, the shield, they could give two s-----." Leaf believes the league's players would greatly benefit from more funding being put towards the NFL's Legends Program, which assists NFL vets on their transition away from football. Leaf commented in an interview, "How much money do you think they pump into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, keeping things in a museum? Imagine if there was a facility somewhere [to offer support] to the fragile minds of the people that

Club Spotlight: Queens College community aid

Avi Koenig
Reporter

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Household Food Insecurity Report, over 35 million families struggled with hunger in 2019. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the enormous economic downturn that followed, this data has surely grown in the past year. In these dire times, the students of the Queens College Community Aid Group, (QCCA), have stepped up to assist the Queens community by establishing weekly grocery pickups for food-insecure families at the corner of Melbourne Avenue and Kissena Boulevard every Sunday morning.

QCCA was started earlier this year by Queens College (QC) sophomore Gav Meiri as part of his internship with the Hillel Campus Service Corps, a joint partnership between Hillel International and Repair the World. The goal of the corps centers around sharing what we can with our surrounding community and peers with the goal of easing the burden of the pandemic for everyone. From this, Meiri created QCCA as a way to organize direct social justice action at QC during the pandemic.

Currently, QCCA operates in two main ways. First, is through weekly learning sessions on Tuesdays discussing matters of intersectionality such as race, gender, class, etc. This education is critical to the group's aspirational mission of mutual aid, whereby members contribute

to the group by both giving and receiving. The learning allows members to better understand the issues that affect their communities, in order to brainstorm structural solutions in addition to their temporary service.

QCCA also has a weekly food distribution taking place at QC. The idea for food distribution originated from a conversation Meiri had with Rabbi Sara Zacharia, QC's Hillel's Senior Jewish Educator about food insecurity during the pandemic. This spurred Meiri to try and do something about this crisis, so he contacted Adama Bah, a community organizer in Harlem running her own food distribution, who in turn referred him to the Hungry Monkey Rescue Truck, which distributes food to the needy through the USDA Farms to Family program to set up a food acquisition system. On Sundays, QCCA distributes this food from Hungry Monkey Rescue to the 600 or so families who come to receive it. While Meiri is the leader of this massive logistical effort to get the food distributed every week, he's quick to note that "this is a team-organized feat. My role has been... to make sure everything fits together, but everyone does rely upon each other [to make this happen]".

This unique combination of learning and community aid that QCCA embodies has been making a profound impact not just on the people they give the food to but also the members themselves. As QC Junior and QCCA member Esther Schonfeld says, "I really appreciate the opportunity to volunteer with QCCA, not just because it gets me out of the

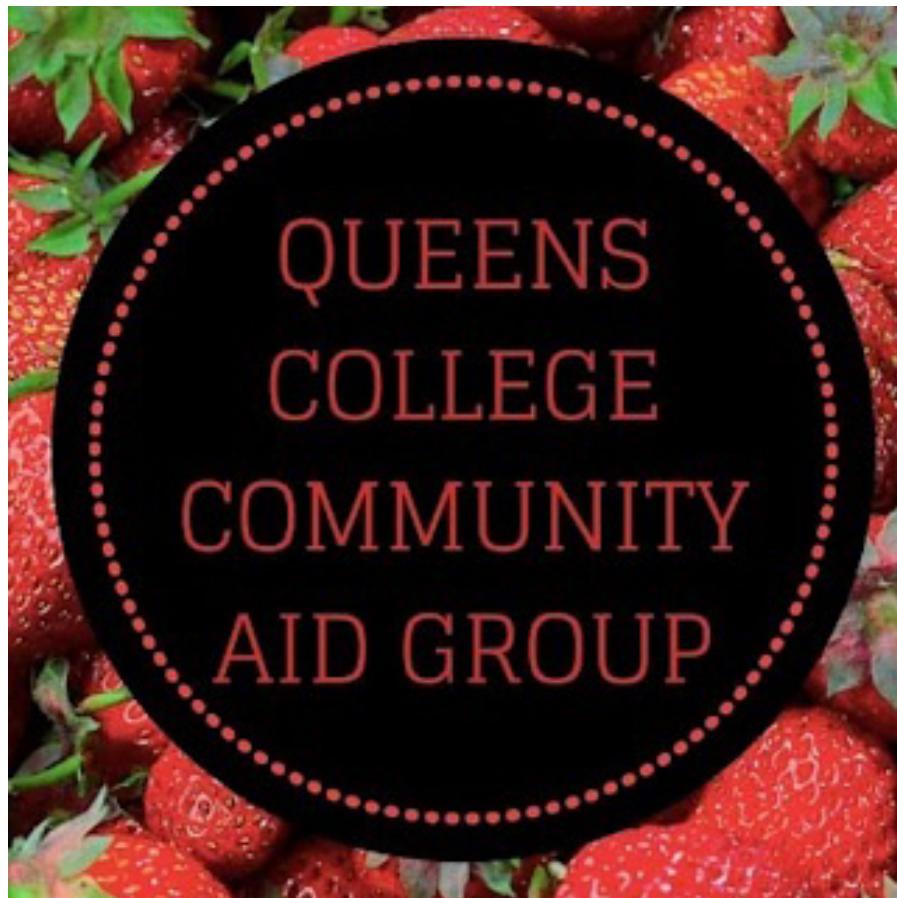


Photo: QCCA Instagram Account

house every week but because my volunteering is grounded in the political philosophy I'm developing as a result of the Tuesday learning. I'm giving my time not just as a hierarchical act of charity but as a commitment to equitable community aid."

So what's where is QCCA planning for in the future? As of yet, that's to be

determined. In Meiri's view, "Obviously we plan to keep the distributions going for as long as we can get the food, and learning will always be part of our work... but we're only just [starting to get] into the groove so it's hard to envision further".

If you want to get involved with QCCA and make a difference in our local community, visit <https://linktr.ee/qc.community.aid.group> and join!

Country is countrywide

Christos Kladeftiras
Reporter

While country music is not the most-liked genre in certain parts of the country, Luke Combs has taken down a bit of that barrier by introducing a whole new audience to his music.

"What You See Is What You Get" is Luke Combs' second studio album. Following the major success of his debut album, "This One's for You," which was No. 1 on the U.S. Top Country Albums chart for 50 weeks — a record for a male artist — his second album did surprisingly well in comparison.

Released on Nov. 8, 2019, "What You See Is What You Get" has gone Double Platinum, having over 2,000,000 certified sales by the end of 2020. Similar to Combs' album before this, he released a deluxe

album titled, "What You See Ain't Always What You Get (Deluxe Edition)" with an additional six songs. One of those new songs was a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, named "Six Feet Apart."

Combs has had great success with this album. Six of the songs in the entire deluxe album have been released as singles. The entire album and one song in particular — "Forever After All" — topped the charts in Rolling Stone for best song, album and artist in the same week. Luke Combs is the first country singer to accomplish this.

"What You See Is What You Get" was expected by country music critics and members of the industry to peak at No. 1 on the U.S. Top Country Albums chart. Not many would have expected the album to also peak at No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard 200, which is not limited to one genre.

Combs has many special moments on

this album, such as his teaming up with the duo that inspired him to become a musician, Brooks and Dunn. In their song "Does To Me," Combs collaborated with Eric Church, another big-name country artist who Combs has looked up to.

Another unique fact about this album is that Combs has co-written every song recorded and released. Ray Fulcher, who has co-written eight songs off the first album and eight more off the second, spoke to Rolling Stone about his experience writing with Luke Combs.

"We said let's be honest about the songs we're writing, and let them represent us as people and then see where the chips fall. Luckily, the country music audience was starved for an artist like Luke," said Fulcher. He has known and been friends with Combs since 2014. The two have worked together ever since.

With this newfound fame in country music and with many country music singers dipping their toes into pop music, The Boot reached out to Combs about the possibility of him entering another genre. "It's definitely not something that I sit down in a writing room and go, 'Could this work on pop radio?' I really just want my fans to love it and come see it live, and have that experience," Combs said. "That, to me, is the most important thing, making sure the music is good."

With the landscape of music changing and artists branching into different genres, Luke Combs has expanded his horizons and allowed country music to reach a wider audience in the country.

Wandavision: An immediate highlight of Disney+'s programming

Avi Koenig
Reporter

WandaVision, the Disney+ creation of Marvel and Disney, centers around superheroes Wanda Maximoff and Vision as they adjust to their new lives in suburbia, pulling viewers in with twists more sinister than you'd expect from the average sitcom.

Over the past 13 years, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or MCU, has emerged as arguably the most dominant media franchise in entertainment. With 20+ movies, Marvel has consistently released box office smashes that culminated in *Avengers Endgame* in 2019, breaking the record for highest grossing film of all time. Despite this continuous success on the big screen, Marvel Studios has historically struggled to mirror that success on television. To be fair, the MCU had solid TV series such as *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* on ABC and *Luke Cage* on Netflix. However, nothing approached the cultural domination and popularity of the movies. When Disney (the parent company of Marvel) launched their own streaming service Disney+, Marvel took the opportunity to attempt to revitalize their television efforts for exclusive shows for the new platform. Unlike previous Marvel TV series, Marvel Disney+ shows would feature more prominent and well-known characters from the movies, connect more with the larger MCU, and have a much greater budget than previous shows.

This experiment launched on January 15th with the release of the first two episodes of *WandaVision*. The show, which released a new episode weekly until its season finale on March 5th, centered around *Avengers* characters Wanda Maximoff, played by Elizabeth Olson, and Vision, played by Paul Bettany. From the start, the show established itself as unlike anything Marvel had ever done with each episode being stylized in the form of a sitcom set in different decades, from the 1950s (in the vein of the *Dick van Dyke Show*) to the 2000's (influenced by *Malcolm in the Middle*) set in the fictional town of Westview, NJ. This is in addition to an overarching real-world frame-narrative that is filled with the more familiar supernatural MCU phenomenon and battles that I won't spoil for you.

This is all well, good, and unique for Marvel, but what really makes this show stand out from the rest of the MCU, and quite frankly the rest of the TV landscape, is how this show is never truly a battle of good vs evil. For most of the show, there isn't even a clear villain, and even when it becomes apparent, the villain only serves as a conduit to exploring the show's overarching theme: dealing with grief. In *Avengers Infinity War* (spoiler alert), Vision was killed by the Titan Thanos



Photo: Disney+/Marvel Studios

when he removed the Mindstone which powered him (he's a synthezoid- a type of android). This show is centered around Wanda, who was romantically involved with Vision, dealing with that grief and loss. In many ways, the show isn't about finding out who the bad guy is or what's behind the mysterious happenings in Westview. It's about Wanda going through the stages of grief over the course of the

show and moving from her fantasy of what the world should be like towards what the reality is. A reality that is much harder to deal with than fantasies. The TV show format is especially suited to this progression, allowing for a much more sedate and impactful progression through these stages, retaining much more emotion and perspective than a 2-hour movie would allow.

In conclusion, what are my impressions of *WandaVision*? I think

that it's a fantastic show that opens the door for Marvel, bringing the MCU and the superhero genre into a completely new realm of storytelling. It's got action, it's got drama, but most of all, it's got a sense of vulnerability and a profound insight into the fragility of the human condition. A smashing success for Marvel's Disney+ debut, and hopefully a prelude for more fantastic shows to come.