

THE CHOATE NEWS MAGAZINE

May 2019



MAY 2019



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THE CHOATE NEWS
MAGAZINE

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

In your hands is the inaugural issue of *The Choate News Magazine*!

Well, actually, *The Choate News* published its first magazine in the 1980s. It lasted for three issues. We've decided to revive it.

Why? As soon as Ariel Kim '20 first conceived of a stand-alone magazine last year, we knew that it would allow us to do something different. The nature of the magazine contrasts with what we usually publish. While the paper's regular articles are news-based — they tell you what goes on week to week at Choate — the magazine's pieces are quite different.

The magazine will show you a more intimate, personal side of our community. Rather than covering strictly news, the object of the regular paper, the magazine strives to reveal the unique stories that define each student that walks this campus. The magazine is but one effort to capture the countless narratives of our campus, urging

compassion and deeper connection within a community of ever-evolving perspectives.

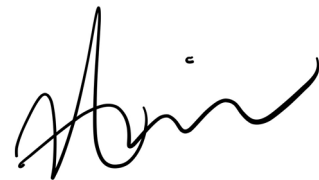
You'll read a profile on Mr. James Stanley — his account of his legacy as the Dean of Students. You'll engage with the foreign worlds of fiction in a set of book reviews by Abbie Chang '19 and Vincenzo DiNatale '19. It's nothing like what you've seen from the *News* before.

Now well into our tenure, we, the 113th masthead of the *News*, cannot wait to continue the production of the magazine. It will continue operating as a subsection of *The Choate News* and will be distributed each term.

Moving forward, we encourage you to contribute! Whether you have an article idea or would like to write, take pictures, or design graphics, don't hesitate to contact an editor. But for now, please enjoy the first issue of the revitalized *Choate News Magazine*.



Derek Z. Ng '20



Ariel H. Kim '20



Letter from St. John Hall

SIGNING OUT

Mr. James Stanley says goodbye to the Deans' Office.

By Brandon Zhang '20

Sitting in his office on the second floor of St. John Hall not long ago...

Mr. James Stanley began to reminisce about his time as Choate's Dean of Students, a position he has held since 2012. This July, he will leave the office and return to teaching economics and history classes full-time. Mr. Michael Velez will be taking his position as Choate's new Dean of Students.

The first piece of legislation that Mr. Stanley passed as Dean of Students was to eliminate the meal dress code. "When I was first Dean of Students, we still had a dress code. When kids finished sports, they had to change back into their dress clothes before they would be allowed to go to dinner. The first thing I did was to get rid of that," Mr. Stanley said.

This is one of many projects Mr. Stanley has accomplished throughout his seven-year tenure. As a part of the design team for St. John Hall, Choate's new Student Activities Center which opened in 2017, Mr. Stanley described the process as one of the most positive experiences of his life, leading him to stay on as Dean of Students for two years longer than he had initially planned.

"Trying to figure out how to organize space in here, what would work well for students, and talking to students about what interested them was very rewarding," he said. "If I had stepped out after five years, I would only have around three weeks of working in this building,

which, after all the work I put in, felt a bit too short," Mr. Stanley said.

Mr. Stanley also helped revise the Sexual Misconduct Policy during his tenure. Throughout his years as Dean of Students, Mr. Stanley has tried to spark more robust conversation about healthy relationships between students. In 2012, Mr. Stanley brought to campus activist Mr. Jackson Katz, a major figure and thought leader in the global movement of men promoting gender equality through prevention of gender violence. Mr. Katz is a co-founder of the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program, the first major program of its kind in sports culture and the military.



Photo courtesy of James Stanley

The following year, Ms. Katie Koestner talked about digital citizenship, where members of her team engaged with seniors to run a session called “He Said/She Said” to facilitate conversations about consent.

Just last year, Mr. Stanley led efforts to change the former Crisis Intervention policy to the current Safe Haven policy, which allows students who are worried about their own or their friends’ substance use to get help. “I am very encouraged by the change in Safe Haven policy. If anything, it has led students to engage in more conversations on the issue. I am encouraged by the amount that Safe Haven is being used because people are coming forward and acknowledging that they are worried about themselves or a friend much earlier along in the process,” Stanley commented.

“Over the years, I’ve had a number of moments when challenging social issues on campus have come up,” Mr. Stanley said. “I’ve sat down with various groups of students and listened to them about what would be effective approaches to dealing with them. We’ve put together plans of action, we’ve put them to action, and we’ve seen them work. And that has been great.”

Although Mr. Stanley had attended boarding school himself — he graduated from Hotchkiss School in 1984 — he never expected to return to one as an adult. Born in Philadelphia into a family deeply rooted in the financial industry, Mr. Stanley always assumed a career in finance was in his future.

Mr. Stanley hardly remembers his time in Philadelphia. At the age of three, Mr. Stanley moved to Kent, Connecticut, a cozy town three hours north of Wallingford. Mr. Stanley soon made his first contact with a boarding school, attending Hotchkiss, in Lakeville, Connecticut. However, Mr. Stanley’s initial experience at boarding school was not indicative of his current employment. “My boarding school experience was hard, and, if you asked me or any of my classmates if I would go back to boarding school, they would have emphatically told you, ‘Never.’” Like many boarders, Mr. Stanley dealt with homesickness due to the large adjustment when entering a boarding school. He shared the common struggles of balancing physically demanding sports with challenging classes, but he appreciated the valuable lessons he learned from dealing with this experience.

Two key factors steered Mr. Stanley away from finance and toward teaching. After graduating from Hotchkiss, Mr. Stanley attended Trinity College in Hartford, which offered students an opportunity to intern in the Greater Hartford Area for academic credit. Mr. Stanley’s first internship was at the stock brokerage Dean Witter. “I remember being in a hermetically-sealed building, wearing a suit and learning about making trades in the financial industry. By the time I left the building every day, I just didn’t like it. I didn’t like being indoors every day.”

But Mr. Stanley was not sure of what else he should pursue. “Basically, every single male member of my family has been in the financial industry. My father was, my brother is. So it was something I kind of assumed I was going to do.”

He eventually decided to take on a second internship through Trinity’s program, this one at the Renbrook School in West Hartford. In contrast to the austerity of a stock brokerage, the Renbrook School was filled with innocence and energy. Mr. Stanley found that each day he looked forward to teaching in the classrooms, coaching on the athletic fields, and otherwise interacting with bright-eyed, hopeful kids.

What ultimately pushed Mr. Stanley back to boarding school was his senior year at Trinity. In his dorm room, Mr. Stanley and his roommates crowded around the TV they had set up, watching the breaking news of significant price drops in the stock market. It was October 19, 1987, what became known as Black Monday, when the Dow Jones dropped by more than 20% in a single day — a decline bigger than the one that precipitated the Great Depression in 1929. One of Mr. Stanley’s roommates turned to him and said, “What profession do you think you’re going to go in? Cause the financial industry is definitely not going to be a good one right now.” This event, alongside his experience at Renbrook, led Mr. Stanley to break from family tradition and pursue a career in teaching.

Near the end of his senior year at Trinity, Mr. Stanley reached out to numerous full-time internship programs and was delighted to receive a one-year offer from the Noble and Greenough School located in Dedham, Massachusetts. Nobles was a unique experience for Mr. Stanley, as it had a five-day boarding program. This experience provided him insight into the experience of teaching at a boarding school: living in a dorm, teaching world history and photography during the day, and coaching a sport in the afternoon.

Mr. Stanley then applied for a permanent teaching post at an independent school in the New England region. “I sent out a huge amount of cover letters and resumes, and I was lucky that Kingswood Oxford showed interest. They were interested in the fact that I had taken a lot of economics classes in college and wanted me to join their economics program.” Mr. Stanley spent the next 13 years at Kingswood Oxford, rising to the position of Form Dean. In the fall of 2002, he came to Choate.

“I was in my mid-thirties and thought it would be interesting to take on a little challenge, so I took a leap of faith, and now here I am. Interestingly, at my last year at K.O. they approached me about being the Dean of Students, and I said no, repeatedly. I had no interest in doing it.”

At Choate, that intention remained the same — for 10 years, at least. Mr. Stanley never thought of taking the



Photo courtesy of James Stanley

Dean of Students position. However, in his fourth year at Choate, he became the Chair of the Faculty Committee, leading to a greater number of interactions with the Head of School, Dean of Academic Affairs, Dean of Students, and Dean of Faculty, fueling his interest in working in school administration.

When a spot in the Deans’ Office opened, Mr. Stanley jumped at the opportunity. He became a Form Dean in the fall of 2006, 4 years after he arrived at the School. Then, in 2012, Mr. John Ford decided to step down as Dean of Students. Mr. Stanley’s older daughter, then a Choate student, told him that if he took the job as Dean of Students, she would transfer schools.

However, later on in the fall, the same daughter approached him and

asked him if he had applied for the job. Confused, Mr. Stanley questioned her sudden change of heart, and she told him that he would be a good fit for the job and that she wouldn’t mind being a Choate student with him as Dean of Students. Heartened by this conversation, Mr. Stanley took another step up the administrative ladder.

Walking through the School’s dining hall this winter, Mr. Stanley spotted a set of six-word stories, written by students and faculty as part of the year’s Diversity Day activities. He remembered a time when he’d completed one of his own. “It was at my daughter’s grade school a couple of years ago. The English teacher was making us do these memoirs, and I picked: ‘Survived boarding school, then went back.’” ■

Department of Oops

TOOTING MY OWN HORN

I was a brilliant trumpeter. What could go wrong?

By Alex Yoon '19

I became familiar with the trumpet as I grew up. I played everything from the nursery rhyme “Hot Cross Buns” to Herbert Clarke’s “The Maid of the Mist.” But I had never been a part of a cohesive band — an ensemble — until my seventh-grade year. One day, four months before I would step onto the stage for my middle school band’s first concert, the audience brimming with parents staring in my direction, I was handed the music for Karl King’s famous march “Prestissimo.” After careful inspection of the sheet music, I noticed the words “one trumpet” written in by my conductor in the middle of the third page.

My first band piece would feature a trumpet solo.

Even at first glance, I knew that I wanted the solo to be mine. As principal trumpet, I had first dibs on the solo passage, and, without delay, I pestered my conductor for the honor of performing it. He agreed.

The only word that could describe the way I felt when I played that solo each time in rehearsal was *confident* — almost to the point of arrogance. I had done this before; in the fall of 2012, I’d performed in the University of Missouri’s main recital hall and nailed Allen Vizzutti’s “The Enchanted Trumpet” in front of 5 judges and 150 people. A 30-second solo

in the middle of a band piece? Child’s play. I practiced it a few times. Every time, I executed it flawlessly; the passage fit snugly in the center of the piece for the audience to admire.

Four months of hardly hard work later, the evening of the concert arrived. I strutted into the practice theater, trumpet in one hand, music in the other, quickly played a simple C major scale, moved up the circle of fifths to an F# major scale, adeptly buzzed a few arpeggios, and concluded my warm-up. Our song was last on the program, and I used the 45-minute wait for more practicing (or *showing off*, as my fellow bandmates called it), playing the solo perfectly from beginning to end. During this time, my valves felt sticky, but I was too busy showboating to my bandmates to investigate.

“Next up, we have the seventh-grade advanced band coming to the stage to perform Karl King’s classic march, ‘Prestissimo!’”

Showtime.

I stepped onto stage, bright lights gleaming, cameras flashing, fans screaming for autographs. With total ease, I sat down at the chair marked “principal trumpet player.” As our conductor picked up his baton and the trombones began the performance, I calmly prepared for the solo section. My moment was now thirty seconds away.



Photo courtesy of Alex Yoon



Photo by Praj Chirathivat/*The Choate News*

As the conductor whipped his head in my direction and flicked his baton up to cue my solo, the other instruments decrescendooed to a soft whisper. I pushed the first valve down. It didn't come back up. My trumpet sounded like a freshman's voice cracking during his first day at festival chorus.

Was showboating to my bandmates earlier instead of oiling my valves really worth embarrassing myself in front of the audience? My face contorted. My hands began to sweat. They slipped over valve keys and, try as they might, couldn't pull that stuck valve back to its original position. I did manage to squeak out the rest of the solo through awkward alternate fingerings of notes. It sounded, I'm pretty sure, like yodeling. The band finished the piece. I hung my head in shame and slunk

off the stage. Later, my bandmates would tell me that I looked like I spent a few days in the sun without sunscreen.

My valves felt sticky, but I was too busy showboating to my bandmates to investigate.

When our conductor told us that, in ten minutes, each of us would have the "unbelievable privilege" of receiving a handshake from the school's headmaster in the lobby of the arts center, I let out a disapproving grunt: "Do we *really* have to?"

I slogged through the crowd and reluctantly shook the headmaster's hand, avoiding any other interaction. Now, I don't know if you've embarrassed yourself in front of your school and then walked up to shake the hand of the head of that school a few minutes later, but this was one of the most awkward things that I have done in my life.

Even five years removed from that concert, I can still remember my conductor telling me that he hopes that the experience will make me a more prepared human being. I like to think that it did. After all, the one thing I now do before every concert is oil the valves of my trumpet. ■



TEACHING DIFFERENCE

*For years, Choate has worked to diversify its faculty.
Have those efforts paid off?*

By Alex Yoon '19 and Grace Zhang '20

On a blazing hot day, Mr. Kojo Clarke was headed down North Colony Road in Wallingford when he saw a group of students of color trudging through the muggy summer sun. He knew one of the students well, so he pulled over.

“Where are you guys going? You want a ride?” said Mr. Clarke.

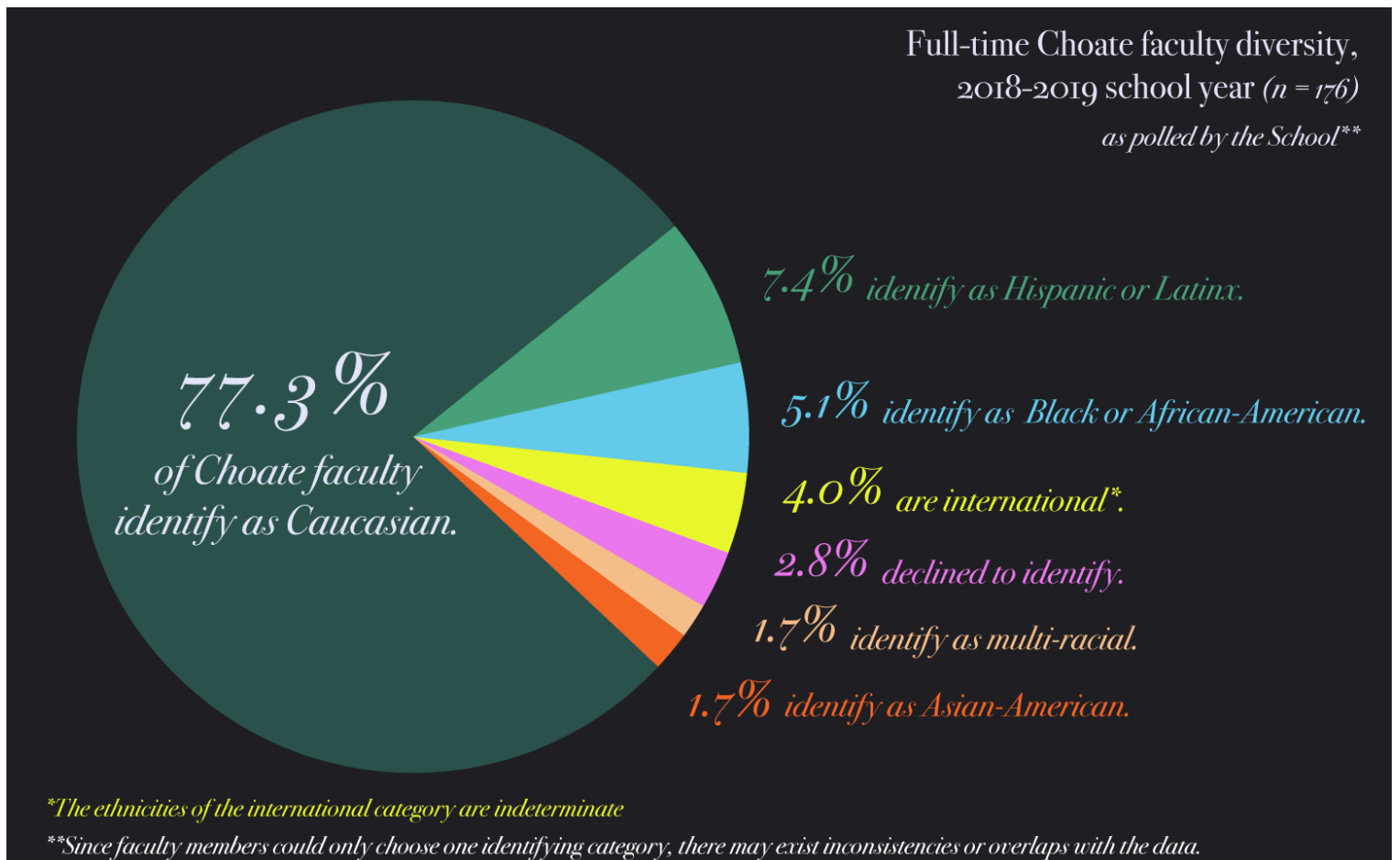
They happened to be walking over to Classic Cutz, one of the few barber shops

in Wallingford that boasts a large black and Latinx clientele. Mr. Clarke was a regular customer of Classic Cutz, and he happily agreed to give the students a ride. Through that simple shared experience of going to the same barber, he was able to connect with those students — he became much closer with them over the next few years.

Mr. Clarke recalls many other students that he has grown friendly to, all thanks to

the fact that they went to the same barber and were thus able to talk about the shared difficulty of finding a barbershop that could cut hair for people of color.

“I think, in many cases, students can connect better with teachers when they have some sense of shared experience, because there is a better understanding of what that other person has gone through,” he said. “It’s important we have those connections and



relationships on our campus, especially in the dorms where a lot of social growth happens.”

However, many students note a discrepancy between faculty racial diversity and student racial diversity as an added obstacle that students of color have to face in obtaining those relationships, as there are fewer faculty members who can fully empathize with their experiences and difficulties. While the students who met Mr. Clarke on their way to Classic Cutz were able to voice their difficulties with living at Choate, other students of color have not been so lucky.

According to the Dean of Faculty’s office, almost 78% of the faculty identify as white while only 20% of the faculty identify as faculty of color. The rest of the faculty either did not respond or declined to respond to the survey. Data acquired from the Director of Institutional Research, Mr. Corey Wrinn, shows that the student body is more diverse than the faculty. More than 35% of the school’s students are students of color, and nearly 20% of students are international students.

Many students, faculty, and administrators think that having a diverse faculty that is of a similar makeup to that of the student body is important. Racial diversity at Choate not only affects the students’ relationships with faculty but also the faculty’s relationships with one another and the School. While diversity initiatives have been aggressively pursued in the past few years, problems and difficulties regarding racial and ethnic diversity among faculty still exist.

The Importance of Faculty Diversity to Students

Having faculty that are from different backgrounds is important, especially if Choate’s goal is to build an environment that mirrors a full picture of the world and provides students with the best resources to maintain a healthy and progressive life at the School. To students of color, especially Asian-American, Hispanic, and Latinx students, resources on campus seem limited. Tatiana Louis ’19, a prefect in Nichols House, said, “The numbers and viewbooks show immense diversity in race and ethnicity, but there seems to be an attitude towards race among the faculty that is very black and white — quite literally — that rarely takes the experiences of Asian-American, Hispanic, and Latinx-American students into account.”

In reflecting on the faculty-student body racial makeup discrepancy for Asian students, former sixth form student body president Tippa Chan ’19 said, “I can probably think of two Asian faculty off the top of my head... That is pretty problematic, not just in terms of teaching, but advising as well.” While Chan’s estimate is not exactly correct, it is true that Asian faculty are underrepresented on campus.

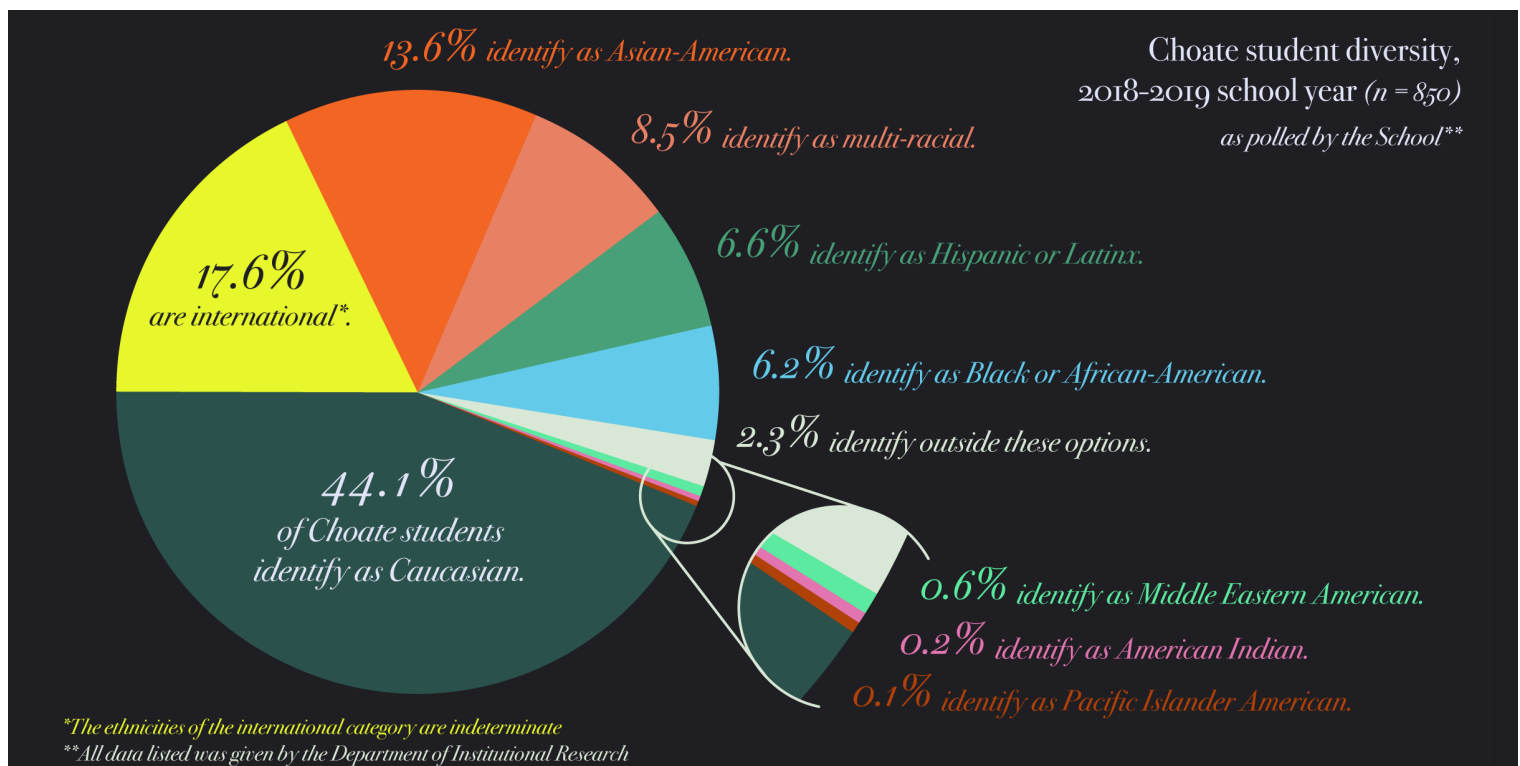
Chan continued, “It is generally easier to connect with people when you are the same race or ethnicity because, for the most part, they understand your cultural and general

day-to-day experience better than someone who does not share these similarities.”

The problem most likely lies in transforming a historically Caucasian institution into a diverse and inclusive community in a short amount of time. Mr. James Davidson, a member of the HPRSS Department, commented that the norm for boarding schools in the 1970s was to have a primarily Caucasian faculty makeup. As conventions have slowly changed, the racial makeup of boarding schools has changed, including Choate’s. But it is still far from being similar to that of the student body.

In this respect, many students and faculty stress the importance of having faculty of color versus having faculty who are simply racially and culturally competent — in other words, faculty that know how to navigate cultures beyond their own. “Faculty who aren’t people of color just can’t understand what some students of color face. They can sympathize with us, but they can’t empathize with us,” said Arsh Sekhon ’19, another Nichols prefect.

Increased faculty diversity may also provide the student body with different perspectives on other issues on campus. Some faculty feel that consent and sexual misconduct, a focal point of many discussions and talks this academic year, may benefit from a more diverse exploration of the issue. Ms. Eera Sharma, Director of Summer Programs, said, “We’re [employing] a very Americentric view of what consent is. What if we opened our blinders to see what it means in other cultures



of the world? We should be looking at things that way, instead of just with an American, privileged kind of view.”

Moreover, while many students of color see the lack of social support as the most crucial issue in the discrepancy between faculty and student diversity, others also note the importance of racial diversity in academic thought and learning inside the classroom. Students and faculty of color stress the sentiment that diversity of background generates different lenses and perspectives in approaching concepts and ideas in class, especially in history, English, and the social sciences.

“People talk about what affects them,” Sekhon said. “The ideas I’m exposed to when Ms. [Cindy] Okrah talks about race relations versus when a white teacher discusses the same issues with me are really different, and I think every student should have that [type of] experience in the classroom.”

Many of the faculty agree with the opinions of the students, especially faculty of color who have been at Choate for a longer period of time. Ms. Sharma said, “First hand experience — going to a college where there was not much racial diversity within the school or within the faculty? That was really challenging.” Echoing the sentiment of many other faculty, she also said, “I want to make sure that all of our students feel supported here and see themselves here.”

Importance of Faculty Diversity to the Rest of the Community

In many ways, having a diverse faculty is as beneficial to the faculty as a whole as it is to the student body. Not only does it provide the same variety of thought that a diverse student body offers, but it also allows the faculty to empathize with each other. However, many faculty members, including Dr. Alex Curtis, Head of School, noticed that the support system for faculty of color was thin. “For many of our faculty of color, it was hard to find people who had shared experiences like them,” he said.

Thus, retention of faculty of color becomes an issue due to the preexisting, persistent environment of historically white boarding schools like Choate. The problem is reflection of an industry-wide problem and is not solely confined to Choate’s community. Simply obtaining a diverse faculty makeup for a short period of time is easier than maintaining one over a long period of time.

“If you’re a faculty of color and you’re coming to a school that does not have a

great tradition in that area, why would you come?” said Dr. Curtis. “I think that it was extraordinarily important for people to be able to speak to someone that ... would be among their peer group.”

Fourth Form Dean and Assistant Director of Admission Ms. Dana Brown said, “Keeping faculty from diverse backgrounds is always a challenge; keeping faculty from any background is always a challenge.” She cites many different reasons for the difficulty in retaining faculty of color, the most prevalent being that the environment of elite boarding schools may not always be the best fit for some faculty with unique backgrounds. Instead, they may feel more disposed to participating in other organizations focused on issues of social diversity or simply may not see themselves thriving at a place like Choate.

Dr. Curtis largely agrees with Ms. Brown, but he also mentions the fact that the faculty are much harder to diversify because they do not turn over every four years like the students do. However, he and Ms. Kathleen Wallace, Associate Head of School, agree that having Dr. Keith Hinderlie as the new Director of Equity and Inclusion has been vital for expanding the presence of faculty of color. Now, the School is seeing more teachers of color in almost every academic department.

The School has held significantly more conversations over retention of faculty of color over the years. Mr. Phil Ventre, Faculty Marshal; Ms. Katie Levesque, Dean of Faculty; and Mr. Tom White, Director of Faculty Development, all cite that the appointment of Dr. Keith Hinderlie has been monumental for retaining faculty of color, as there is now an available resource for faculty of color if problems arise.

Mr. Will Morris, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residential Life, also said that a diverse faculty profile allows for a better understanding of student views within the faculty. Citing the way the entire campus reacted to the results of the 2016 election, Mr. Morris felt as though having a more racially diverse faculty with different backgrounds would have helped mitigate the effect of the election on both the student body and faculty.

While not everyone agrees on how many problems a lack of faculty diversity may generate, almost everyone acknowledges that, in order for Choate to be an intellectual breeding ground designed for social and academic growth, it is crucial for faculty diversity to match that of students. Most on campus agree with Mr. Davidson, who said, “There are steps that we want to continue to take to the point where you stop worrying

about it. We aren’t there yet, but that would be the goal.”

What’s Next?

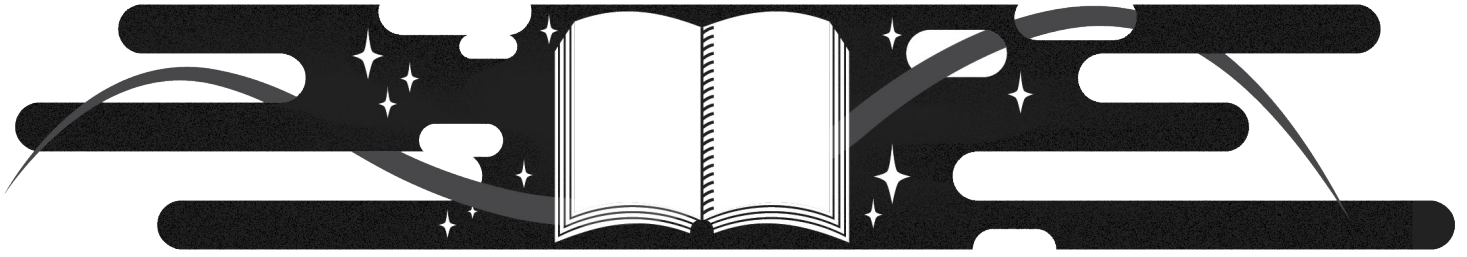
In the past few years, Choate’s numerous initiatives have restructured the School’s faculty to be more culturally competent and resourceful to students of color. The Dean of Faculty Office’s 2013 strategic plan included a plan for broadened advertising in order to hire more people of color — and progress has been made. Mr. Tom White, Director of Faculty Development, mentioned that Choate has started obtaining help from placing agencies that focus on hiring faculty of color, and the Dean of Faculty’s office has started directly posting job openings on the alumni boards of historically black colleges and universities.

As the School grew more diverse, the Choate community began to underscore the important issue of inclusion. Having a diverse faculty and student body is important, but the real difference lies in what the School does to ensure that those faculty and students of color feel like they are complete, heard members of the community. That is the challenge in retaining faculty of color, and many faculty members have seen significant progress in that area.

“Before, the resources were never put into retention. So we would get a faculty of color, but there would be none of the structure to support that faculty,” Ms. Sharma said. “But recently, Mr. White, the Director of Faculty Development, has helped with the hiring, recruiting, and retention, and the programs he has put into effect, I think, have really, really helped.”

Dr. Hinderlie is also essential in the hiring process. Mrs. Helene Ramirez-Guerra, Director of Multicultural Recruitment, said that with the addition of Dr. Hinderlie, the School now has a faculty member who focuses specifically on the areas of diversity and inclusion when hiring. “The fact that we have someone who is actually taking the time to look at [faculty diversity] is vital. As someone who has worked at other institutions, I have not seen that,” said Mrs. Ramirez-Guerra.

The School has implemented initiatives and programs to improve faculty diversity and inclusion. Still, virtually everyone agrees that there remains work to be done to ensure the community functions as inclusively as possible. “The current diversity situation must change — it’s very important that this happens,” Mr. Ventre said. “But when will it change? I honestly do not have the answer to that.” ■



THE BOOKSHELF

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

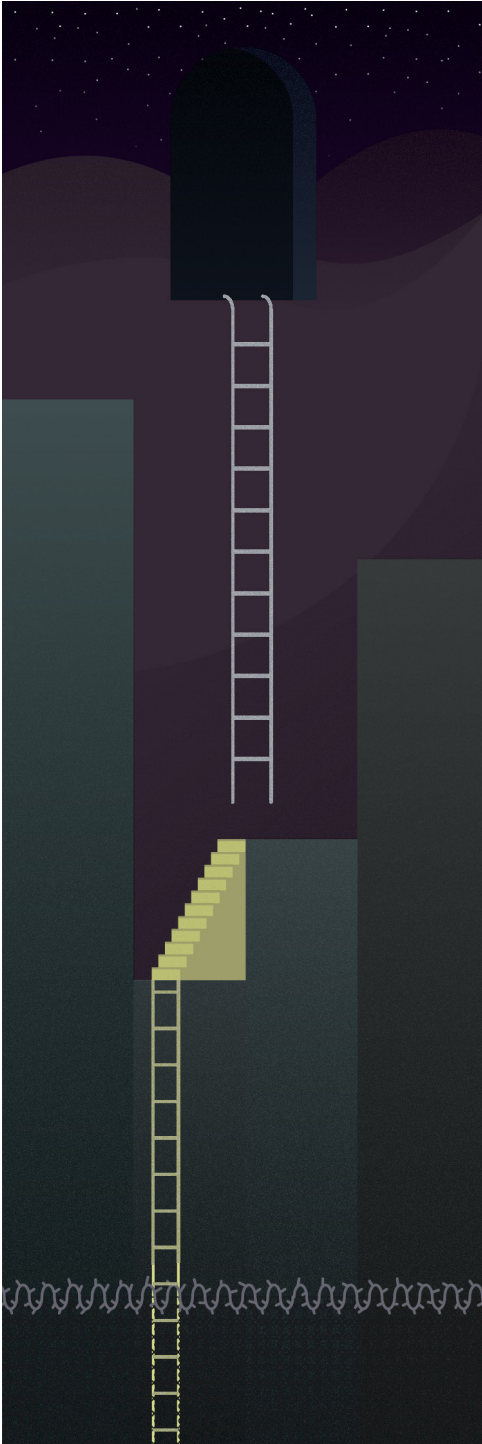
Reviewed by Abbie Chang '19

Exit West, Mohsin Hamid's fourth book, accompanies Nadia and Saeed, a young couple searching for refuge in the margins of a collapsing world. The two meet while enrolled in an evening adult-education class. Saeed, soft-spoken and mildly religious, is employed at a marketing company and lives with his parents. Nadia lives rebelliously on her own, sidestepping stereotypes with her motorcycle, full-length black robe, and fondness for smoking marijuana on the balcony of her gendered apartment building (which she eventually sneaks Saeed into under the nose of her landlord). Their relationship begins just as unrest in their unnamed Middle Eastern city transforms into a full-scale war; this changes their romantic dalliance into a partnership requisite for survival. Personal tragedies and increasing danger force the couple to become passengers on a network of magical doors that transport them to far-flung, marginally safer locations.

The New York Times named *Exit West* one of the five best works of fiction in 2017, and *Los Angeles Times* later awarded it a Book Prize for fiction. Hamid's writing is unpretentious, descriptive, and occasionally introspective yet devoid of frills. He does not dance around turmoil and pain with euphemisms or other sleights of hand. He approaches these difficult moments — and *Exit West* contains a lot them — as clear-eyed as he does with moments of tranquility and joy.

The literary intrigue surrounding *Exit West* is bolstered by the many questions it raises — questions that appear more relevant now than ever. The novel is, in some ways, a political commentary that asks the reader to examine a world in which border barriers are usurped, and how the perilous movement of people from place to place forces societal adaptation. *Exit West* invites the reader to examine the roots of the author's fears and what, in a nebulous world no longer divided into distinct factions, holds people together. ■

231 pp. Riverhead Books. Paper, \$16



Graphic by Chandler Littleford/*The Choate News*



Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

Reviewed by Vincenzo DiNatale '19

It is the 1960s, and the lasting effects of the partition of India are tearing apart the political and social harmony of Calcutta, as Kolkata was then known. Amid the city's turmoil, however, the bond between Subhash and Udayan Mitra seems unbreakable. Soon, however, the symbiotic relationship between the two brothers begins to disjoin. Subhash

decides to pursue scientific research at a university in New England, while Udayan stays home and pledges his allegiance to the Communist Party of India.

The Lowland is Jhumpa Lahiri's third novel. Shortlisted for the National Book Award in 2013, *The Lowland* unfolds a poignant narrative reminiscent of Lahiri's story collection *Interpreter of the*

Maladies, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000, as well as her previous novels *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. The daughter of a Bengali couple that immigrated to London and later Rhode Island, Lahiri powerfully encapsulates her own experiences in her work.

As *The Lowland* progresses, Subhash discovers that his relocation isn't what distances him most from Calcutta. Udayan, for his part, becomes engaged to an Indian woman named Gauri, but his parents refuse to bless the union. After Indian authorities uncover Udayan's plans for a violent act of rebellion, Subhash fails to return home before his brother's execution.

The tragedy rocks the family, sending Gauri, pregnant with her dead fiancé's child, to America with Subhash. But the damage of Udayan's death is irreparable, and the fragile ties holding the family together continue to disintegrate.

The Lowland follows the lives of its characters all the way to present day. A riveting tale of what it means to defy societal norms, to be an immigrant in modern America, and to separate familial bonds, Lahiri's work carries the reader on an emotional journey across continents and through generations. ■



Photograph by Venturelli / GC Images / Getty

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* prompts readers to consider the core of immigrant identity.

415 pp. Vintage Books. Paper, \$16

PASSING PERIOD

On leaving Hanoi for Wallingford.

By Siri Palreddy '20

At Choate, it's rare to meet someone who is alone — alone in the sense that they are the only member of a group that includes no one else.

In most cases, students can access the support of clubs and organizations, ranging from affinity groups that bring people together through the likes of nationality, ethnicity, or cultural heritage, to political clubs composed of those who share ideas about politics and the government. Huong Pham '19 is that rare exception.

As I sat down for dinner with her not long ago, I eyed her plate: a simple meal of steamed broccoli and rice. She noticed my stare. "It reminds me of home," she said.

Home for Pham is more than 8,000 miles away, in Hanoi, Vietnam. Like many of Choate's international students, Pham occasionally gets homesick and suffers through jet lag during school breaks, but she's the only student native to Vietnam.

Pham was born and raised in Hanoi — going to boarding school in the U.S. has been one of her few overseas experiences. Before she was accepted to Choate, Pham didn't research the size of the School's Vietnamese population. But Pham says that knowing this information beforehand would not have affected her decision to attend Choate. "I'd been in Vietnam for so long, and all my friends were Vietnamese," Pham explained. "I [had] never been to an international school before Choate, so I guess I wanted a change in the community I was in."

While Pham was excited to experience what Choate and its community would offer, transitioning away from the mostly homogenous community in Vietnam left her in culture shock. "I took a solid year and a half to adjust because the cultures are so different," Pham said. In Vietnam, it was easier for her to make friends. At her previous school, one class would stick together for the entire school day, so everyone within the group became friends quickly.

"I was a shy kid in Vietnam. I kept my grades up, and everything was fine. You made friends by just being nice — it takes little effort to get to know

someone when you are constantly with them," she said. Pham thought that she would encounter a similar environment at Choate but soon found that making friends at Choate required her to become more of an extrovert.

Pham's limited knowledge of American culture and her experience living in Squire Stanley, one of the smallest dorms on campus, made this even more difficult. "Everyone in my dorm was really nice," Pham said. "But I kind of missed out. Like when they talked about Beyoncé or other popular singers and actors, I couldn't understand or contribute to the conversation."



Photo by Pinn Chirathivat/The Choate News



Photo by Pinn Chirathivat/*The Choate News*

While it was difficult for Pham to acclimate to Choate at first, her experience here has taught her a lot about herself. Ironically, being in the United States has actually allowed her to connect more with Vietnamese culture. She explained, “In America, I think there’s a lot of patriotism and love for your country. But in Vietnam, everyone bashes our own country just because our government is a one-state party, so we all grew up with corruption. So I never felt any patriotism towards Vietnam before.” She continued, “I didn’t embrace my identity as Vietnamese until I came here. I used to want a job in the U.S., but now I want to return and be a proponent of change in Vietnam. In a way, America taught me to love my country more than my own people did.”

Pham does wish, however, that parts of her Choate experience had been different. For instance, she wishes that she had been able to celebrate a traditional Vietnamese holiday, Têt, at Choate. Têt is the Vietnamese New

Year, similar to the Chinese New Year in that both holidays fall on the same day and have similar customs. But it is rare to hear of Têt celebrations or club-sponsored Têt dinners. “I wish there was more awareness about Têt,” Pham said.

“Everyone in my dorm was really nice,” Pham said, “But, still, I kind of missed out.”

“It’s basically the only holiday I actually celebrate, but it falls during the school year, so I can’t spend it with my family. In Vietnam, during Têt, the streets will be empty because all the

families are celebrating together inside,” she said. “I don’t want to force my culture on others, but it would make me really happy if people knew about Têt.”

Pham also wishes she had socialized more at Choate. Since her freshman year, Pham has taken six classes each term, and she’s participated in a demanding signature program: the Science Research Program. “At the time, I thought having more coursework would widen my interests,” she said. “Good grades used to be the most important thing for me. But now I realize spending time with friends can be even more important.”

Still, Pham is no longer the quiet girl who reads books during dinner. Now days away from her graduation, she’s the type of person who’ll strike up a conversation with a stranger at the table. “If I had stayed in Vietnam,” Pham said, “I don’t think I’d be the way I am today. I learned some tough lessons about being social, but I’m more confident and friendly now and ready to use what Choate has taught me.” ■

COMMUNITY LUNCH

Social eating via Instagram.

By Natarsha Yan '21

One of the biggest issues Choate students face is balancing self-care with a demanding schedule. Jayden Khuu '21, a fourth-former from Hong Kong, found a fun, innovative solution to this problem. In October 2018, Khuu created an Instagram account devoted to food under the name @khuu_food. With nearly 150 followers and over 600 posts, @khuu_food is a hit within the Choate community. Recently, Natarsha Yan '21 sat down with Khuu to discuss the motivations behind @khuu_food and what he hopes it will become.

What inspired you to start @khuu_food?

I think we all have moments when we are irresponsible in considering the food decisions we make. Just imagine the regret after eating two packets of chips or an entire pizza. You don't really feel good the next morning. So I found a way to make myself more accountable and conscious of the food choices I make. I created @khuu_food and make what I eat public.

How does @khuu_food work?

Since I eat three meals a day, I also post three times a day — breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Fun fact: if you take the number of posts I have and divide it by three, it shows the number of days I've been posting.

I also include the snacks and drinks I eat throughout the day on the highlights section of Instagram to make sure those choices are accounted for as well.

How long are you planning on keeping this account going?

The current plan is for the account to run for an indefinite period of time or until I get tired of it, which I actually already am starting to feel at times. I have already tried the paleo diet, as well as intermittent fasting, and I've shared my thoughts on those experiences. I look forward to experimenting with more diets and documenting how I feel about them.

What inspired your interest in health?

Health has actually been a huge part of my life for a long time. Both my paternal and maternal grandmothers have Type 2 diabetes, and we have a family history of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, as well as high blood sugar. I have done

a few body checks before, and the results weren't optimal, so I've been trying to improve my food choices to escape my predestined fate. My dad has also been taking cholesterol pills, so this is kind of a whole family movement.

Do you ever have cheat days when you don't fully follow your @khuu_food lifestyle?

I do not believe in cheat days. I believe that, in order to maintain a sustainable diet, everything has to be balanced. So if I want to eat something, I'll eat it without being too hard on myself. Indulging in moderation is better in the long run than having cheat days where you have sudden spikes in your sugar and caloric intake.

Are there other ways you work to maintain your health?

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle requires not only a healthy diet but also exercise. I used to be a lot chubbier, and, at one point, I was at least 22 pounds heavier while being four inches shorter. Since then, and long before starting @khuu_food, I've picked up running. I now run on a daily basis, and I even tried out long distance track last spring term. Running is a really beneficial activity for your body, not only for weight loss but also as a way to strengthen your heart muscles and build up your fitness, making daily tasks much easier. Although I wasn't much of a runner before, since starting running four years ago, it has become an indispensable part of my life.

Any last words for your @khuu_food fans and followers?

@khuu_food is about more than keeping myself accountable. We can all eat healthy and delicious foods, even at a boarding school, as long as we try to fill our plates with more color. ■



Graphic by Derek Ng/The Choate News

A Reporter at Large

AGENT OF INFLUENCE

Once a Naval intelligence officer, history teacher Mr. Jonas Akins has a past full of secrets.

By Deanna Tan '20



Photo courtesy of Jonas Akins

Mr. Jonas Akins is more than just a teacher, coach, and adviser at Choate. He is also a former intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy.

Mr. Akins grew up in Dover, Massachusetts, a small residential town just outside of Boston. He graduated from Milton Academy and Harvard University, and, after teaching Medieval, U.S., and 20th Century World History for two years at the Sedbergh School in northwest England, he returned to the U.S. and was commissioned as a naval ensign. This work would consume the next two years of his life. "I learned a great deal about a wide variety of people from all over the world," he said.

Mr. Akins' time in service began with Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Florida, from July to October of 2004. Then, he partook in a Navy and Marine Corps Intelligence Officers' Basic Course at Dam Neck, Virginia, from

January to June of 2005. After a two-year tour with Carrier Air Wing ONE at Naval Air Station Oceana, Mr. Akins began reporting to the Chief of Naval Operations-Intelligence Plot at the Pentagon in September of 2007.

"I don't miss [the military's camaraderie] that much, because I feel as though we have a good share of it here."

As an Intelligence Officer, Mr. Akins was primarily responsible for advising commanders in the face of adversary action. His position required him to tackle a variety of conflicts, depending on where the military was operating. "At sea, it could be as small as a drone flight of a

coastal patrol vessel, while at the Pentagon, I was more likely to be briefing the Chief of Naval Operations and Secretary of the Navy on technological developments in foreign navies; any changes in terrorist group tactics, techniques, and procedures; or geopolitical shifts around the world," he said.

When he was with the air division, he kept watch in the Supplementary Plot. This division provided classified indications and warnings to the strike group commander in addition to briefing and debriefing aircrew who were flying missions over Iraq and Afghanistan or were engaging various military exercises around the world. In Iraq, he served as Morning Intelligence Briefer for General Raymond Odierno, the commanding general of the Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF–I).

At the Pentagon, Mr. Akins regularly briefed the Chief of Naval Operations

and Secretary of the Navy. He also prepared the executive intelligence summary for the senior officers at the MNF-I in his final job at the Pentagon, delivering intelligence briefing books each morning to the admirals and senior civilians in the Pentagon. He worked with the MNF-I at the height of the controversial, wide-ranging Iraq War, allowing Mr. Akins to see the war's progression and impacts firsthand.

"I was fortunate enough to be challenged by a number of the tasks set for me and the teams with which I worked," Mr. Akins said, "often having to work from a variety of sources to reach our conclusions and then having to tailor the manner in which we presented our analyses for different audiences."

To Mr. Akins, his time in the military was more than simply service to the Department of Defense. It was also a service to his generation. "A number of my friends from high school and college

had joined the Army and the Marine Corps," he said, "and I felt as though the two wars then ongoing in Afghanistan and Iraq would be the defining challenges of my generation."

Mr. Akins wouldn't trade his experience with the Navy for anything in the world, he said. He had slept on the aircraft carrier the U.S.S. Enterprise in a bunk just below the flight deck, listening to fighter jets land above his head; briefed rooms full of admirals, generals, and ambassadors; and held offices in the basement of the Pentagon and in two of Saddam Hussein's former palaces.

After leaving the active duty Navy in 2010, Mr. Akins attended Harvard Business School, graduating in 2012. He then taught for four years at the Kent School in Kent, Connecticut. In 2016, he married Sarah Stapleton, who teaches history and geography at Greenwich Academy. The next year, he joined Choate's HPRSS department, also

coaching football and squash. Mr. Akins said that, at Choate, the "experience of family has been positive and welcoming, which is a wonderful feeling to me."

His experiences in the Navy have influenced how he approaches teaching at Choate. "I've tried to impart some of that experience to my students," Mr. Akins said.

"I'm happy to have had the chance to serve on active duty for six years. The United States military and our coalition partners are some of the most remarkable people with whom I've had the privilege to work," Mr. Akins said.

He noted that most veterans come to miss the camaraderie afforded by serving in the military. "But I don't miss that that much," he admitted, "because I feel as though we have a good share of it here." ■



Photo courtesy of Jonas Akins

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