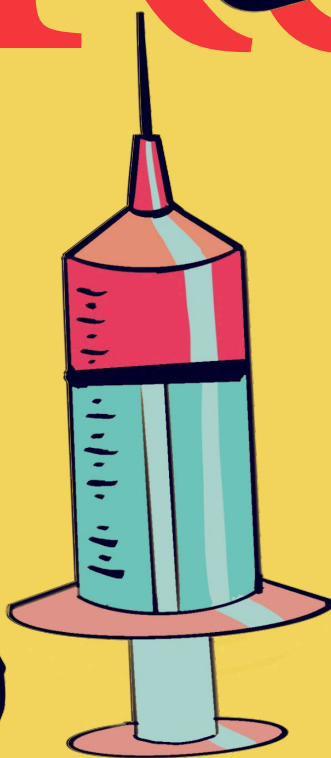


Issue
4

THE HORACE MANN

Review



VOLUME XXX - APRIL 2021

Letter From the Editors



Cover image by Gabrielle Fischberg

Hello Horace Mann! We are incredibly excited to present Issue 4 of Volume XXX of The Review.

It has been just over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic put the world on pause and permanently altered the way we think about public health. However, amidst the pandemic’s disastrous impact on society, the unrelenting work of scientists and pharmaceutical companies is finally illuminating the light at the end of the tunnel: widely-available and effective vaccines.

As a result, in the Features section for this issue, our writers dissect what lessons can be learned from vaccine rollouts, the media’s effect on public opinion, and the intersections between race and public health as they relate to this pivotal new advancement.

Additionally, while the eyes of the nation are focused on the ever-increasing amount of Americans who are considered safe from coronavirus, our writers highlight the importance of geopolitical events such as the Russian SolarWinds attack and the possible resurrection of the Iran nuclear deal. They also take stances on critical domestic issues such as the impact of Texas’ electrical grid failures and the slippery slope that is the hegemony of the world’s largest tech companies.

As the nation enters this new phase in the history of the pandemic, the entire Review staff takes great pride in being an outlet for the Horace Mann community to voice its opinions on the world’s most pressing topics.

We hope you enjoy the issue!

Sasha Snyder and Alex Gerstenhaber
Editors-in-Chief
Volume XXX

THE HORACE MANN Review

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History Repeats Itself: Texas Sacrificed its Electric Grid on the Altar of Cost “Efficiency”

Teddy Ganea

Between February 11 and February 18 two extreme winter storms buffeted the entire state of Texas. Wind turbines, gas and water pipes, and even oil pumps froze. At the same time, as temperatures plummeted, millions of Texans cranked on the heat. With energy demand skyrocketing and supply collapsing, Texas’ electric grid failed.²

The grid’s failure quickly morphed into a disaster of apocalyptic proportions. The resulting power outage affected all of the state’s 254 counties and left up to 4.5 million Texans without power at its height.³ In an image eerily reminiscent of the USSR, millions of desperate Americans, without heat or water, had no choice but to burn their own books, furniture, and even houses to keep warm.⁴ Many Texans tried to heat themselves using gas stoves, only to set themselves and their houses on fire or succumb to carbon monoxide poisoning. Hospitals shut down and flooded and dozens of elderly Americans froze to death. Disabled Texans reliant on electric wheelchairs quickly ran out of battery, finding themselves helplessly trapped in place for days on end.⁵ It is impossible to know the death toll of Texas’ electricity outage; as of February 23, The New York Times found that at least 58 Texas residents died from the power outage.⁶ This figure is most likely a massive underestimate.⁷

Amid the damage and destruction, people were and are rightly outraged at Texas’ politicians, in particular Senator Ted Cruz, who decided to hightail to Cancun for some rest and relaxation with his family while his constituents froze to death.⁸ Many were also livid at Governor Greg Abbott, who, in many Texans’ view, responded too slowly

to the electricity outages. It’s easy to blame politicians for failing to react fast enough to a crisis, but in this case such criticisms target a symptom rather than the underlying disease. The Texas electric grid debacle was never about crisis reaction. It was about the misguided attempts to cut costs that resulted in a massive, preventable failure.

Indeed, the state of Texas has done an extraordinary job managing the crisis, and should be praised for it. Under extreme pressure from severely compromised energy supply and off-the-charts energy demand, the Texas grid’s electric frequency briefly fell to below 60 hertz; a few hertz lower, and electricity’s frequency would be so slow that it would effectively stop moving, shutting down the entire grid. In Texas’ deregulated electricity system, the federal government has no power; instead, ERCOT, the Electric Reliability Corporation of Texas, runs the grid. During the crisis, ERCOT acted decisively. With just 4 minutes and 37 seconds to spare, the agency launched rolling, localized blackouts, preventing a much longer statewide blackout.⁹ After ERCOT saved the grid, Abbott and the state government restored power remarkably quickly. In only three days, they restored electricity to a whopping 4.22 million Texans - almost 1.5 million per day!¹⁰ By comparison, when wildfires caused blackouts in California, the California state government restored power at a rate of only 50,000 per day - not even a tenth of Texas’ effectiveness.¹¹

Despite the rapid and competent response of ERCOT and the Texas state government, millions of Texans are livid, and for good reason. By the time power was restored, the damage had already been done; Texans had already burnt their houses,

froze to death, or poisoned themselves in futile attempts to keep warm. Crisis prevention must always come first, as no response can reverse every negative effect of a crisis.

Going forward, to prevent future unnecessary loss of life, Texas should pursue two avenues of action:

First, the state government must winterize the electric grid. The most obvious and easily solvable cause of the grid collapse was a lack of winterization - wind turbines, gas and oil pumps, and power generators, which convert gas to electricity, all froze in the freezing temperatures. This challenge is not one of engineering - at the same time as Texas’ energy production failed, wind turbines in Greenland and Siberia ran smoothly, while North Dakota continued pumping out oil.¹² Rather, it is a failure of investment to deal with Arctic winter temperatures - which were predictable!

After all, the winter storm that knocked out Texas’ electric grid should not have been unexpected - such an event happens about once every ten years.¹³ Indeed, in 1989, 2003, and 2011, Texas’ electric grid failed under basically the same circumstances. In the aftermath of the 2011 disaster, ERCOT-aligned scientists and engineers recommended a slate of winterization policies, which local energy providers simply refused to follow, unwilling to cut into their bottom line.¹⁴ In Texas’ highly unregulated electric system, ERCOT lacked both the power and the willingness to enforce winterizing upon other energy companies. With all of this in

“Those in power must be held accountable, not because of their response to the crisis, but because of their failure to prepare for the preventable.”



mind, the Texas state government should invest money and pass regulations enforcing proper winterizing protocols statewide. After all, Texas’ electric grid crisis would have been far less damaging had 40% of Texas’ power capacity not frozen.¹⁵

More broadly, the state government must restructure Texas’ electric energy market to avoid a similar disaster in the future. Currently, in Texas’ generally deregulated market, electric providers earn revenue solely by selling energy at whatever the volatile market price happens to be.¹⁶ Prices are generally based on supply and demand, although ERCOT can alter prices through an arcane and byzantine system of incentives and accounting sleights of hand. This system incentivizes energy producers to produce just enough energy to meet average electricity demand - producing less energy leaves money on the table, while producing too much creates waste.¹⁷ Texas’ quasi-free market has proven extremely effective at keeping Texas’ grid prices low. Unfortunately, this approach also discourages even moderately expensive (but life-saving) efforts like winterizing the grid, because, from a purely economic standpoint, it makes more sense to lose a few days’ worth of production every ten years than pay an upfront construction cost.¹⁸ Texas’ current market structure also penalizes companies for building up reserve capacity; reserve capacity is essential for offsetting decreases in energy supply from freezing and increases in energy demand from heating that come during weather crises; reserve capacity costs money to maintain and adds little to

corporations’ revenue.¹⁹

The Texas state government could solve both problems by paying providers not only for electricity production, but also for electricity resiliency; measures like winterization or excess capacity would increase the power company’s resiliency, and thus increase revenues from the government. Coupled with such incentives must come regulations and penalties for electric companies who refuse to build up their resiliency, for their inaction endangers the wellbeing of the entire state.

Lastly, the electricity market harmed Texas’ response even during the crisis. As energy demand rose and energy supply shrank, prices in the volatile market skyrocketed. On February 10, just a few weeks before winter storms hit, electricity on Texas’ ERCOT market cost \$30 per megawatt-hour; at the peak of the winter storms, electricity prices increased up to \$9,000, surging by a mind-boggling 300 times in days. Only Texas regulations capping electricity prices at \$9,000 stopped the continued upward surge.²⁰ These surge prices have wrecked the finances of many of those families fortunate enough to access electricity. In the height of the crisis, high prices incentivized power retailers - middlemen between energy and the consumer - to simply not buy electricity and urge their clientele to stop buying energy from them, contributing to chaos and weakening energy transmission across the state.²¹ ERCOT price glitches also sent mixed messages to energy producers, slowing the ramp-up of energy production in the state and prolonging the crisis.²²

This is unacceptable. ERCOT’s job is literally to manage prices - together with the quasi-free market - in order to maximize efficiency and prevent crises. And they’ve failed, and deserve to be held accountable. In a time of crisis, ERCOT has no excuse for algorithmic errors which the company should have detected and solved beforehand. Nor does ERCOT have an excuse for setting a ridiculously high energy maximum of \$9,000, which must be lower.

A strong electricity grid is in everyone’s best interest. For those seeking to maintain Texas’ energy independence, the current crisis has proven a formidable foe, as more and more Texans push (perhaps wrongly) to submit to federal regulations and interconnect the US-Texas grids. For those seeking a strong economy, the complete freezing of an entire state - hospitals, roads, businesses, homes - for several days is a massive threat to economic livelihood. For those seeking to save lives, bulking up Texas’ grid will save hundreds of lives - if not more - in the next weather crisis that died unnecessarily in this one.

Those in power must be held accountable, not because of their response to the crisis, but because of their failure to prepare for the preventable. And more broadly, across the United States, we need to fight for preventative measures, to save lives and money in advance. It’s time we stop putting out fires - or starting new ones - and start getting rid of our country’s kindling: defective electric grids and improvable infrastructure. **HMR**

The Rise and Fall of Governor Andrew Cuomo

Sophie Dauer



Despite winning three terms as governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo has traditionally been viewed as a “micromanager, bully, and a vacuum cleaner set on high to suck up power.”²⁴ “At the wedding of two former administration staffers during the governor’s first term, one speaker asked during a toast how many attendees had been bullied by Cuomo at some point — then watched as hands shot up across the room.”²⁵ In 2018, Jumaane Williams, who at the time was a New York City Council member, described Cuomo’s identity as a bully as an “open secret.”²⁶ “People

who know Albany know the governor rules with an iron first,” said Fordham University political science professor Christina Greer, and included in this is “making sure that people very rarely speak up publicly against him.”²⁷ Cuomo has long had the reputation of being aggressive and intolerant of criticism. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who has had bad blood with Cuomo for many years, attested to the fact that many of his colleagues have experienced phone calls with Cuomo in which they were “berated and belittled.”²⁸ Cuomo entered the pandemic as a sharp-elbowed bully, but his

reputation very quickly took a sharp turn for the better.

Political images can turn on a dime. The pandemic changed the view of Governor Cuomo 180 degrees. As recently as February of 2020, Cuomo had an overall job approval of 36%. In May of 2020, 7 in 10 approved of the job he was doing.²⁹ Cuomo’s live daily broadcasts projected confidence as he spoke about the rising COVID case numbers, lack of ventilators, and field hospitals in Central Park. He spoke of his family, showing concern for his brother Chris who contracted COVID, and for his aging mother. He talked about missing one of his daughters, who was quarantined after exposure to the coronavirus, and of the joy of getting to spend time with another daughter. His approval ratings soared and the whole country watched “the Cuomo Monologues: part briefing, part sermon, part inspirational talk.”³⁰ He became a media darling with popular comedians Ellen DeGeneres and Chelsea Handler professing their love for him, coining the phrase “Cuomosexual.”³¹ People felt comfortable with Cuomo at the helm and so the governor was able to secure emergency powers allowing him to spend state money without legislative approval in order to battle COVID.³² To say that Cuomo amassed a near-universal praise is not at all an overstatement.

Yet, with this circulation of praise, we must not forget that Governor Cuomo emerged as a hero with the benefit of having former President Donald Trump as his foil.³³ As Trump proclaimed COVID-19 a hoax that would end by Easter, Cuomo displayed graphs and charts warning people about the coming months. As Trump contemplated people injecting bleach to wipe out the virus, Cuomo set up a floating hospital on the Hudson River.³⁴ Trump was the Draco Malfoy to Cuomo’s Harry Potter. He was the Claudius to Cuomo’s Hamlet. Yes, Governor Cuomo did lead well this past year, but the extent of his stellar image would not have been possible without the bumbling of Trump, who did not just set the bar on the floor, but in the basement. Recently released information about Cuomo’s undercounting of nursing home death numbers is reflective of some of some of his shortcomings to which Americans were blind with Trump’s actions as a standard.

In early February, we learned that Governor Cuomo’s administration withheld from



Democratic leadership in New York information regarding the number of deaths in nursing homes. Melissa DeRosa, a top Cuomo aide, told Democratic leadership that the administration “froze” when asked for numbers because it feared a federal investigation by the Department of Justice, which had requested numbers of deaths to determine whether New York and other states violated the civil rights of nursing home patients.³⁵ In addition, New York State Attorney General Letitia James has issued a report that shows an underreporting of deaths by as many as 6,000 people. Her report shows the death toll of people in nursing facilities to hover around 15,000, not the reported 9,000.³⁶ The problem doesn’t end there. Cuomo’s administration may have had a hand in the wildfire-spread of COVID in New York nursing homes. In a memo dated March 25, 2020, the Cuomo administration mandated nursing homes to readmit former residents who had been transferred to hospitals, even when those residents were still positive for COVID.³⁷ Buried in complicated language, the measure also protected nursing homes against many lawsuits over their failure to protect residents from death or sickness, something that most lawmakers were unaware of when they approved the budget.³⁸ Cuomo’s responses to the uncovering of this information has resurfaced his reputation as a bully.

A phone call has been released wherein the Governor berated a State Assemblyman, Ron Kim, the chair of the Assembly’s Aging Committee, for critical comments against him. Kim has been one of the few Democratic lawmakers willing to criticize Cuomo during the pandemic, and when James’s report was released, Kim was quick

to comment on it. Just hours after Kim made his remarks, he received a late-night phone call from Cuomo. Cuomo yelled at Kim then threatened his political career for questioning Cuomo’s nursing home decisions and reporting. As stated by de Blasio, this response appears to be “classic Andrew Cuomo.”³⁹ As a result of the Governor’s cover-up and poor judgement demonstrated, Cuomo has been stripped of his emergency powers; however, he is still permitted to extend orders that he already issued. There is growing support among Democratic and Republican legislatures for Cuomo’s removal from office either through resignation or impeachment.⁴⁰

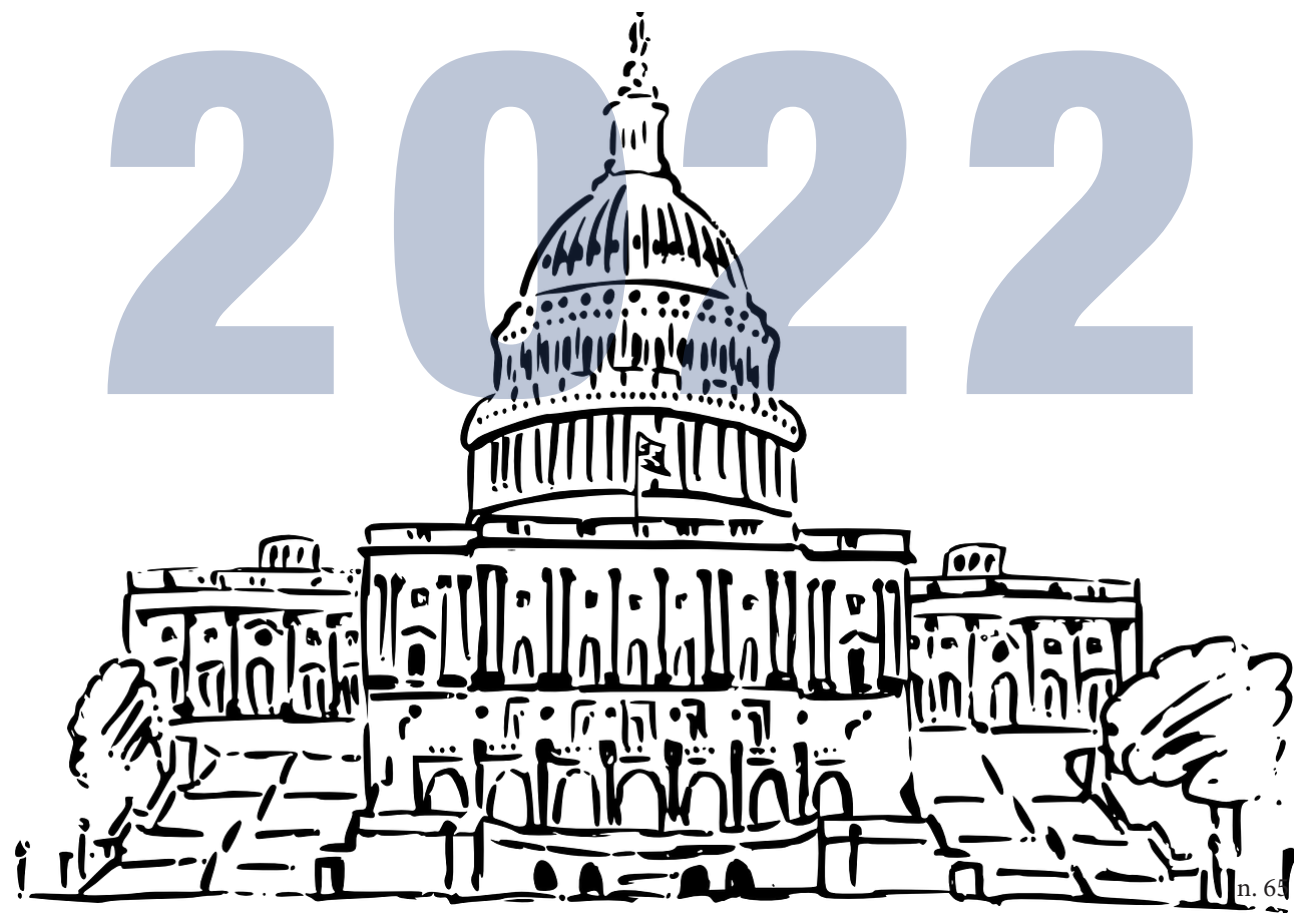
In response, Governor Cuomo is churning out ridiculous rhetoric to defend himself. First, he spent 90 minutes lashing out at his critics, stating that he is the victim of toxic politics.⁴¹ Let’s be clear here. Cuomo is no victim. His administration admitted the cover-up. They “froze” in response to the requests for information. They didn’t comply. Second, Cuomo claims that the numbers don’t matter given that all deaths are tragic. It is ridiculous to suggest that people who want clarity in numbers don’t care about the value of life. Finally, Cuomo says the numbers don’t matter because New York’s numbers are below the national average.⁴² Being below the national average is simply not a reason to refuse to deliver an accurate death toll. It is especially notable that Cuomo, who, earlier in the pandemic, prided himself on his fact-based approach, has now found himself in a position where he must justify his refraining from delivering the truth to the public.

To boot, Cuomo is now at the center of sexual harassment claims. On Wednesday, February 24th, Lindsey Boylan, a former

Cuomo aide, came forward to describe misconduct. She alleged that the Governor invited her to play strip poker on a government airplane, suggested that she was “a better looking” version of another woman, and gave her an unsolicited kiss when the two were alone in Cuomo’s Manhattan office in 2018.⁴³ A second former aide, Charlotte Bennett, came forward shortly thereafter, alleging that Cuomo asked inappropriate questions about her personal life. Specifically, Cuomo asked Bennett whether she thought age made a difference in relationships and told her that he was open to relationships with women in their 20s.⁴⁴ As of right Marcg 13, seven women have accused Cuomo of sexual harassment or inappropriate behavior.⁴⁵ Cuomo denies the harassment but former staffers describe him as a controlling boss who uses fear and retribution to get what he wants.⁴⁶

There is a reason Governor Cuomo has a reputation as a power-hungry bully. Indeed, he did a lot of good these past few months and we owe a debt of gratitude. However, true colors don’t change. It was just the background that made him appear as a temporary hero. **HMR**

There is a reason Governor Cuomo has a reputation as a power-hungry bully.



MIDTERM ELECTIONS PREVIEW

Now that the tumultuous 2020 United States election cycle is finally over, it is time to look ahead to elections that will be held in November 2022. While Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were able to flip several key states that Hillary Clinton lost in 2016 during her presidential campaign, 2020 was not all good news for the Democratic Party. Prior to the election, data analysis publication FiveThirtyEight estimated that the most likely balance of power in Congress would be 239-196 and 52-48 in favor of Democrats, in the House and Senate respectively.⁴⁹ However, once all the votes were tabulated, the Democrats ended up only having a 9 seat advantage in the House (222-213), and needed the massive voter turnout in the Georgia run-off elections in order to regain control of the Senate.⁵⁰ The Democrats underperformed political analysts' expectations and left many skeptical about maintaining a Democrat majority in Congress, come 2022. Meanwhile, Republicans have been brimming with confidence about 2022 ever since November's results

Eshan Mehere

have been released: House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy recently went as far as to declare that he would "bet [his] house" on Republicans retaking Congress next year.⁵¹

Historically, the party of the incumbent President has not fared very well in midterm elections, as they lost an average of 3.3 seats in the Senate and 22.4 seats in the House between 1982 and 2018.⁵² In some extreme cases, such as the "Gingrich Revolution" of 1994 or the "Red Wave" of 2010, the minority party has picked up as many as 50 seats in the House and 5 seats in the Senate, completely shifting the dynamics of Washington. There have generally been two accepted barometers for forecasting the political environment of a midterm election. The first is the President's approval rating which indicates their popularity and that of their party's agenda, and hence the likelihood for a motivated and robust coalition of voters to turn out in the upcoming elections. The second measure is the Sen-

ate map of seats that will be up. Due to the fact that Senate seats are contested every six years, some Senate cycles are more advantageous to one party than others.

The Biden administration is certainly popular among voters based on recent approval ratings.⁵³ As of February 28, Biden's net favorability stands at +15.8 amongst all likely and registered voters.⁵⁴ As comparison, at a similar point in Trump's presidency, he stood at around -6.0 on net favorability. Furthermore, according to a recent YouGov and The Economist poll, 53% of voters approve of the way Biden is handling COVID-19, as opposed to 34% who do not, and 66% of voters support the COVID-19 relief bill that Biden has long lobbied for as opposed to 25% who do not.⁵⁵ These two data points, along with a few others, indicate that as of right now, Joe Biden's agenda and work as the President has been relatively popular with the American people. Regardless of how popular Biden and the Democratic agenda remain, he will still be the President of the incumbent party, a historical disadvantage. Depending on how

the next two years go, voters who put Biden in office and gave Democrats control of Congress in 2020 may second guess themselves when it comes to voting blue again, potentially, if the President fails to meet his campaign promises or there is a lack of productivity under Democrat majorities in congress. Therefore, Biden and the Democrats' political prospects rely on ensuring that their agenda and legislation can hold on to as many voters as possible.

The second, and perhaps the most important aspect of how the midterm elections will go, is the actual map of the Senate seats that are up in 2022. The Senate currently stands at 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris having the ability to break any ties, giving the Democrats the smallest of majorities. When it comes to 2022, Republicans will have 20 seats up to the Democrats' 14, meaning that entering these elections the Democrats will have a 36-30 advantage. However, 14 of these 20 Republican incumbents who will be fighting for re-election reside in states that voted for Fmr. President Trump by at least 10% in 2020, and hence will not be competitive in 2022. Meanwhile, 10 out of the 14 Democratic incumbents whose terms are up reside in states that voted for President Biden by at least 10% in the 2020 election, and hence will also not be competitive in 2022.

That leaves 10 "toss-up" races that will determine the balance of power within the United States Senate. Two of these races are in Nevada and New Hampshire, where incumbent Democratic Senators. Catherine Cortez-Masto and Maggie Hassan are up for re-election. These two states voted for Biden by 2.4 and 7.3% respectively, meaning they were somewhat competitive but have shifted to the left from 2016.⁵⁶ In addition, Cortez-Masto and Hassan have net favorability ratings of +8 and +16 respectively, meaning that they are very popular with their constituents.⁵⁷ Although it is possible that a charismatic and strong Republican candidate, such as potentially Governor Chris Sununu in New Hampshire, could come along and tighten the race, it is logical to conclude that the Democrats will hold on to both of these seats.

Two more tossup races are in the states of Iowa and Ohio, where incumbent GOP Sens. Chuck Grassley and Rob Portman find themselves at the end of their term. Portman, a more "moderate" Republican, has already announced his plans to retire.⁵⁸ Grassley has been more reserved about his future plans, although, if he were to win

re-election in 2022, he would be 95 years old at the conclusion of that next term in 2029. Given the nature of a job in the United States Senate, and the fact that only one individual in history has served in the Senate after the age of 93, it is likely that Grassley will also be retiring.⁵⁹ This leaves two "open" seats and potential "pick-up" opportunities for the Democrats. In 2012, Former President Barack Obama was able to carry Iowa and Ohio by 5.6 and 1.9% respectively. However, the broad Democratic coalition that was able to deliver those victories simply no longer exists anymore in these states.⁶⁰ Trump was able to carry both states convincingly (by a margin of 8%) in both 2016 and 2020, so the Democrats would need a major shift in political dynamics in order to have a shot at winning these races.

Florida, the first of the remaining six races is likely to be the one with the widest margins. GOP Sen. Marco Rubio will have a chance to win a third term, and he may do so easily. Although Florida voted for Barack Obama twice in 2008 and 2012, Trump flipped the state in 2016, and was able to win it convincingly by a 3.3% margin in 2020.⁶¹ This signals that Florida, driven by a large coalition of Hispanic voters in the Miami area, is shifting to the right and away from the "less than 1%" toss-up state that it was for much of the past 10 years. In addition, Senator Rubio stands at a +15 net favorability rating, showing that his con-

stituents have no problem with the job he is doing in Washington, and therefore, it is difficult to see a path where the Democrats are able to capture a victory in this state.⁶²

Perhaps the most intriguing of the remaining races is in North Carolina, where incumbent GOP Senator Richard Burr has already announced his intention to retire.⁶³ NC has seen very thin margins recently, as Trump won it by 3.7% and 1.3% in 2016 and 2020, respectively.⁶⁴ Since Burr's seat is open, the Republican candidate will have no incumbency boost, leaving the race as a toss-up that can go either way. There is no clear favorite, so the slight advantage can be given to the GOP, which has carried the state in the prior two Presidential elections.

Wisconsin holds another anticipated election where incumbent GOP Sen. Ron Johnson, an ardent Trump loyalist, has not yet announced whether he will be seeking a third term in 2022. If he were to run, he would be favored slightly, but if he were to retire, the race would certainly move in the Democrats' favor. The fact that Johnson has not announced his plans yet makes this race nearly impossible to predict. However, the slight nod can be given to the Republicans, as the Democratic coalition in this state isn't very robust—Biden carried it by less than 1%.

In the state of Pennsylvania, incumbent GOP Senator Pat Toomey has already announced his decision to retire at the conclusion of his term, and Democrats should

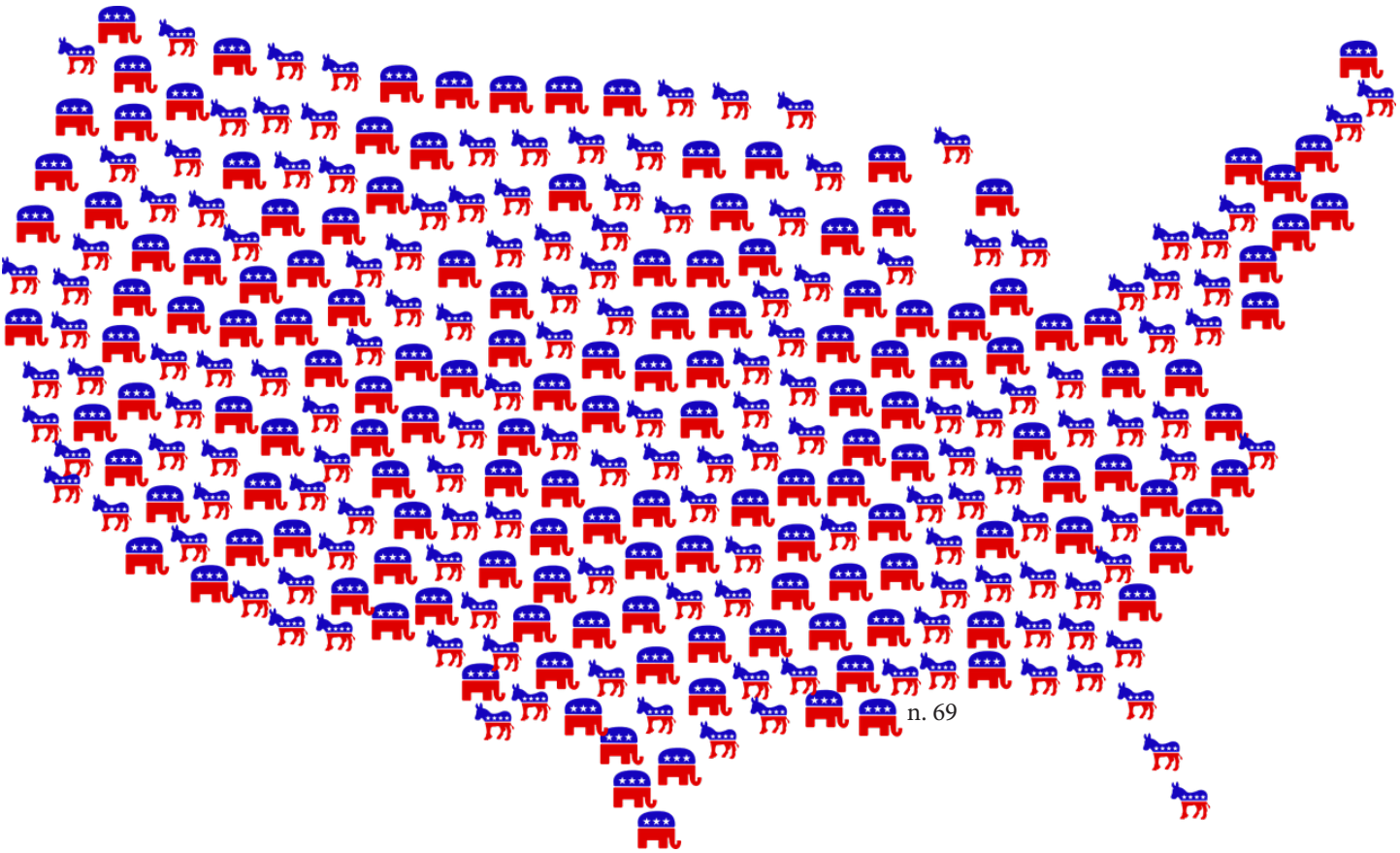


be excited by the prospects of flipping the state.⁶⁷ PA voted for Biden by about 1.2% in 2020, and so an open seat environment would tab the Democratic candidate as the slight favorite. However, a strong Republican candidate, who is able to drive high turnout in rural areas, as Trump did in both 2016 and 2020, would certainly put the GOP right back into contention.

That leaves two races that will likely have the thinnest margins, and two states that are very electorally similar: Arizona and Georgia. Both of these states voted blue on the Presidential level in 2020 for the first time since the Bill Clinton era, and both states also sent Democratic Senators to Washington in Special Elections. Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia will be back fighting for a full term in 2022 after two year terms, and they will certainly have stiff competition. Although Kelly and Warnock’s victories were impressive, and certainly display a sign of shifting demographics in the Sun Belt, it is important to remember that they were both fighting against appointed, not incumbent, Senators in 2020, and both appointees were not very popular amongst their constituents. In addition, Biden’s mar-

gins in these states on the Presidential level were less than 1%, meaning that slightly more Republican turnout, or a few Democratic voters shifting to the right, would put the GOP right into the driver’s seat in these races.⁶⁸ Ultimately, the outcome of these two races will likely be determined by Warnock and Kelly’s popularity as Senators. If both of them are able to remain very favorable, the Democrats will likely be favored to hold on to these seats. However if their image sours in the eyes of the electorate, then Republicans have a great shot at coming up victorious. At this point, the incumbents should be considered the safer pick, but it is impossible to predict how things will look in a few months.

Based on the predictions outlined above, the Democrats would come out of these Senate elections at a 51-49 advantage, with a net gain of one seat. The range of outcomes in these elections are certainly very wide, and right now, it is too early to make predictions with any confidence. The outcomes for the House elections are even more vague than those for the Senate. If the Democrats are able to remain relatively popular in the national political environment, then they should be favored to hold onto their majority. Only time will tell the composition of the Congress that President Biden will have to work with for the latter half of his first term.HMR



The Wrong Time for a Cruz: How Ted Cruz Abandoned His State During a Time of Crisis

Rowan Mally



In mid-February, a cycle of extreme winter weather forced Texans to bear record-chilling temperatures, treacherous snow and sleet, and pounding winds. While residents of the Northeast are definitely not strangers to this type of weather, Texas’ unfamiliarity with such extreme weather dramatically heightened the danger of the cycle’s effects on Texans. A massive failure of the state power system left millions of Texans without light, heat, and water, even though Texas is the largest energy producer in the United States. Consequently, dozens of Texans are dead: some froze to death in their beds, others carbon monoxide poisoned while seeking warmth in their idling

cars, and some perished in house fires while trying to keep their families warm.⁷⁰ To add insult to injury, literally, electrical companies are now dishing out massively expensive bills to minimize their losses. In times like these, there is only one solution to bringing hope and safety back to the millions of lives affected: leadership. Well, unfortunately for Texas—along with warmth, power, and water—leadership appears to be missing in the Lone Star state as well—again, literally. While his people froze to death with their families, when his people needed his support the most, Texas Senator Ted Cruz took a family vacation to Cancun. Photos of Cruz lounging on his Can-

cun-bound flight went viral over social media, causing public outrage over Cruz’s blatant disregard for his state’s well being. Leaked text messages from Cruz’s wife Heidi described that the Cruzes fled their state because their house was “FREEZING.”⁷¹ While Cruz has the luxury of escaping for a luxury vacation at the Ritz-Carlton in Cancun, did he forget the millions of Texans who do not? Maybe, but there is a simpler explanation to his actions: he simply does not care. Cruz even went so far as to blame his young daughters for the family trip: “With school cancelled for the week, our girls asked to take a trip with friends. Wanting to be a good dad, I flew down with

them last night.”⁷³ Cruz attempted to frame the decision as a parent’s attempt to appease his two daughters, ages 10 and 12, after a “tough week.”⁷⁴ In fact, Cruz cited his need to take care of his children as a justification for his absence: “All of us who are parents have a responsibility to take care of our kids, take care of our families.”⁷⁵ Yes, while Cruz may have an obligation to his family, does that entirely trump his obligation to the people of Texas and their obligation to their children? By taking an oath to represent his people in the U.S. Senate, Cruz assumed the responsibility to take care of the people of Texas—not just his

“Ted Cruz clearly has no remorse or concern for the people he claims to represent.”

family. Plainly, Cruz abandoned his people and abandoned the state of Texas. It would be an incredible understatement to say the people of Texas had a “tough week” as Cruz and his family did. Regardless, Cruz made his stance on the issue clear: his well-being over yours.

Cruz even tried to compare his situation to that of the Texans suffering without food, water, and power. “Like millions of Texans, our family lost heat and power too,” Cruz said.⁷⁶ Well, if that’s true, instead of remaining in his state as a symbol of strength and resilience during a state emergency, he did what the millions of Texans couldn’t do: booked a five star tropical getaway. But not to worry, Cruz said, he would get to the bottom of it—just while he happened to be lounging on a Mexican beach: “My staff and I are in constant communication with state and local leaders to get to the bottom of what happened in Texas.”⁷⁷ I’m pretty

sure Cruz also qualifies as a state leader regardless of whether he works in Washington D.C. Not to mention that the crisis was still very much ongoing during the time of Cruz’s statement. What “happened” in Texas was still most definitely happening.

To make matters worse, Cruz has shown that he has learned absolutely nothing from his mistakes. Instead of acknowledging his wrongdoings, the main lesson Cruz took away from his lack of leadership (let alone presence) was that people should not be “a**holes”, and should treat each other with respect.⁷⁸ In Cruz’s eyes it was the press who had violated his personal boundaries during a time of relaxation in paradise: “Here’s a suggestion,” “just don’t be a**holes. Just, you know, treat each other as human beings, have to some degree some modicum of respect.”⁷⁹ The irony in Cruz’s words is incredibly disconcerting. Cruz has absolutely no place to question the respect of the press since he has clearly allocated no respect whatsoever to his own Texan people. Cruz doesn’t seem to understand that while his personal soap-opera unfolded,



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people’s lives continued— people froze, suffered, and died. Cruz’s one job is to support and provide a voice for his people, especially during times of heightened stress. Yet when his people needed him most, Cruz was nowhere to be found. Senator Cruz, here’s a suggestion for you, give the people of Texas the respect, dignity, and attention they deserve, and, at the very least, have some sensitivity for your people.

Ted Cruz clearly has no remorse or concern for the people he claims to represent. Like many politicians, it appears that Cruz too is only in it for the fame, glory, and money. After this recent slip-up, however, Cruz may not have the taxpaying dollars to pay for his paradise excursions after 2024. Even if Cruz doesn’t show any passion for creating positive change in the lives of Texas, he should, at the very least, show some interest in his job. Well, on the bright side for Cruz, soon, he may have all the time in the world to focus on being a “good father.” He clearly wasn’t able to fit the bill of “good senator.” HMR

The Countless Candidates of the 2021 Mayoral Race

Maya Westra and Allison Markman

As the 2021 mayoral elections has begun, twenty-two candidates have decided to run. Of those candidates, there are six front runners, but none with polls that show more than 28% of the vote. Candidates have only months left in the campaign.

Andrew Yang, the clear front runner thus far in the race, has run on an unorthodox platform. He has proposed a base income for the poorest individuals in the city. The program would give 50,000 New Yorkers a basic income with the goal of ending extreme poverty in the city, as well as accelerate COVID recovery by putting cash into the hands of New Yorkers.⁸¹ If elected, the administration plans to invest one billion dollars into the program, creating the largest basic income program in the country. Though there are some pros to the universal base income (UBI) program it has been proven that establishing a UBI removes the incentive to work.⁸² For this reason, many countries who have proposed UBIs have rejected them. In addition, the proposed program is simply far too expensive. The one billion dollar program would take up 1/88 of the current budget, and would induce an increased budget if put into fruition.

Yang believes that schools must stay open, as they provide socialization, better education than remote learning, and crucial services such as childcare. With teachers having access to vaccines and proper personal protective equipment (PPE), he believes that schools should be able to stay open.⁸³ Yang’s goal is to keep children and their parents equipped with the best technology such as providing internet to households without it, and ensuring every

student has the technology needed. Yang wants to reexamine the admission process to specialized high schools; he believes the admission process should be a holistic one: the combination of SHSAT performance along with other evaluations such as grades, test scores, and essays.⁸⁴

Yang further plans to reduce carbon emissions by fully electrifying the city’s vehicle fleet by 2035, five years earlier than currently scheduled. He will also expand Community Retrofit NYC -- a program geared towards helping building owners -- to ensure low income communities are able to benefit from more efficient buildings.⁸⁵ Lowering NYC’s temperature, as buildings are responsible for 48% of the city’s emissions, is important to Yang as he plans to extend the CoolRoofs program.⁸⁶

Yang’s platform does not include policies regarding civil rights, such as those to reform police and promote racial equality. As the current policing system must be addressed, the lack of anti-discriminatory legislation and racial equality policies can definitely hurt his administration. One concern to have about Yang is his presidential ambitions. New Yorkers need someone to care about their city, not a mayor who is running for the position to add to their political resume.

Eric Adams, a Democrat from Brooklyn, has an advantage as a front runner with fundraising. Despite his democratic title, Adams opposed the Defund the Police Movement.⁸⁷ As a former police officer and an individual who encountered police brutality as a child, Adams claims to understand both sides of the BLM argument. That being said, he does want police reform,

making the force more “modern, proactive, and data driven.”⁸⁸

Adams believes that significant reform is needed within city government. Growing up in a working class household, Adams understands how essential it is for New York to help its people. In order to do so, Adams has a three section plan: efficiency, effectiveness, and equality.⁸⁹ For efficiency, Adams plans to focus on the cause of problems, rather than problems themselves. He plans on closing the budget gap, the inequity in budget between boroughs, and instituting real time governing, which began to be implemented under former President Barack Obama. This is when a government uses citizen led platforms, such as change.org, to help guide their actions.⁹⁰ In terms of efficiency, Adams empathizes with many New Yorkers who are in need of help, but have fallen through the cracks. Using technology to care for every citizen, he will create a digital platform to access city services, and devise a “discovery score” system to track the City’s progress using analytics.⁹¹ Most importantly, Adams plans to focus on social and economic equity by promoting places that “reduce inequality” and revising regulations that discourage growth of small businesses owned by people of color. He will also eliminate fees for starting a new business and institute. He will also create a warning system for violations of the law that do not pose danger rather than sending people straight to jail.⁹²

Adams’s focus on equity, justice and significant reform to New York make him a strong candidate. That being said, his plans for police reform seem implausible because creating remarkable change within

“After an economic crisis, mass unemployment due to the pandemic, and the recent push to end systemic racism, NYC needs a mayor who will not only fight for them nationally, but will focus on the local issues as well.”



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Andrew Yang

the police system required fund redistribution. It shows that Adams wants to focus on building off of the police system as a means of improvement rather than attacking the corrupt and inherently racist system as its source. This directly contradicts Adams’ method of creating a more equal city, and makes it near impossible to improve the police system in its entirety. Adams’ plans seem a bit vague since he states that he will spend more on programs that “reduce inequality” but does not detail what these programs look like. However, if Adams is able to follow through on his plans, he will make great improvements for the city.

Another frontrunner in the race is Scott Stringer, currently serving as New York Comptroller. To help the economy recover from the pandemic, Stringer would provide tax relief to small businesses. He plans to have every billion dollars the city spends create 5,000 jobs in response to the current 8% unemployment rate.⁹³ Stringer believes the city needs a major infrastructural overhaul; he plans to create a major public-works program to fix the crumbling infrastructure of the city from projects such as public transportation, school, streets and hospitals. He also calls for the expansion of the public transportation system creating a five borough 24 hour system.⁹⁴

Stringer wants to help make education more accessible by scaling back academ-



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Eric Adams

ic screens at the middle school level and eliminating the SHSAT test.⁹⁵ He believes that access must be increased to mental health professionals and ensure that every student has access to high speed internet.⁹⁶ Stringer would like to ban any new fossil fuel infrastructure including pipelines and the redevelopment or expansion of plants. He has committed to power the city with renewable energy by 2035 and will fight for federal and state funds to implement the Green New Deal.⁹⁷

Stringer commits to move responsibilities that are typically handled by police to trained professionals to help those struggling with substance abuse, homelessness, and mental health.⁹⁸ He would like to end the deployment of militarized police groups to protests across the city. Stringer plans to give the Civilian Complaint Review Board final say on disciplinary actions and increase transparency in regards to the NYPD budget. He plans to eliminate sentencing for low level offences and grant amnesty to those with open warrants for these crimes, as well as reform the re-entry program and increasing access to supportive housing.⁹⁹

Stringer has a strong progressive agenda that addresses many of the key issues facing our city. As a politician, he understands how to help the city and take action while working within a bureaucracy. As



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Scott Stringer

city comptroller though, he has a key role in passing budgets that gave the police four billion dollars which could foreshadow what is to come if he were to be elected to this new role. Stringer proposes major infrastructure that is a necessary action that needs to be taken as we saw the effects of outdated infrastructure in Texas this winter. His education plan discusses lifting academic screenings to integrate schools, but Stringer never mentions how he plans to improve schools that do not provide the same resources as better funded schools. Integration is not going to be the sole way to improve public schools, and instilling a plan that creates equal opportunities for all students would have been more rational.

The remaining candidates are trailing behind quite significantly, but it is still important to address each one. Ray McGuire, the former head of global corporate and investment banking at Citigroup. Because of his Wall Street history, McGuire is projected to be popular mainly among voters who work in finance. In terms of policy, McGuire wants to focus on safety, economic recovery, helping children, and equity.¹⁰⁰ Some of his most remarkable ideas include: rebuilding the police force; decriminalizing poverty and public health issues; using his financial background in his plan to rebuild the economy; and bettering education through a “cradle to career model” which

will give parents resources to help their children, utilize nonprofits and private partners to fund schools, and most importantly focus on helping kids succeed after high school thorough financial literacy and resume writing requirements. Not only does McGuire have strong ideas but they are meticulously outlined to a point where they seem highly plausible.¹⁰¹ The biggest drawback with McGuire is that he is not a politician, other than that he would make a great mayor, if he had more votes.

Another trailing Candidate is Maya Wiley, a lawyer, former Counsel to Bill de Blasio, and member of the NAACP and ACLU.¹⁰² Her main goal for New York is to create a much more equitable society to a point where each New Yorker can be dignified and she plans to do this through the lens of Fairness, Equity and Justice.¹⁰³ Specifically, she wants to focus on climate change as it is a crisis which is impairing our lives, an improved justice system, schooling that has a much more open curriculum, expanding affordable housing stock by buying abandoned buildings, investing in public health care facilities, and asking wealthy New Yorkers to contribute what they can to help the economy.¹⁰⁴ While the majority of Wiley’s plans are exemplary, her plan to open

up curriculums may make it more difficult for students who thrive in a structured environment and cause those who do not try to fall behind. Additionally, her unconventional approach to depend on the wealthy contributing to the budget and economy of New York seems a bit optimistic.

Dianne Morales, the CEO of Phipps Neighborhoods and single mother of two, is open about her disdain for the wealthy and care for the underprivileged.¹⁰⁵ She plans to take action to help meet the needs of New Yorkers through emphasizing dignity, prioritizing a “care economy” and uniting the city.¹⁰⁶ Specifically, she plans to help people live dignified lives through creating more skilled jobs in spheres with high demand, better healthcare, integrating schools, defunding the police, and strengthening workers rights. In terms of “care” Morales will invest in public infrastructure, prioritize the environment, aid small businesses, and have “people centered tech.”¹⁰⁷ Lastly, she plans to help create a more equitable society through a wealth tax, free CUNY’s, public banking, and land accountability. While many of Morales’ ideas seem beneficial at first glance, namely the ones relating to dignity, they lack specifics which raises concern about the feasibility and potency

of her plans. On her website she mentions “people centered tech” as well as other undefined ideas and has no information about how she will implement vague ideas such as “wealth tax” and “democratized health care.” The lack of clarification on what she actually wants to do makes it seem as if she is not prepared to lead New York City.

There are many qualified and impressive New Yorkers running to become the next mayor of the city. After an economic crisis, mass unemployment due to the pandemic, and the recent push to end systemic racism, NYC needs a mayor who will not only fight for them nationally, but will focus on the local issues as well. New Yorkers need a mayor who will find a way to provide high quality education in public schools, while also maintaining the city’s cleanliness and infrastructure. The city’s needs are demanding, and each candidate has platforms to address them. In June, we will discover who the people believe have the best solution to address these consequential issues and revive the city.**HMR**



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Carpenter and Digital Privacy Rights

Gavin Song

In the summer of 2013, Edward Snowden became something of a national hero, at least to some people. Against his own interest, he leaked classified NSA information that revealed the unbelievable breadth and depth of the American surveillance state. Among other things, the documents described two secret programs authorized by Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA): PRISM — otherwise known as downstream collection — and upstream collection.¹¹² Under the PRISM program, the NSA sends requests for data to American technology companies.¹¹³ Upstream collection allows the NSA to obtain and monitor in-transit data across American internet infrastructure.¹¹⁴ Both programs allow other agencies to search their data, including the content of emails and other communications.¹¹⁵ In particular, even though PRISM is meant to surveil foreign targets, it inevitably collects communication data from U.S. persons (citizens and permanent legal residents). The data can then be queried (searched) for specific information.¹¹⁶ In 2019, 16,692 search terms identifying a known U.S. person were used to query that data for metadata (sender, recipient, timestamps, and communication length, etc.).¹¹⁷ In the same year, 9,126 similar search terms were used to query collected data for unminimized contents of communications, i.e., the actual text or recordings (and each term could be queried multiple times but only be counted once).¹¹⁸ The numbers provoke a critical question for a citizen of the twenty-first century: is mass U.S. surveillance of digital communications constitutional?

In evaluating the legality of mass surveillance, the first piece to understand is the Fourth Amendment: “The right of the people to be secure [...] against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated.”¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, the body of Fourth Amendment caselaw (unwritten law based

on legal precedent) is widely considered to be a collection of inconsistent rules without a consistent theoretical basis.¹²⁰ Here are just a few examples: police need a warrant when searching a home, but none for a car.¹²¹ If the police record the numbers called from a phone, the Fourth Amendment isn’t even applicable, but if they tap the contents of the call, a warrant is required.¹²² Seemingly arbitrary rules like these form the basis of Fourth Amendment caselaw, a particularly frustrating fact for scholars and judges, who are used to having consistent theories that govern decisions. The problem with Fourth Amendment cases is the variability and specificity of the case facts, so when any of these cases reach the Supreme Court, a new rule has to be created to address another specific scenario.¹²³

And the rise of technology complicates everything even more. The problem is that Fourth Amendment interpretation has historically been based on places and things.¹²⁴ The best example of this approach is in *Katz v. United States* (1967), a case deciding that federal agents could not constitutionally eavesdrop on a private conversation in a telephone booth.¹²⁵ *Katz* established what is referred to as “reasonable expectation of privacy,” which is the idea that privacy rights are protected under these conditions: society is prepared to recognize that privacy as reasonable, and an individual makes an effort to hide their activity from observation.¹²⁶ The Supreme Court held that the Fourth Amendment protects people, not things, so its reach couldn’t be influenced

by intrusion of physical space.¹²⁷ But Justice John Harlan II’s concurring opinion disregards that interpretation; it explains that the critical reason for the decision is that a phone booth is a place of expected privacy.¹²⁸ Despite it not being the official opinion of the court, Harlan’s interpretation has generally been how the Fourth Amendment was applied post-*Katz*.¹²⁹ Since digital communication doesn’t occupy a place, Harlan’s interpretation vastly expands the potential for government surveillance. A recent development in Fourth Amendment scholarship suggests a better way to approach the dozens of rules, which will later help us to understand the Amendment as it relates to surveillance.

Under this view of Fourth Amendment caselaw, the patchwork of arbitrary rules are explained by identifying a dynamic called “equilibrium-adjustment” between the judiciary and changes in technology or society.¹³⁰ Specifically, when new technology and practices either significantly increase or decrease police power, courts attempt to restore the “equilibrium” of power by strengthening or weakening Fourth Amendment protections.¹³¹ To be clear, courts generally intuitively made these restorative adjustments and rarely consciously tried to restore a balance in the law.¹³² Critically, courts can use the theory of restoring equilibrium as a guiding principle for Fourth Amendment interpretation.

This leads us to the application of this principle to mass surveillance. The Supreme Court case examined here is *Carpenter v. United States* (2018), which ruled that searching cell-site records (locations recorded by cell towers) of suspected robbers was unconstitutional.¹³³ The prior decision on the Sixth Court of Appeals had decided that Timothy Carpenter’s Fourth Amendment rights weren’t violated because the cell-site records were stored on company records, and therefore, companies had Fourth Amendment rights, not individuals.¹³⁴ Therefore, the companies had Fourth Amendment rights, not the users.¹³⁵ But the Supreme Court disagreed. Chief Justice John Roberts’ majority opinion start-



ed with a critical observation: the rise of technology has made it substantially easier for the government to search its citizens.¹³⁶ Since cellphones are widely used and follow their owners virtually everywhere, location records can be accessed at practically no expense to investigators. Government access to cell-site records “contravenes [the] expectation” that one is secure in their privacy of location because prior to the rise of technology, tracking suspects over time was too costly.¹³⁷ This observation marked a shift from place/thing-based interpretation of the Fourth Amendment — Harlan’s interpretation — to what the police can actually do. Although the Court’s opinion does not give a clear reason for the shift, I would argue that the second interpretation (the Fourth Amendment should protect individuals) was always the motivation for the first (the Fourth Amendment should protect places and things). Before the rise of digital communications, people and their information and correspondences could be kept private in their homes, offices, etc., which effectively limited the police’s ability to search. In other words, in a pre-digital-technology world, limiting the scope of privacy rights to places and things still gave citizens control over their information. But the dramatic increase in governmental surveillance powers called for a similarly dra-

matic response from the Court.

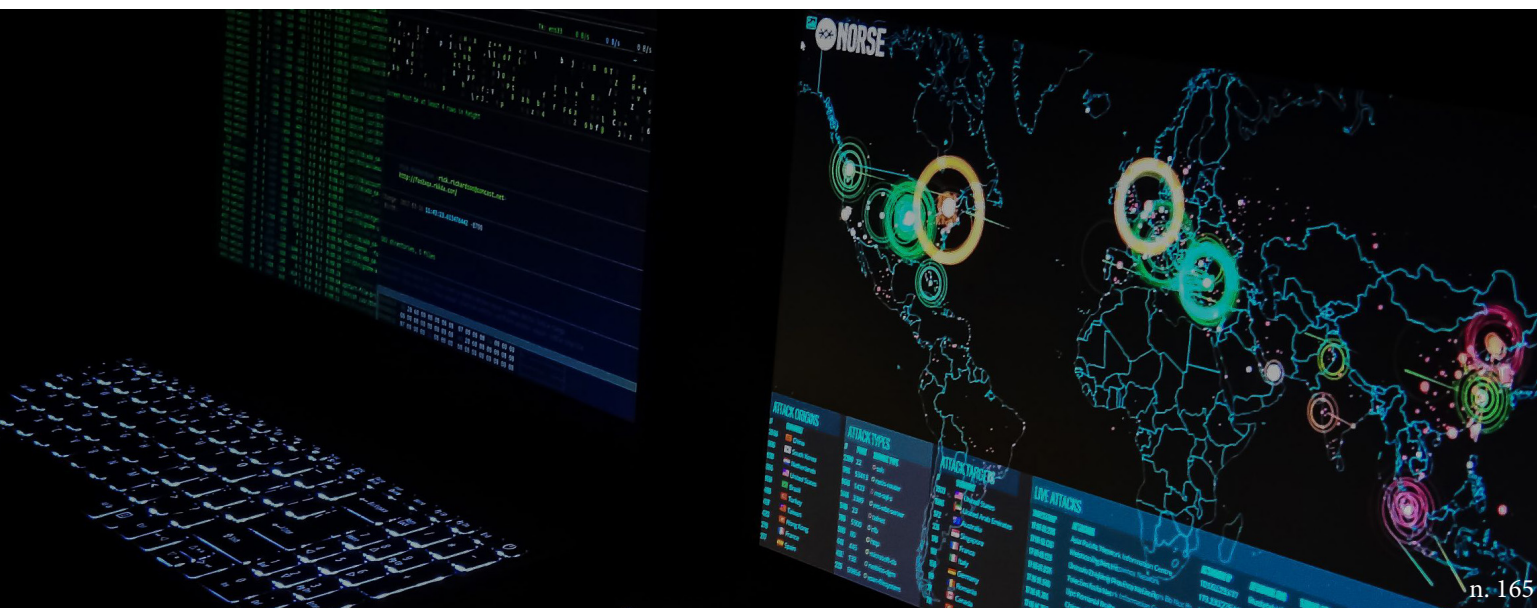
The decision significantly increases the credibility of the equilibrium-adjustment theory because the Court specifically referenced a significant increase in government power. Since this is now the prevailing interpretation of the Fourth Amendment, equilibrium-adjustment can be applied to judge the constitutionality of other matters of digital privacy — most importantly for our purposes, digital communication.

So what about Internet messages (texts, emails, etc.)? The pre-*Carpenter* Fourth Amendment rule is that contents are protected, but metadata is not.¹³⁸ Under *Carpenter*, metadata should be protected as well. Although there was some capacity for metadata collection before, the government’s ability to do so has undoubtedly expanded because of significant advancements in technology.¹³⁹ Internet facilities operate on a scale far larger than postal services (an example of pre-digital communication from which “metadata” could be collected). Internet messaging makes up such a critical portion of communication that even its metadata reveals the privacies of life in a way that physical mail never could.¹⁴⁰ And what about voice calls? Metadata for voice calls shouldn’t be protected under *Carpenter*. Recall that equilibrium-adjustment isn’t based on logic, but instead on

experience.¹⁴¹ The government’s ability to obtain metadata from voice calls hasn’t significantly increased since the last decision, *Smith v. Maryland*, so equilibrium-adjustment shouldn’t apply.¹⁴² And voice calls aren’t made with nearly the same frequency as messages (or significantly more frequency than themselves since *Smith*), so their metadata doesn’t reveal privacies of life in the same way as messages do.¹⁴³

Carpenter was a huge step in the right direction for the Court, but the process of figuring out the intricacies is only just under way. Under pre-*Carpenter* Fourth Amendment interpretation, digital privacy rights would be minimally protected because of the focus on places and things. As long as equilibrium-adjustment continues to be the guiding principle of Fourth Amendment rights adjudication, all cases going forward will aim to maintain the same level of surveillance power from the government. One last parting thought: the Fourth Amendment protects against searches, but a search is only triggered by downstream analysis (analysis of data queried from databases) when the source of the data is protected.¹⁴⁴ For example, the government might combine records from multiple unprotected sources and analyze them together. For an interpretive problem with such an unclear answer, all we can do is hope. **HMR**

“The dramatic increase in governmental surveillance powers called for a similarly dramatic response from the Court.”



What the Russian SolarWinds Hack Means for American Cybersecurity

Jacob Silverstein

On December 13, 2020, Reuters first reported that unknown hackers had been monitoring email traffic within several government agencies, including the U.S. Treasury and Commerce Departments. Initial reports found that hackers inserted malware into a legitimate software update from IT company SolarWinds—a trick often called a “supply chain attack.”¹⁴⁶ The company’s Security and Exchange Commission reported that hackers had targeted new software purchases and security updates that were available between March and June 2020.¹⁴⁷ During that time, more than 425 of the Fortune 500 companies and all five branches of the U.S. military were on SolarWinds’ customer list. However, despite the long list of potential targets, evidence indicates that hackers targeted only some companies and branches of government. Charles Carmakal, the Senior Vice President of FireEye, the private cybersecurity firm that initially alerted the federal government to the hack, thinks that the hack specifically targeted “all the high-value targets.”¹⁴⁸ Multiple intelligence

agencies reported to Congress that Russia’s SVR carried out the attack. The SVR is a Russian intelligence agency and generally a successor to the KGB.¹⁴⁹ A joint report from several government agencies, including the FBI and NSA, released within the first days of 2021, confirms that the attack is likely Russian in origin.¹⁵⁰ Officials claim that the attack was traditional espionage, similar to cyberattacks that the United States consistently runs on other nations’ networks.¹⁵¹ However, the depth to which Russian hackers penetrated is a cause of concern. The initial reports that the hackers had breached the government and massive corporations fell short: the New York Times reports that the hack also reached the nation’s premier nuclear facility at Los Alamos, several utility companies that control parts of the power grid, and the Cybersecurity and Intelligence Security Agency (CISA), which oversees election security.¹⁵² To mitigate the effects of Russian warfare and such cyberattacks, the United States must move past tough rhetoric and adopt a hawkish, aggressive approach to cyberwar-

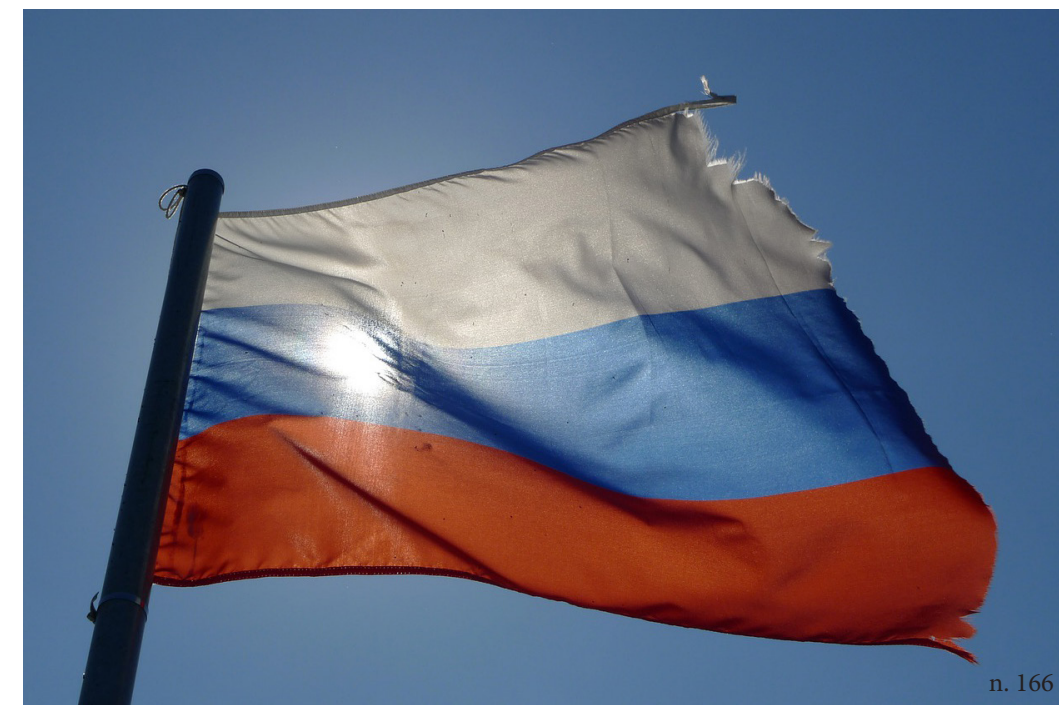
fare against Russia.

The United States did not do everything it could to stop the SolarWinds attack. In fact, the United States is not doing enough to stop foreign cyberattacks, especially from Russia. It is no secret that the Russians were heavily involved in the 2016 election. In the aftermath, reports questioned whether then-President Obama took sufficient cybersecurity measures, both before and during the election. A 2018 report from Dutch publication *de Volkskrant* details the extent of Obama’s knowledge of Russian activity. In 2014, a Dutch intelligence unit pulled off a stunning feat of spycraft. It hacked into the GRU, Russia’s primary foreign intelligence agency.¹⁵³ The Dutch quickly alerted the NSA, and the two countries formed a close intelligence partnership.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, American intelligence and President Obama knew about all of Russia’s nefarious endeavors against American democracy in 2016, like when hackers stole DNC emails and posted them online through WikiLeaks. However, Obama’s inaction led to an election that was, if not

directly influenced by the Russians, at least perceived to be by the public. Russia has, in many ways, achieved its goal of undermining American democracy. Their 2016 election interference made many Americans question whether the election was free or fair, causing a general distrust of the election process.¹⁵⁵

Last year, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) published its long-awaited report on Obama’s response to Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Perhaps the most important takeaway was the report’s recommendation that the “public should be informed as soon as possible” if foreign interference in an election is detected.¹⁵⁶ NBC reports that a primary reason that Obama didn’t respond more aggressively to Dutch intelligence was because he didn’t want to appear to be interfering in the election. The SSCI proposal would resolve, or at least mitigate, the issue of public distrust of the federal government’s anti-interference measures. NBC also reports that Obama didn’t respond in order to avoid diplomatic confrontation with Russia.¹⁵⁷ Although the Obama administration correctly recognized that it is necessary to have government transparency and confirm that the American people do not think that the government is interfering in elections, it was too worried about diplomacy towards Russia. Instead of passively awaiting Russia’s next attack, America should take a hawkish approach to diplomacy. The Obama administration showed us that being rhetorically tough on Russia but not taking the necessary steps to fight against it is not a viable option. In 2014, there were multiple instances in which Obama responded inadequately to Russian threats. Obama was passive in responding to a 2014 State Department hack, in which state-sponsored Russian hackers breached government email servers and even accessed sensitive White House information. Furthermore, when the United States tried to build an effort to combat increasing Russian propaganda, Obama shut it down before it got off the ground. Obama’s inaction “only encouraged the honey badger in the Kremlin to grow more adventurous and aggressive.”¹⁵⁸ Russia’s mounting confidence culminated in the aforementioned 2016 election interference.

If one saw Donald Trump speak about, or tweet about, Russia, one would assume he was weak in his Russian foreign policy. However, his administration was quite



“Biden must prove he is willing to use aggressive cyberattacks and cyberwarfare tactics to retaliate against Russian hacks.”

successful in addressing Russian cyberattacks. Trump appointed the highly respected General Paul Nakasone as NSA director. Under Nakasone, the NSA has shifted its cybersecurity strategy to a proactive approach of “persistent engagement” and “defending forward” instead of merely responding to Russian activity. WIRED estimates that Nakasone “launched more cyberattacks against U.S. adversaries than Fort Meade had initiated in the rest of its history” in his two-year tenure. WIRED also reports that Trump asked the NSA and other American cybersecurity agencies to multiply the country’s cyber operations.¹⁵⁹ Notably, on the day of the 2018 midterms, the NSA launched a successful attack against Russia. The hack targeted the Internet Research Agency, a hub of Russian disinformation funded by Putin’s allies. Sergio Caltagirone, a former technical lead at the NSA, called the hack a “masterful move.”¹⁶⁰ Caltagirone argues that the breach sent a message that the United States would defend itself from and retaliate against Russian cyberattacks.¹⁶¹ The NSA’s success in neutralizing a key Russian disinformation platform during the midterms could explain why Russia did not try to influence

the 2020 election on the same scale as 2016.

The SolarWinds hack is only the tip of the iceberg. Russia will continue to attack the American government, American companies, and American infrastructure. President Biden must send a message that the United States will retaliate against Russian cyberattacks, not just with rhetoric, but with action. In Biden’s first foreign policy address as president, he said that the U.S. would stop “rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions” and pledged to make the country more resilient in facing attacks.¹⁶² “We will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia and defend our vital interests and our people,” Biden claimed.¹⁶³ Biden has also made the SolarWinds hack, which has affected multiple government agencies, a top priority of his administration.¹⁶⁴ However, if we have learned anything from the past couple of years, we have learned that empty words and threats do not scare Russia. To deter Russia from attacking America, from executing more attacks similar to the SolarWinds hack, Biden must prove he is willing to use aggressive cyberattacks and cyberwarfare tactics to retaliate against Russian hacks. **HMR**



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The Myanmar Crisis through the Lens of Post-Trump Politics

Myra Malik

On February 1, 2021, the Burmese military overthrew their democratic leader in a coup d'état, giving way to military rule. The now-ousted state councilor, Aung San Suu Kyi, faces charges in a secret court while the military seizes control over the country's infrastructure, media, internet access, and airports. Pro-democracy protests have left 21 dead and many more injured.¹⁶⁷ Currently, the de facto leader of Myanmar is General Min Aung Hlaing, who has faced massive opposition from Burmese civilians since the coup.

In the months before the coup, tensions were already mounting against Aung San Suu Kyi. Her party, the National League for Democracy, swept the elections last year, with 83% of the popular vote.¹⁶⁸ However, the military rejected the results of the election, citing irregularities on voter lists. Even after being struck down at every court-level in Myanmar, the military was adamantly against the fair election. Finally tensions exploded this February when the military declared a state of national emergency to oust the government and assume dictatorial control.

The circumstances around the coup and its motivations are still unclear, given the pre-existing military power in Myanmar. Furthermore, Aung San Suu Kyi was pro-military, defending the institution on numerous notable occasions. Most memorably, she defended armed forces after they displaced, raped, abused, and killed

Rohingya Muslims in 2017. After the UN accused the Burmese military of attempted genocide, Aung San Suu Kyi denied the claims in support of the military. Kim Jolliffe, a researcher on Myanmar military relations, suspects the coup “might be reflecting [military] dynamics and might be somewhat of a coup internally and [Min Aung Hlaing’s] way of maintaining power within the military,” rather than the military’s dissatisfaction with the government.¹⁶⁹

Globally, the most controversial aspect of the coup has been the military’s crackdown on pro-democracy protests. In late February, the military killed 18 people, wounded over 30, and arrested 1,000 who were part of a peaceful protest against the coup.¹⁷⁰ Subsequently, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on the current Burmese military government in defense of peaceful Burmese protesters. However, simply imposing sanctions will not be meaningful enough to end the military dictatorship.

In 2017, the Burmese military forcibly drove more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims out of Myanmar to Bangladesh.¹⁷¹ They used brutal tactics to force the Rohingya out, such as burning villages, separating families, and raping women and children. The US’s response to this crisis was — as it always is — to impose sanctions. However, while increases in exiles slowed, they did not stop. As of 2019, over 900,000 Rohingya resided in refugee camps in Bangladesh.¹⁷² While the US placed sanctions on certain

military officials and divisions in 2018, they avoided the top levels of the military, such as General Min Aung Hlaing.¹⁷³ The lack of impactful retaliation from the US allowed the Rohingya persecution to continue and therefore the military to grow stronger. Due to inter- and intra- national ignorance toward the exceedingly violent Myanmar military, the coup was bound to occur.

In recent years, governmental issues in the US have evoked reactionary and violent responses, the most prominent example being the election riot earlier this year, on January 6th. In this riot, a group supporting a leader who lost a democratic election violently attempted to keep said leader in power. The unpopularity of the group staging the “coup” on the 6th corresponds to the largely disliked military in the Myanmar coup. Additionally, the violence toward minorities is a theme clear in both aggressors. The events share other similarities too, with a few consequential differences.

The Myanmar coup and January 6th riots act as foils to each other: both events rejected the results of a legitimate election to muster support for a violent opposition; both events were unpopular with the majority of their respective nations; both events have been decried on a global scale. While overarching themes remain the same, there are some important differences. While the Burmese military was the offending group in their coup, ordinary American civilians were the offenders on the 6th. While the Burmese military successfully removed a

sitting leader, the Capitol rioters desperately attempted — and failed — to protect their own. However, striking similarities in both the events can be misleading — although the American riots were quelled, the coup cannot be “solved” in a similar fashion. While the situations hold some important parallels, the ultimate difference between them is the makeup of the perpetrating groups.

The Myanmar coup was planned and staged by a trained, organized government body with access to military-grade vehicles and weapons. The American riot was planned largely on social media and consisted of a group of civilians who did not have en-masse training and had only their own possessions—and even that was limited by TSA regulation.¹⁷⁴ The Myanmar military was set up for success, and they achieved it. The main question now is how the military will use their power.

One final key difference between the American and Burmese events is their intentions. While the coup’s ultimate goal remains unclear, the ultimate goal of the riot was to keep former President Donald Trump in power. The lack of a final goal in sight may ultimately cause the coup’s downfall. With no apparent end to the coup, instability and uncertainty will continue to build in the country, resulting in the US and China backing away from trade, aid, and diplomacy. Because China has major economic ties to Myanmar — as well as a shared border — instability is not ideal

for China’s goals for Myanmar.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the US has already placed sanctions on Myanmar, and many other Western leaders have denounced the actions of the military.¹⁷⁶

Disregulation of the Myanmar military in the past has facilitated the displacement of close to a million Rohingya Muslims. This same disregard and lack of any domestic or international checks allowed the military to grow unchecked in power despite their many atrocities against minority groups. Moreover, the international blind eye taken toward aggressive militarism empowered the army to act with free rein. Because of this negligence, Burmese protesters and tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims are forced to submit to a dictatorial regime.

Domestically, Aung San Suu Kyi effectively gave a green light to the military in support of their violence towards minority groups, but the power growth she encouraged eventually led to her own removal. While the attempted American “coup” in January was suppressed domestically, the Burmese military received approval domestically and little meaningful opposition internationally. Ultimately, the Myanmar coup teaches us that domestic vigilance and international action are the only differences between Myanmar’s successful coup and the US’s failed one. Myanmar serves as a reminder to stop dangerous, violent ideologies before they reach the stage of total upheaval of democracy. **HMR**

North Korea: *Isolated from the* **#MeToo Movement**

Alexa Turteltaub and Samantha Strasser

North Korea is not known for the promotion of women’s rights. North Korea has been ruled over since 1948 by the Kim family. It is classified as one of the poorest countries in the world regardless of the wealth of the Kim family and party leaders. After taking power, Kim Jong-un aimed to boost the country’s economy by erasing restrictions surrounding public markets. He created a “prey-and-predator relationship” between female traders and male government officials.¹⁷⁹

Opening markets allowed restrictions and more open trade. Women, in particular, were able to gain power in the economy.¹⁸⁰ Many male officials, such as police officers or train inspectors would take sexual advantage of these women, most of whom did not have the option to object, as they would lose their chances at making money for their families. These officials threatened many women with arrest or confiscation of goods: just one example of the corruption and male chauvinism in North Korea, which caused many men in power to believe they were doing nothing wrong.¹⁸¹ These extreme conditions are a major contributing factor towards the disproportionate percentage of female defectors.¹⁸² North Korean defectors have abandoned their homes in favor of residing in South Korea, which to them seemed like a liberty-bearing utopia in comparison to their mother country. 80 percent of North Korean migrants to South Korea faced sexual abuse.¹⁸³ Upon their exit many

women have taken the opportunity to join the #MeToo movement, revealing secrets hidden behind the closed-off walls of North Korea.

The #MeToo movement began in 2006 with founder Tarana Burke.¹⁸⁴ In 2017, the hashtag went viral and inspired millions of survivors globally to speak out about their past traumas. In 2018, the movement became central in countries overseas including India and South Korea.¹⁸⁵ Survivors from

and a major reason for women to join the army.²⁷¹⁸⁶ Joining the army gives these women a chance to gain entry to the party, therefore gaining some sense of security which is rare to be found in their home country. However, their strong desire to join the party, similar to women’s strong need to continue trading their goods in markets, has been exploited by many male officials who engage in sexual harassment and abuse. Men would use their power as a method of exploitation, refusal was not an option. Threatening to “bad-mouth” the women, therefore removing their chances of gaining access to the security of the Workers Party became a typical ploy on the part of the officials.¹⁸⁷

Malreatment and harassment continue to go unaddressed and undefined in North Korea. The possibility of change did not even occur to women while in North Korea; it was only when women took the opportunity to defect from North Korea that they were able to speak out about the horrors they experienced.¹⁸⁸

The sealed walls of North Korea have inhibited women’s abilities to express their emotions and experiences, forcing them into a life of submission in the hopes of making money necessary for their families’ families’ success. North Korea is known around the world as a place of limited means and limited

external communication, yet for women, restrictions yield even further. News coverage is controlled by the government in North Korea, so it has become impossible to report on these cases, and even more so impossible to bring movements like #MeToo into the country’s social environment. The released information about these occurrences hasn’t been publicly acknowledged by government officials in major countries, including the United States, and that reflects the world’s ability to easily turn a blind eye to concerning situations. In open discussions between Kim and Trump, Trump has “directly avoided raising such issues with Kim, eager to achieve [his] own key objectives.”¹⁸⁹ Trump blatantly disregarded the facts that North Korean women are suffering severe abuse, caring solely about personal achievements and power -- once again reflecting the disgusting nature of men in power casually disregarding women’s rights. Information about dangerous sexual conditions for women in North Korea has become more popular in the news since 2018, but we have yet to see any kind of political public cognizance. However, the issue does not stop once the border is crossed as renowned defectors, such as Jang Jin-sung, continue to take advantage of women in South Korea as well.¹⁹⁰ The isolation of North Korea cultivated an environment where sexual assault and exploitation of women was normalized. If we do not recognize the issues and misogynist culture that has deep roots in North Korea, these values will only carry on.

Using Jang Jin-sung as a case study exposes the stunted development of the #MeToo movement in many countries, and specifically North Korea. Defectors from North Korea have escaped a country veiled in secrecy and isolation only to show the reality of North Korea and its human rights violations. In this way, when a defector is accused of actions that mirror the kind of human rights violations they tried to escape, there is a paradoxical sort of irony. Jang Jin-sung is the self-proclaimed Poet Laureate of North Korea and the successful author of Dear Leader, a “gripping story of how a member of the inner circle of this enigmatic country became its most courageous, outspoken critic.”¹⁹¹ Jang is internationally recognized and acclaimed, has appeared on CNN and the cover of a British magazine and has lectured in European universities.¹⁹² Jang stood as the example of a brave, moral, and highly intelligent man who escaped



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from the most dangerous of situations. As of February 17th, 2021, he was accused of rape by two women. One was a North Korean defector and the other woman has not filed an official complaint with police, but has come forward using media outlets such as the New York Times. Both women claim that after Jang Jin-sung defected to South Korea, he used his power, wealth, and celebrity status to take advantage of women and sexually exploit them using force and extortion. There are some parallels to be drawn here, and observations that are interesting to consider when examining the allegations about Jang Jin-sung.

Jang Jin-sung was a highly ranked official and lived comfortably in the elite class in North Korea.¹⁹³ He was responsible for the propaganda that the Kim family used to support their totalitarian rule. Now he is vehemently denying all allegations against him and counter suing both women for defamation.¹⁹⁴ Propaganda is a heavily wielded tool (and perhaps weapon) used by the Kim family to push their own narrative, and it is clear that Jang Jin-sung is highly skilled at communicating a truth that he wants others to believe. If the allegations are true, it is not difficult to believe that Jang Jin-sung was capable of presenting himself as something he is not, and of seeming like a moral figure tasked with unmasking the secrets of the North Korean government. In

reality, it may be time to unmask Jang Jin-sung’s own narrative and what secrets and crimes he has held and committed.

The accusations against Jang Jin-sung serve as a lens through which to examine the universal culture of uncertainty and silencing women receive when they speak out against accomplished or revered men. Recognition for women who have been violated has begun to take hold during the #MeToo movement, specifically in the United States. As we marvel at the rapid progress and modernity of the #MeToo movement, it is important to consider its impact, or lack thereof, in countries that may lag behind in social modernization. North Korea is an extreme example of isolation making it especially hard for movements such as the #MeToo movement to proliferate within, and make it a safer and more equitable place for women. The lack of information from and communication with North Korea means that the limited knowledge we can acquire is very valuable. It is important to understand that women’s rights may be stagnant in countries such as North Korea; if we cannot do anything to fix the systemic gender discrimination and divide, the best we can do is learn, educate, and spread information. **HMR**

THE POSSIBLE RESURRECTION OF THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Rachel Baez



The 2015 Iran Talks in Vienna. From left to right: Mohammad Javad Zarif (Iran), Philip Hammond (UK), John Kerry (USA).

The Iran Nuclear Deal was initiated in the summer of 2015 by Barack Obama during his last term as President, in response to the growing concern of a potentially nuclear Iranian attack on Israel and the United States. The deal between Iran and the United Nations Security Council includes the United States, China, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France as signatories. The Iran Nuclear Deal aims to prevent Iran from creating nuclear weapons and blocks Iran

from acquiring uranium and centrifuges, needed to create these nuclear weapons.¹⁹⁷ The deal requires Iran to give up 97% of its enriched uranium, going from a supply of 10,000kg to 300kg.¹⁹⁸ With a uranium enrichment of only 3.67%, as opposed to the 90% enrichment required, it will be virtually impossible for Iran to build a nuclear weapon.¹⁹⁹ Plus, the deal allows the United States to constantly inspect Iran in order to monitor whether or not they are in the process of creating nuclear weapons.²⁰⁰ How-

ever, even with these precautions in place, Iran continued working toward a nuclear weapon under the guise of nuclear energy.²⁰¹ Iran was able to do this because they had more than enough time to hide it, as they were given a 24-hour notice before the inspection. In exchange for ostensibly limiting their access to nuclear weapons, Iran receives sanction relief, with the US lifting crippling economic sanctions on Iranian international banking and finance.²⁰² The relief from these sanctions didn't only ben-

efit Iran as a country, but also the millions of people that had been suffering. Though the Iran Nuclear Deal didn't negatively affect the United States, the deal created backlash, specifically from the Republican Party, including former President Donald Trump. In one of the largest foreign policy decisions of his presidency, the United States withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal. Trump's decision was highly controversial and received condemnation from American allies France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, who opposed this ruling.²⁰³ He believed that the Iran Nuclear Deal didn't adequately address Iran's poor regional behavior or its missile program. "It is clear to me that we cannot prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb under the decaying and rotten structure of the current agreement," Trump said in May 2018. "The Iran deal is defective at its core. If we do nothing we know exactly what will happen."²⁰⁴ But by abandoning the deal, Trump in fact raised the probability of a war in the Middle East, which would ultimately harm the United States. Abandoning the Iran Deal has also ended any hopes of diplomacy with Iran; Donald Trump tried to enter negotiations to tamp down Iran's regional terrorism, but Iran continuously rebuked these efforts.²⁰⁵ Iran's leaders have made it very clear that for them to even consider negotiations, the United States must rejoin the Iran Nuclear Deal, as, under their logic, the US' exiting the deal is tantamount to a declaration of "economic war."²⁰⁶ President Joe Biden wants to rejoin the Iran Nuclear Deal in order to prevent a war in the Middle East, but he has a narrow window of opportunity. Within three months he must revise the original deal, due to the fact that Iran has made a deal with the International Atomic Energy Agency, allowing them to monitor Iran's nuclear activity.²⁰⁷ Since the International Atomic Energy Agency is able to monitor Iran's activity, Iran is unable to create any nuclear weapons, preventing Iran from taking action towards the United States or its allies. The International Atomic Energy Agency is giving Biden the time he needs to organize the deal before any rash actions are taken. The International Atomic Energy Agency has confidentially stated that Iran had begun extracting uranium metal, an essential ingredient for nuclear weap-



ons production.²⁰⁸ This time period gives Biden the chance to revise the conditions of the Iran Nuclear Deal with the European signatories.²⁰⁹ The United States has offered to have a meeting with Iran and the United Nations Security Council in order to discuss the new conditions, but Iran has not yet agreed to this.²¹⁰ Due to the lack of trust, Iran has confirmed that they are creating enriched uranium, a confirmation that adds a sense of urgency, as it shows that Iran could possibly attack Israel.²¹¹ The new information adds more pressure to Joe Biden's decision of whether or not the United States will rejoin the Iran Nuclear Deal. If the United States were to rejoin the original deal then, sanctions on Iran would be removed. By doing so the United States won't have leverage over Iran, preventing Joe Biden from proposing a more beneficial agreement.²¹² The Biden administration has talked about revising the Iran Nuclear Deal, but due to the pressure that has been added to the process, Joe Biden's administration is now debating whether to rejoin the original or to revise it.²¹³ A new one could include

limits on Iran's missile program, add provisions that are longer-lasting, and/or give more limited sanctions relief to Iran.²¹⁴ The recent attack by the United States against Iranian militias on Syrian soil on February 25, 2021 may affect Iran's decision on whether or not they will agree to negotiate.²¹⁵ The United States attacked the border of Iran and Syria, an important geographical locale as weapons, personnel, and goods cross between the two countries.²¹⁶ The United States might have done this in order to display to Iran that Joe Biden's administration is capable of taking these measures but doesn't want this to escalate.²¹⁷ Despite the fact that this was Joe Biden's intention, Iran may not agree to have a pact with the United States, since Syria is one of Iran's allies. Iran may attack one of the United States' allies as a form of revenge, letting the United States know that the deal is a necessity.HMR

How the Media is Affecting Confidence in FDA-Approved COVID Vaccines

SIMON SHACKNER



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Doctors found no evidence in the New York Post article that the death was related to the vaccine, and the man in the Fox News article was not supposed to be taking the vaccine, as mentioned.²²⁴ Those who are only reading the titles of these articles will not get this information. In fact, the article titles might convince them that the accidents were the fault of the vaccination effort. All they will see is that a man collapsed after receiving the vaccine, a headline that could challenge one's confidence in receiving the vaccine and encourage the creation of conspiracies. On social media platforms such as Facebook, conspiracist anti-vaccination "groups" have become commonplace. This theorizing, which is propelled by many of the articles released by the media, undoubtedly hampers the nation's vaccination rollout.²²⁵

While the New York Post and Fox News articles surely are upsetting for those in support of the nationwide vaccination effort, they are somewhat expected. Even before the creation of the COVID vaccine, right-wing groups have traditionally been skeptical of vaccines. Polls taken this February show that 91 percent of Democrats are willing to get the vaccine, as opposed to only 51 percent of Republicans.²²⁶ Nevertheless, right-leaning media outlets are not the only ones publicly theorizing about potential adverse effects of the vaccine. The New York Times, a media outlet that has consistently been critical of the anti-vaccination movement, released an article titled, "A Few COVID Vaccine Recipients Developed a Rare Blood Disorder (Thrombocytopenia)." After a few paragraphs, the article mentions that only 36 people out of the (then) 31 million vaccinated people developed thrombocytopenia. The article adds that this number sits within the scientifically accepted range of the amount of people that normally develop the disorder, vaccinated or not.²²⁷ With all of this being true, it seems slightly reckless for the New York Times to title the article the way that they did. Such an article posted by the New York Times, a source that would expectedly support the vaccination effort, suggests that some media outlets are not thinking thoughtfully about the effects that their articles can have on the general public. The message to get vaccinated needs to be universal. The media should be the ones encouraging this message, not the ones supporting the mistrust.

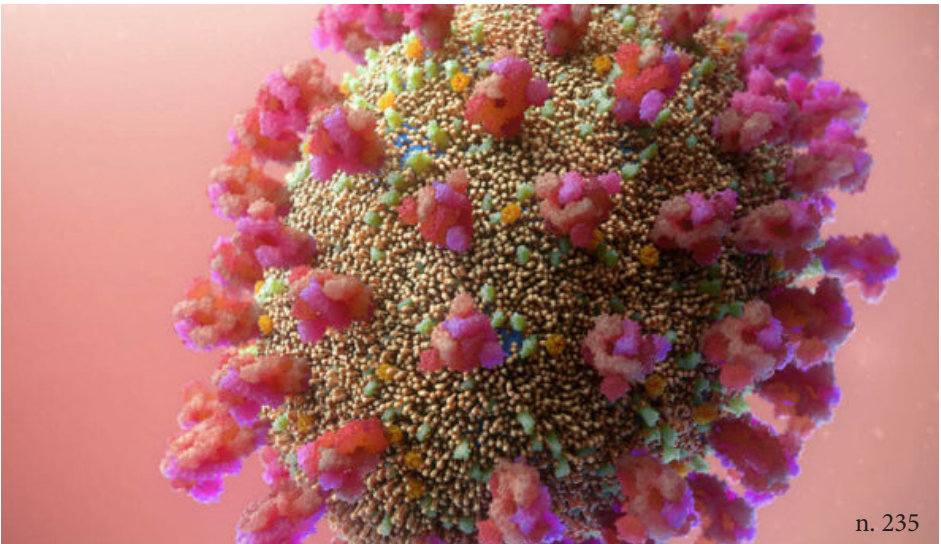
People who have received higher education are more willing to get the vaccine,

Articles like these, which contain little content and frightening titles, show how the media has spread rampant misinformation during the vaccination effort. In the US alone, COVID-19 has taken the lives of five hundred thousand people.²²² As there are no consistently available treatments for those who get COVID, the vaccine is the only hope to curb the COVID's death rate. If America can vaccinate over 75 percent of the population, we can achieve herd immunity, and life may finally go back to normal.²²³ With all of this being said, it seems logical that the entire country, including the media, would stand behind the vaccination effort. Instead, news outlets, such as the New York Post and Fox News, have been releasing articles that are likely to negatively affect confidence in the vaccine. Worse, most of these articles have no reason to question the efficacy of the vaccine.

On February 7, 2021, the New York Post published an article titled, "Elderly Man Collapses, Dies Shortly after Getting COVID Vaccine at Javits Center." The article tells the story of a man in his 70s who suddenly collapsed and died 30 minutes after receiving his first shot of the vaccine. However, if you read the article in full, the article reveals that doctors found no evidence of the death being related to the COVID vaccine. The article makes no mention of which vaccine the man received.²²⁰

Around the same time, Fox News released an article titled "Investigation Underway after Man Died Hours after Getting COVID-19 Vaccine." Conveniently, the title of the article fails to mention that the man recently had COVID when he received the vaccine, thus violating CDC COVID guidelines, which say to wait 90 days after having COVID to receive the vaccine.²²¹

“Those who receive their information from accessible, non-scholarly resources are more likely to not trust the vaccination effort.”



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suggesting that those who receive their information from accessible, non-scholarly resources are more likely to not trust the vaccination effort.²²⁸ Such resources extend beyond mainstream media outlets like the New York Post, Fox News, and the New York Times. "The Joe Rogan Experience," the most popular podcast on Spotify with over 1.5 million monthly listeners, is an example. In one episode with actor/comedian Jamar Neighbors (titled "Jamar Neighbors") Rogan mentioned that while

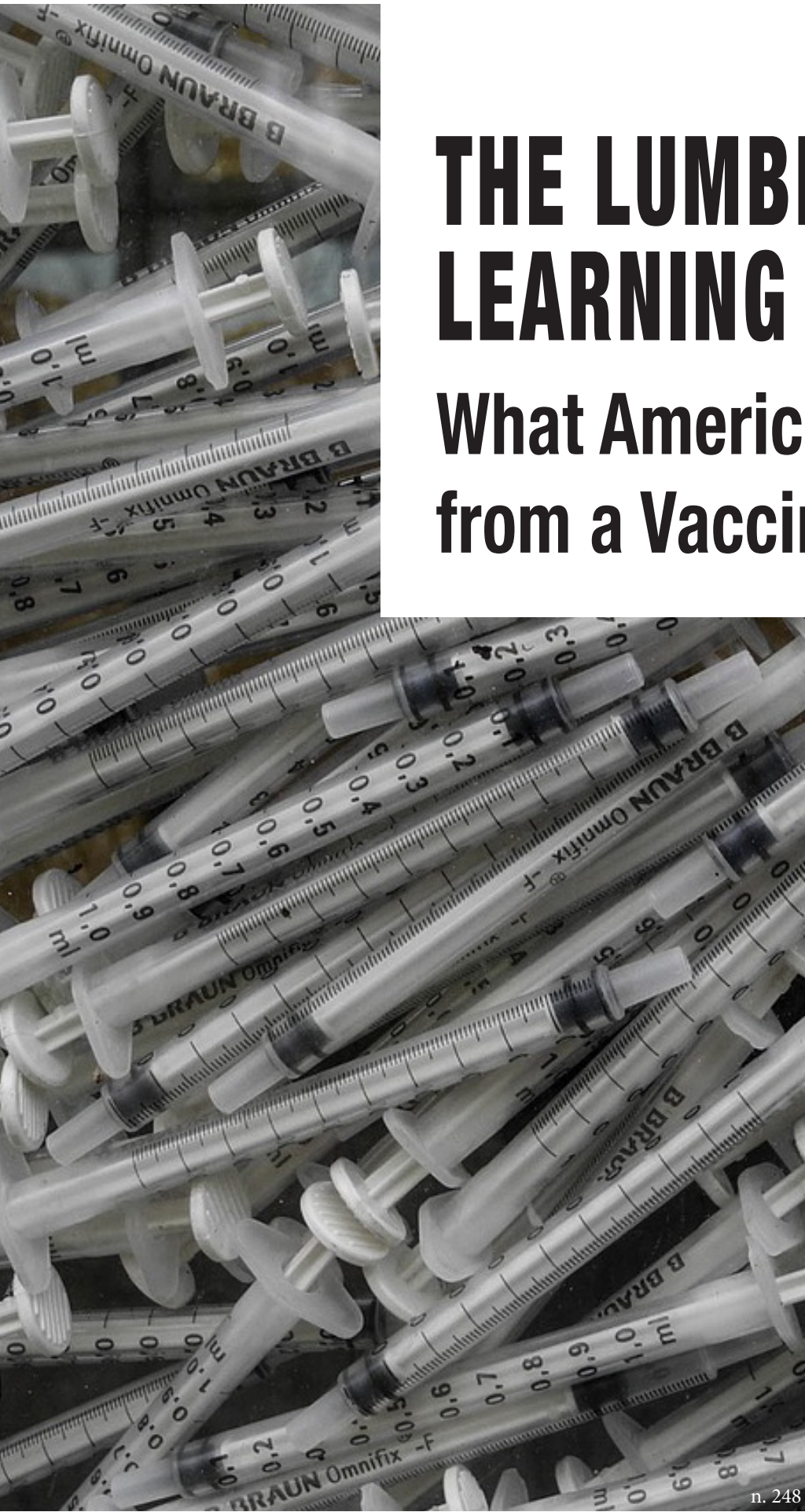
he does not necessarily believe that there is a problem with the vaccine, he will not be getting it anytime in the near future. He pointed out that as a healthy man, he feels no need to receive any of the FDA approved vaccines and wants to observe the vaccine's "long term effects." We are now multiple months into the vaccination effort and have vaccinated over 50 million people and, as of March 10, nobody has been proven to have died from the content of the COVID vaccine.²²⁹ Furthermore, all prov-

en effects of the vaccine have been observed directly after receiving the shot. Of course, Rogan certainly has the right to believe and say whatever he wants. The issue is that his comments show a lack of understanding of the way that the virus and the vaccine really work. The goal of the vaccine is to reach herd immunity among large populations, which cannot happen if healthy people do not get vaccinated.²³⁰ The CDC has stated that the vaccine is both for personal and communal protection.²³¹ Rogan's idea that he does not have to get the vaccine, therefore, does not make any sense. Rogan's statement, which shows a lack of competence, is received by a large audience, many of whom might be influenced by his statement. His comments, due to the large influence he has on the general public, is enough to reduce confidence in FDA approved vaccines.

In 1947, when New York City was experiencing an unexpected outbreak of smallpox, the city sent out a consistent, unwavering message supported by doctors and media to get the smallpox vaccine.²³² The city was able to vaccinate 6 million people in less than a month without much turmoil. To be fair, the country was in a promising place in 1947, as WWII was finally over. Soldiers had been ordered to receive vaccines during the war and the US was emerging as a global superpower, giving citizens incentive to trust the government's orders. Additionally, untrustworthy online resources such as social media and a rising anti-science movement did not exist at the time.²³³ There were no Facebook groups discussing vaccines, just government issued reports. Despite the added difficulty that we face in administering COVID vaccines nationwide in 2021, there is still much we can learn from the smallpox vaccination effort in 1947. It is true that such a feat could not be entirely replicated today, but it is entirely possible that the mainstream media could be the ones supporting the vaccination effort rather than the ones curbing it. **HMR**



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THE LUMBERING GIANT LEARNING TO WALK: What America Can Learn from a Vaccination Success

COREY BROOKS

The vaccination rollout in America is, needless to say, terrible. The root of this crisis comes from governmental neglect and pure incompetence. The high demand for spots and the required tech-savviness needed to secure a reservation online, leave older people, ill people, and essential workers who can't take hours out of their day to refresh the booking site left dry. Moreover, those who can get a vaccine are hindered by medical distrust, lack of transportation, and inability to access the internet reliably.²³⁷ Even with the restrictions on who can get an appointment, vaccination sites are left with as much as a 1/3 surplus of vaccines at the end of the day. These sites look for anyone to stick the vaccine into while people who need the vaccine are neglected. They are stuck between letting the vaccines expire or giving them to whomever is there to take it. In either scenario the people who need it are excluded.

The vaccination crisis isn't a red-state/blue-state problem; it illuminates the inefficiencies in state governments around the

country. States Alabama and Mississippi haven't used 40% of the vaccines they have acquired.²³⁸ The crisis doesn't stop there. There are racial barriers, socio-economic barriers, linguistic barriers, and more. There needs to be quick, effective change before more people die unnecessarily due to political apathy. But, how do we tackle such a large problem when it feels like our hands are tied behind our backs? What changes can we make to a system that is seemingly static? And can we make major changes quickly enough?

The type of large-scale change I'm referring to is essentially a pipe dream--and that the broad, monumental change needed to solve this crisis is impossible to accomplish with the current circumstances. That said, by looking at successful examples of vaccine distribution, we can get a better insight on how to pivot America toward inoculation and the future.

Three countries are currently vaccinating at higher rates than the US: The United Kingdom, The United Arab Emirates, and Israel, with Israel topping the list, administering vaccines at 438% the pace the United States has issued theirs.²³⁹ Moreover, Israel has already vaccinated over 85% of people 65 and older.²⁴⁰ Israel was equipped to achieve rapid fire inoculation for many reasons. Israel has a smaller and more urban population than the United States. Moreover, small states comparable in size to Israel have gotten nowhere close to Israel's vaccination statistics. New Jersey, for example, despite being comparable in size and population to Israel, has only vaccinated 14.6% of their population--a far cry from Israel's over 50%.²⁴¹ Therefore Israel's small size and urban center may help, but it hasn't seemed to help America. There are three essential reasons why Israel (and The United Kingdom and United Arab Emirates) were far better equipped to handle vaccination than America: transportation, education, and governmental healthcare.

For starters, cheap, efficient transportation is much better in Israel than in the United States. Not only do they have a far more expansive train and bus system, it's cheaper too. Unlike the United States, which has mostly neglected ensuring easy access to transportation, Israel has made an asserted effort to secure public-private partnerships that motivate companies to work efficiently while guaranteeing their accessibility.²⁴² The US, on the other hand, has not. Amtrak, America's national attempt at private-public transportation has

been (in large part) a failure. Rather than having the government hire private companies, Amtrak is essentially the inverse--private companies hiring the government to spend money on unprofitable, unusable projects. Being assured government money for access to their lines, American railroad companies serve their private interests first and the public second.²⁴³ The first step in tackling the vaccine distribution crisis would be reworking Amtrak and other transportation companies such that the government enlists companies rather than the companies enlisting the government. In other words, setting a system akin to Israel's (and most other countries in the world) where public transport is truly public and serves the needs of the people first rather than companies. If the United States were to ensure quality transportation for individuals and vaccine distribution, whether it be by train or bus, then the question of distribution and accessibility would be largely solved

Secondly, there needs to be better access to education in America. Education leads to vaccination--it's that simple. A Gallup poll from January 2021 showed college-educated Americans were 28% more likely to say they were open to a COVID-19 vaccination.²⁴⁴ However, the exorbitant cost to attend college in America has acted as a classist barrier for vaccination willingness. This classist barrier (just like most classism in America) has predominantly affected Black, Latinx, and American-Indian communities. The effect of a college education runs deeper than willingness, however. College-educated Americans are far more likely to have reliable access to the internet, a car, ample free time, and medical connections that can guide them through the vaccination process.²⁴⁵ To improve primary education and increase access to secondary education (say, for example, making college partially or entirely government paid, and giving government aid to poor public schools that need it) would, in large part, break down the class barrier of education.

Lastly, there needs to be reliable government healthcare. "With a government option, a national system can offer affordable healthcare to all people." With such a system insurance will become less expensive and more accessible.²⁴⁶ Also medical infrastructure has the ability for great improvements. Israel, the UK, and the UAE all share a government option-based system (and it's worked out very well for them). The United States' distribution of vaccines is remark-

ably poor due to the framework for administration, which was all but non-existent a few months ago. The United States doesn't know what booking systems work and which ones don't--states don't know how to store and distribute vaccines--and individuals don't have the information necessary to take full advantage of the vaccines.²⁴⁷

It's hard to imagine a seismic change during such a tumultuous time, but experiencing the failures of a flawed system should motivate everyone to create change. It's important to look toward what works and mix it with a little creativity to create the best possible system--one that The United States should strive for. Although change may not come tomorrow (or next week or even next year), it's important not to forget the flaws in systems, so we can improve upon them and change them for good.HMR

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MEDICAL RACISM AND THE COVID-19 VACCINE

Zahra Motwani

COVID-19, the deadly virus sweeping the country, is not as frightening anymore. There is a vaccine, but getting the COVID-19 vaccine isn't as easy as it looks. In fact, multiple obstacles are obstructing Black Americans from getting the vaccine, including systemic racism, access barriers, and medical mistrust. Even in diverse cities like New York City, where Black people make up 25% of the population, they have only received 11% of the vaccines. Conversely, white Americans (who make up 40% of the population) have received almost 50% of the vaccines.²⁵⁰ Nationwide, only 1.9% of the Black population has received a vaccine while 4% of the white population has received the vaccine, which is particularly worrisome, as data shows that Black Americans are three times more likely to die from COVID than white people.²⁵¹ Underlying health issues, overcrowded housing, lack of healthcare access, and high-risk jobs are all factors that contribute to the disproportionate death rate of Black Americans.²⁵² Foodservice, hotels, taxi drivers, and chauffeurs are all essential jobs that lead to higher rates of exposure to the virus, and Black people disproportionately hold these jobs.²⁵³ Adding to their workplace risks, Black people also display higher rates of hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease, all of which are risk factors for severe COVID-19.²⁵⁴

Vaccine rollout was intended to prioritize higher-risk groups, which is why healthcare workers and people over the age of 75 were given early access, but even within those priority groups, racial disparities persist. Elderly white people have gotten the vaccine at almost five times the rate of elderly Black people. Additionally, 63% of white hospital workers have gotten the vaccine compared to a mere 10% of Black hospital workers, and there are 63% more white hospital workers than Black hospital workers.²⁵⁵ This inequity reveals that the current system of prioritization is not effectively addressing racial disparities. The

roots of this racial gap in vaccination rates are complicated, relating to both healthcare access and medical mistrust—all stemming from historical injustice. Some attempts to address the gap have focused solely on one or the other, but in order to truly understand and alleviate the situation, both factors must be understood.

Scheduling appointments and accessing vaccination sites presents a significant challenge for all people, but this challenge is heightened for Black Americans due to their disproportionate representation in essential jobs. Sites typically operate during business hours, so many essential workers who are unable to take time off of work cannot get inoculated.²⁵⁶ Additionally, many low-income neighborhoods (which are disproportionately Black) do not have vaccination sites near them, presenting a

major obstacle for families without cars.²⁵⁷ This leaves families with a dangerous choice: go without the vaccine or risk exposure on public transit.

Getting a vaccine becomes exceedingly difficult because of how overloaded call centers and websites are.²⁵⁸ Only people with time to continually refresh websites, flexible schedules, and reliable transportation can receive the vaccine—the people with these privileges are much more often wealthy and white. Mayor Bill de Blasio commented on this problem, “Clearly, what we see is a particularly pronounced reality of many more people from white communities getting vaccination than folks from Black and Latino communities.”²⁵⁹ However, access issues are not solely responsible; another important reason why Black Americans are not getting the vaccine is



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Participants in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study

medical mistrust. Many Black Americans are rightfully suspicious of the medical system because of illegal experimentation and medical racism both in the past and present. The memories and long-term effects of horrific medical abuse are still very relevant to Black Americans today. This lack of trust is seriously impacting the vaccine rates within the Black community.

The most infamous case of medical racism in American history is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which began in the 1930s and lasted for forty years. The study was conducted by white doctors and included 600 Black men, 399 of whom had syphilis (a sexually transmitted disease that can be fatal if left without treatment).²⁶⁰ To study the progression of the untreated disease doctors decided to use these 399 Black men as test subjects without their consent. In the minds of the doctors, Black people were expendable and therefore viable candidates for such an unethical and irresponsible experimentation. The study gave these men free meals and offered free checkups but never informed them of their diagnoses; the white doctors only told them they had “bad blood.”²⁶¹ These men were completely unaware that they had syphilis, and the doctors running the study made sure they never found out, coercing other community doctors and church leaders into supporting the study by withholding medical information and treatment from the men in the study.²⁶² The result was community-wide deception, wherein 399 men were allowed to live (and often die) from untreated syphilis, endangering their partners and children by exposing them to the disease. These men never consented to this experiment, and they were lied to throughout the process—needless to say, the impact continuously lingers in the memories of Black Americans today.²⁶³ Lucenia Williams Dunn, the former mayor of Tuskegee, is hesitant to get the vaccine because “you cannot separate the experience of the past with what we believe in the present.”²⁶⁴

Lack of consent in medical spaces was not limited to Tuskegee; these atrocities were present in countless other situations, such as the case of Henrietta Lacks. A Black woman who suffered from cancer in the 1950s, Lacks is another example of the medical disregard of Black bodies. Her cancer cells were taken by white doctors without her consent and used for research.²⁶⁵ Her story causes many Black people to

“The memories and long-term effects of horrific medical abuse are still very relevant to Black Americans today.”

worry that their personal and genetic information will be used without their consent. Despite public messaging from the medical system about consent protocols and proper treatment, it makes a great deal of sense for Black Americans to remain skeptical.

Additionally, systemic racism is still very much present in the medical community today. According to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), many mostly white medical students still believe that “Black people’s nerve endings are less sensitive than white people’s, Black people’s skin is thicker than white people’s, [and] Black people’s blood coagulates more quickly than white people’s.”²⁶⁶ This leads to under-treatment of pain in Black people and frequent accusations of drug-seeking behavior, which can seriously damage medical care and trust. A comprehensive 20-year review of similar studies by Salimah H. Meghani, Eeeseung Byun, and Rollin M. Gallagher found that Black patients receive pain medication 22% less often than their white counterparts.²⁶⁷ Once again, this justifies the prevalent distrust that many Black people have in the American medical system.

Beyond prescription inequities, the maternal mortality crisis displays another terrifying side of racism in medicine. The National Partnership for Women & Families noted that “Black women are three to four times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than white women.”²⁶⁸ Black women are more likely to get preeclampsia in pregnancy (high blood pressure), which can be fatal if it is not treated, and faster-growing fibroids (tumors in the uterus), which can cause earlier and more severe postpartum hemorrhaging than in white women.²⁶⁹ Black women die in childbirth at disproportionate numbers—a harsh indictment of inequity in this coun-

try. Race should not determine healthcare quality. Black people should not be deemed expendable and left to die. Allowing vaccine disparities to continue is just continuing the atrocious legacy of medical racism in this country, and the status quo cannot be permitted to continue.

In addition to examining the historical context and facilitating honest dialogue about medical mistrust and bias, concrete action also needs to be taken to improve vaccine access. There need to be more vaccination sites in lower-income communities to limit exposure and increase accessibility. Vaccines should be distributed to those who cannot social-distance or do not have the means to protect themselves from COVID-19. Additionally, communication with Black community leaders is essential. A problem regarding the Black community cannot be solved without Black voices, involvement, and leadership. Education about systemic racism and understanding the Black Lives Matter mission for racial equity and justice is important as well. Furthermore, the medical community needs to make honest amends with the Black community. History will repeat itself if implicit biases and wrongful treatment are not repaired. Lastly, the Black community can’t be blamed for not accepting the vaccine. The blame should be placed on the dehumanizing system that caused Black people to develop hesitance in the first place. Moreover, the Black community can not be expected to move on from past events when it is the system that is not changing, constantly abusing Black people. As has come up time and again, COVID-19 isn’t the only pandemic devastating this country; life-threatening structural racism is still, heartbreakingly, attacking the Black community. **HMR**

GameStop To The Moon: An Unmitigated Disaster



Avi Rao

In October 2020, a storm was beginning to brew on the Reddit forum r/WallStreetBets. In the community, where users discuss personal investing and the stock market, interest had started to grow in the stock of GameStop, which had fallen to its lowest valuation ever as a result of COVID-19.²⁷¹ This very low valuation led many of the forum members to begin buying the stock in bulk, hoping that the price of the stock would rise, resulting in a “short squeeze.” The members of r/WallStreetBets weren’t looking to make money but rather to bring the large hedge funds which had shorted GameStop to their knees and to begin a people’s crusade against the wealthy investing elite.²⁷² On January 24, it exploded, powered by a viral forum post by Reddit user DeepF***ingValue. GameStop’s stock had shot up by 1770% in only a few days, from selling at \$20 a share to over \$300 a share as the GameStopToTheMoon began.²⁷³ The campaign was hailed as a populist uprising against Wall Street by forces on

both the political right and left, and popular business figures like Elon Musk and Mark Cuban commended the tenacity of the individual investors who had fueled it. When the story is told like this, it seems simple, where the underdog individual investors struck a blow against the might of Wall Street.²⁷⁴ However, GameStopToTheMoon was really a social, economic, and legal disaster that led to the normalization of targeted harassment and anti-semitic conspiracy theories. In addition, the movement was hazardous to market stability, and the man who became its icon, Keith Gill, has been accused of illegally manipulated the market and his followers to make over 30 million dollars for himself.

The craze of GameStopToTheMoon led to the normalization of targeted harassment and anti-semitic conspiracy theories, leading to a field day for the alt-right. As part of the “stick it to the hedge funds” mentality propagated by the movement, targeted and constant harassment of

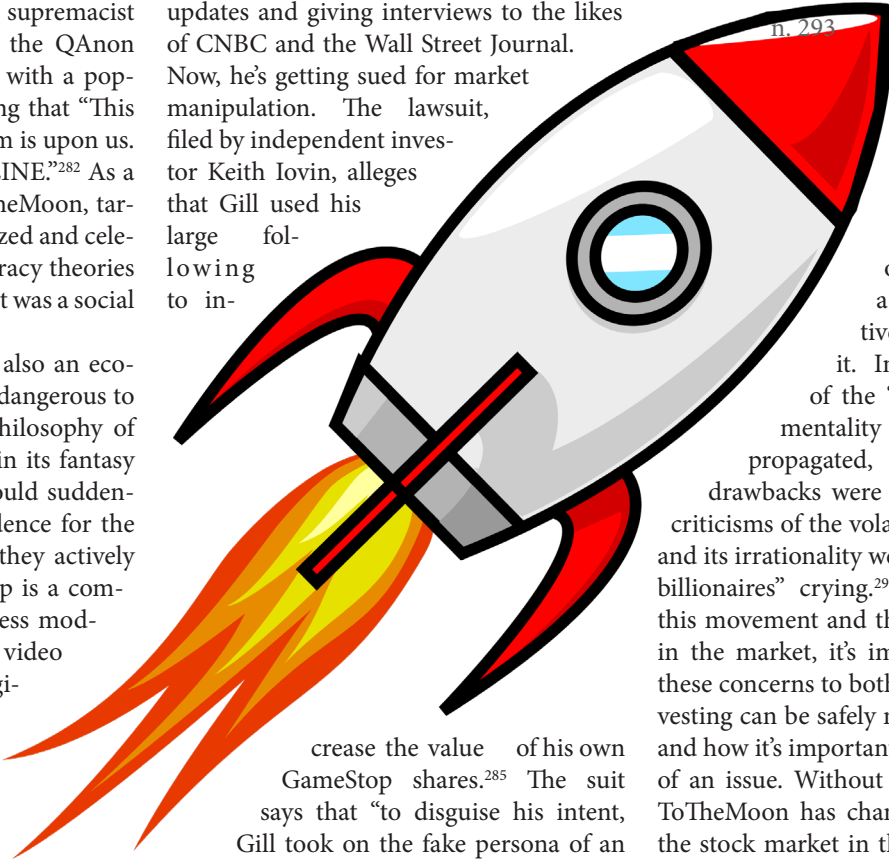
high-profile short-sellers became commonplace. A notable example of this is Citron Research’s Andrew Left, a favorite target of members of the r/WallStreetBets forum because of his vocal opposition to the buying of GameStop stock. Forum members set up a fake Tinder profile for him, showed up on his property, hacked his Twitter account, have threatened his two children over text, and have called his phone constantly.²⁷⁵ When a reporter from Institutional Investor called him, the reporter “thought [she] had the wrong number,” because Left now has to use a fake voice when picking up the phone.²⁷⁶ The harassment that Left has faced has caused him to stop short-selling all together, abandoning the business he’s worked in all of his life.²⁷⁷ And this harassment has not been vilified but rather celebrated and defended. The top reply to the article detailing the harassment was: “I hope these Reddit people completely destroy these firms.”²⁷⁸ In addition to the normalization of targeted harassment, anti-semitic con-

spiracy theories have also been normalized in the guise of “fighting against the elites”. The shutdown of GameStop trading on the app Robinhood led to the widespread propagation of the age-old antisemitic trope that Jews secretly manipulate all of the world’s money, as anti-elitism and antisemitism were blurred together.²⁷⁹ As an example, one alt-right account with nearly 10,000 followers posted: “Only jews can manipulate markets! Not normal citizens!”²⁸⁰ In addition to this rising popularity of antisemitic tropes, the alt-right was also jubilant about the movement, with another account with nearly 50,000 followers gloating that “jewish hedge funds” had lost billions, crediting “a bunch of white supremacist day traders.”²⁸¹ Supporters of the QAnon movement were also jubilant, with a popular pro-QAnon account saying that “This is good vs. evil” and “The storm is upon us. Victory is near, HOLD THE LINE.”²⁸² As a direct result of GameStopToTheMoon, targeted harassment was normalized and celebrated, and antisemitic conspiracy theories ran wild, clearly showing how it was a social calamity.

GameStopToTheMoon was also an economic debacle and incredibly dangerous to the market. The dangerous philosophy of the movement is best shown in its fantasy that a stock valued at \$20 should suddenly trade at \$350, with no evidence for the sudden reevaluation. In fact, they actively disdain evidence, as GameStop is a company based on a failing business model, as they mostly sell physical video games, a product best sold digitally. Usually, more rational investors stabilize stocks driven to absurd heights, but r/WallStreetBets does not limit their actions to one stock, but rather seek to destroy the rational traders who link the prices of a stock to the actual value of the company. While shorting stocks is far from evil and helps keep prices honest, Redditors see it as evil and keep irrationally buying stocks, such as GME, AMC, and RKT, with the sole purpose of driving the price higher and making short sellers lose money.²⁸³ This drive to raise the price of stocks with investments is also dangerously irrational, and professional stockbrokers always avoid doing so. Lasse Pedersen, a finance professor in Copenhagen, detailed this by saying, “By buying shares to make them go up... your average sales price will be lower than your average purchase price,

[and] you will lose money.”²⁸⁴ The investing techniques used by the Redditors of GameStopToTheMoon are not only irrational and dangerous but not profitable and are thus solely used as a way to destabilize the market in an already unstable time.

Finally, GameStopToTheMoon was a legal catastrophe as well, where millions of inexperienced individual investors were manipulated for one man’s profit. That man is Keith Gill, better known as DeepF***ingValue on Reddit and Roaring Kitty on Youtube. As the movement developed and gained popularity, Gill quickly became its figurehead, getting hundreds of thousands of upvotes on his “GME YOLO” updates and giving interviews to the likes of CNBC and the Wall Street Journal. Now, he’s getting sued for market manipulation. The lawsuit, filed by independent investor Keith Iovin, alleges that Gill used his large following to in-



crease the value of his own GameStop shares.²⁸⁵ The suit says that “to disguise his intent, Gill took on the fake persona of an amateur, everyday fellow, who simply was looking out for the little guy” and that “in order to motivate amateur traders, Gill fashioned himself as a kind of Robin Hood and characterized [stock] professionals as villains.”²⁸⁶ The truth, however, is that Gill is as much of a professional in the stock market as those he paints as villains, as he holds 5 professional licenses in investing, as well as being registered as a Chartered Financial analyst employed by MML Investor services, which is the highest legal qualification to be an investment professional.²⁸⁷ According to the lawsuit, with his follower base and extensive knowledge of the market, Gill fooled his millions of followers to buy GameStop’s stock, inflating the price to

a point where he could sell his shares for over 30 million dollars in profit.²⁸⁸ This manipulation would be an example of a “plump and dump” scam, an illegal type of securities fraud in which an individual makes misleading statements about a company to inflate the price, so they can secretly sell their shares at an inflated price.²⁸⁹ According to the lawsuit, Gill’s conduct was also in clear violation of the US Securities Exchange Act, which prohibits people from causing active trading of a stock that raises the price of said stock, especially as a means to induce other people to buy the stock.²⁹⁰ GameStopToTheMoon was a legal nightmare.

All in all, a closer look at the GameStopToTheMoon craze reveals the many significant drawbacks that the movement had, often looked over as a solely positive narrative is constructed about it. In people’s jubilation of the “stick it to the man” mentality that the movement propagated, these concerns and drawbacks were closeted, and honest criticisms of the volatility of the movement and its irrationality were belittled as “angry billionaires” crying.²⁹¹ When considering this movement and the future of investing in the market, it’s important to factor in these concerns to both understand how investing can be safely made more accessible and how it’s important to look at both sides of an issue. Without a doubt, GameStopToTheMoon has changed the dynamic of the stock market in the United States permanently and has drawn more attention to individual investors than ever before. However, it was also completely irrational, led to extreme market volatility, and led to the propagation of alt-right conspiracy. Combining both the critical and optimistic perspectives of the movement is critical in examining it, and realizing its problems is the first step in improving upon the foundation it has laid.**HMR**



Will Inflation Ever Return?

William Bramwell

Inflation, the erosion of a currency’s value and consumers’ purchasing power, is as old as money itself. Growing federal budget deficits and the Federal Reserve’s expansionary policies have rekindled debate over the potential for inflation in the American economy, which has not experienced a serious inflationary spike since the 1970s.²⁹⁴ Michael Burry, an investor who famously bet against the United States’ housing market bubble before it popped (the subject of the popular movie *The Big Short*), recently compared America to Weimar Germany after World War I, which encountered perhaps the most famous case of hyperinflation ever. From 1916 to 1924, prices in Germany skyrocketed more than a trillion percent, and the paper on which

bank notes were printed became more valuable than the bank notes themselves.²⁹⁵ Ever since, Weimar Germany has served as a cautionary tale for the world. “Germany [the US] started by not paying adequately for its war [on COVID and the 2008 fall-out] out of the sacrifices of its people - taxes - but covered its deficits with war loans [Treasury Bonds] and issues of new paper Reichsmarks [dollars]. #doomedto repeat,” Burry tweeted. Burry implies that the U.S. government should not continue to borrow and spend so heavily, lest historic levels of hyperinflation will be upon us.²⁹⁶

Do Burry’s statements have any validity behind them? Will inflation ever return? Inflation has been under control in the American economy for the past thirty-five

years. In fact, the nine worst years of inflation since 1973 all occurred from 1973 to 1982.²⁹⁷ However, just because a trend has held constant in the past does not mean it will continue to do so in the future. The U.S. has experienced several long periods of low inflation, but they were all punctuated by a return of inflation, such as the Civil War, the two World Wars, or the 1970s. These bouts of high inflation were all preceded by high government deficits. Running hundred-billion dollar deficits for nearly forty years (except for when the U.S. ran a surplus from 1998-2001), the federal government has driven and continues to drive fiscal expansion that echoes these three eras. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated government spending.

The 2020 deficit is projected to be 4.2 trillion dollars.²⁹⁸ In comparison, the deficit in 2015 was \$438 billion. One main difference though, between 1922 Germany and 2020 U.S., is that Germany’s government resorted to printing its way out of debts following the Great War. The U.S. did something similar with the introduction of fiat greenbacks during the Civil War.²⁹⁹ The current U.S. government, however, cannot print money in this fashion, at least not directly. It instead sells bonds to finance the deficit, ensuring that the total long-term monetary supply, at least from a fiscal point of view, remains constant. Thus one must instead focus chiefly on the actions of the monetary authorities, who are the ones who truly “print” money in the sense that Germany did, to calculate the probability of inflation.

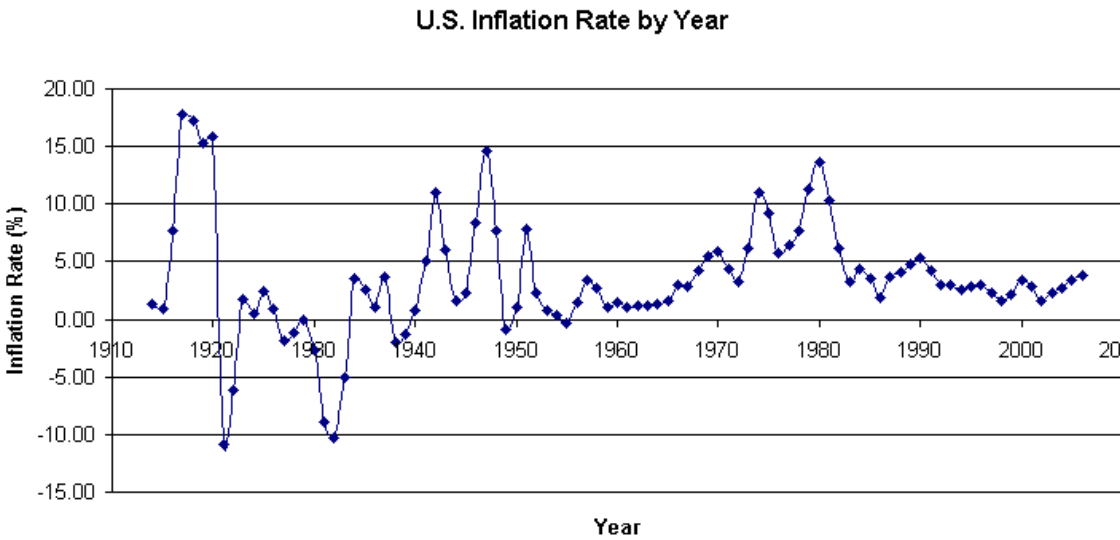
Since federal budgets became increasingly unbalanced under President Ronald Reagan, many financial experts have consistently warned of the possibility of hyperinflation. Such predictions only became more widespread after the Federal Reserve, in the aftermath of the 2008-09 financial crises, adopted the controversial policy of Quantitative Easing (QE), which dramatically increased the money supply by filling bank’s vaults with newly created money.³⁰⁰ Typically, a rise in the money supply, either through the lowering of interest rates or the reserve rate (the percentage of money required to be in the bank’s vaults, not to be lent out), or open market operations, when the Fed directly injects money into the banks by purchasing securities, leads to an uptick in inflation. This byproduct of monetary expansion is a result of increased lending to entrepreneurs, who then hire new workers and buy new products, capital, and commodities. The price of these newly demanded assets rises to feed the growing demand. Then, the owners of those assets do the same as the original entrepreneur, and an inflationary ripple effect is felt throughout the rest of the economy. Since its implemen-

tation in 2008, QE has not led to hyperinflation.³⁰¹ The reason behind this is that almost all of the money given to the banks under Quantitative Easing was not lent out to entrepreneurs, but rather it rested within the bank’s vaults. Thus, the general increase in price level did not occur; QE merely balanced the accounts sheets of the big banks, decreasing their probability of failure.

Leading policy-makers have indicated that they are willing to test the limits of inflationary pressure in an attempt to spur recovery and reach maximum employment. The Treasury of the Secretary, Janet Yellen, stated in early February, “As Treasury Secretary, I have to worry about all of the risks to the economy, and the most important risk is that we leave workers and communities scarred by the pandemic and the economic toll that it’s taken.”³⁰² Jerome Powell, the current Fed Chair, has called rampant inflation “not a problem.” It is true that in the short term, disruptions to employment during the pandemic are certainly of greater concern than long-term prospects of inflation.³⁰³ It is also true that inflation is highly unlikely to occur as long as lockdowns and other economic restrictions, as well as fears among low income households over basic supplies like food continue, because aggregate demand is being artificially suppressed. But, as the country opens up this year and next, these restrictions on demand will be lifted. The combined effects of multiple rounds of stimulus checks and interest rates nearing zero will no longer be hampered by a pandemic. Consumers, celebrating the end of the pandemic, will be free again to consume to their heart’s desire

in ways that COVID made impossible. The majority of people who had received \$1200 stimulus checks in April actually saved it or paid off debt, as opposed to its intended purpose of inducing spending strength. Free from the worries of the pandemic, it is highly likely that American will spend their savings rather than keeping them locked up in a bank account.³⁰⁴ Central bankers need to thoughtfully examine the potential for this to head off a sizable uptick in inflation. Since prolonged inflation is a result of expectations of inflation, it is incredibly difficult to eliminate inflation from an economy. To end the decade-long inflation debacle of the 1970s, Fed chair Paul Volcker dramatically cut down on the monetary base, raising interest rates over 20%, wringing the inflationary expectations out of the economy.³⁰⁵ If a significant uptick in inflation occurs either this year or next, it would be necessary to hike interest rates or pursue other contractionary policies to ensure that the inflationary trend does not continue.

Inflation will be the inevitable result of loose monetary policy, with interest rates nearing 0%, though that rate is certain to be raised in the near future to proactively prevent this. Following the easing of lockdown restrictions, demands for goods and services will swell, and, hopefully, resulting inflation will not mark a long term change in expectations. Comparing the United States to Weimar Germany is hyperbolic, but we must also beware of the inflationary threat, dormant but not extinct. **HMR**



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Making Sense of Reddit, Gamestop, and Robinhood

Sarene Choudhury

An influx of amateur traders have entered the stock market over the past decade, leading up to the GameStop phenomenon that occurred in late January of 2021. This event will continue to impact the economy and leave lasting effects on the stock market. Reddit users invested in GameStop, a company which has been on the decline for some years, and caused its stock price to grow exponentially until the price ultimately fell, resulting in hedge funds and some Reddit users losing billions of dollars overall. Trading apps like Robinhood have made the stock market more accessible to the public, allowing those without experience to trade alongside Wall Street professionals. The idea behind this is to democratize trading, yet it made possible extreme events such as the GameStop bubble from happening.

Amateurs on Reddit caused the stock of GameStop to skyrocket over 1700% and increase its market value by \$22 billion within days.³⁰⁸ Reddit is a social media platform that allows users to discuss and vote on various subjects, and each discussion is called a thread. The thread from which the idea to invest in GameStop to mess with Wall Street traders originated was called WallStreetBets, and is popular with small investors. One of the users of this page was a financial advisor named Keith Gill, known on Twitter as “RoaringKitty,” who, over a year ago, noticed that hedge funds were short over 100% of the total shares of GameStop. To be short a stock is when hedge funds borrow shares of a company they believe will fall in value, and then sell those shares in the hopes that when the stock’s price falls, they can buy the shares back for less and earn the difference.³⁰⁹ On January 4th, 2021, 141.8% of GameStop stock was shorted.³¹⁰ When the hedge funds sell these shares, the buyers then may short the stocks themselves, and this process can continue and result in over 100% of shares being shorted. After realizing this, Gill concluded that Wall Street analysts were too negative on the prospects of the company, and recommended others to buy shares through the Reddit thread. The idea slowly picked up, and soon many Redditors saw this to be a populist movement where amateur investors such as themselves could ‘beat’ the Wall Street giants. So, without understanding the potential repercussions of challenging the hedge funds directly, they bought GameStop stock en masse, causing the stock’s price to increase. Hedge funds who were short GameStop, such as Melvin Capital, were forced to buy back their borrowed shares at much higher prices once they noticed the price rising. However, stock prices cannot continue to go up forever, and at a certain point Robinhood, the platform on which most Redditors were trading, chose to restrict buying of the stock in an attempt to control the frenzy. As a result, GameStop’s price then plummeted. This movement of amateur investors was not thought out, and though they got their David vs. Goliath moment, it was brief. The price soared to \$483 from \$17, yet was already down to \$55 on February 5th, 2021, and both amateurs and professionals suffered losses.³¹¹

The aftermath of GameStop stock’s rise and fall will have both short and long-lasting repercussions, starting with those of

the hedge funds which experienced extreme losses, and had to be bailed out by other hedge funds. Melvin Capital lost 53% in January, and had to receive a \$2.8 billion emergency investment from the CEOs of hedge funds Point72 and Citadel. Maplelaine Capital fell 45%.³¹² As a result, the practice of shorting stocks is speculated to decrease, as other hedge funds will be much more wary to short a company after seeing the fallout from this phenomenon. This will negatively affect the efficiency of the stock market, as contrarians such as short sellers tend to detect fraud in the market. Since they are looking for companies they can bet against, short sellers end up doing more research on these companies than other traders. They are able to discover any bad practices of a company and often publish them to warn other traders. Without short sellers, the detection of fraud and other information that is critical to trade will be delayed.³¹³ Another concerning aspect about the GameStop situation is the herd mentality that caused the buying. Most of those who invested in GameStop were going along with a trend, and had no idea of how the stock market works. Their lack of experience and lack of extensive analysis causes Redditors to end up ignoring the outcomes of their actions. It resembles gambling more than investing. These Redditors rained chaos on the stock market by bringing up GameStop’s price far past what it was valued. This behavior also

affected other stock prices, including that of AMC and Blackberry, and the trading of GameStop shares is still volatile, as its price continues to rise and fall, most recently shooting up to \$200 from \$40 on February 24th, 2021. If left to continue, this fad of herd trading is expected to treat other companies with the same attitude, and the surge of GameStop’s price, as well as the ensuing volatility of the stock market, will be repeated.³¹⁴

The stock market is a place where long term investors can accumulate wealth, with prices that reflect the value of stocks. This is because trading allows prices to fluctuate. With the digital age, the stock market is available to anyone who wants to trade, and apps such as Robinhood make it easily accessible. The growing power and reach of social media allowed the GameStop phenomenon to occur, and the allure of quick riches will continue to be prioritized over repercussions. The phenomenon itself already will impact the stock market through the loss of short sellers, and if the harmful results of GameStop’s rise are repeated, then those impacts could become that much more detrimental to the economy. Moving forwards, the question of regulations when it comes to Robinhood’s ability to curb trading of a stock, to shorting 100% of a company’s shares needs to be considered as more unprecedented events reveal issues within the market.HMR



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STOCKS TO CONSIDER IN 2021

Maya Westra

As the coronavirus spread across the globe, many industries crumbled. Indoor dining, overseas travel, and indoor shopping are just some of the once common activities that now pose a risk to health. As a result, the restaurant, hospitality, travel, and retail industries have all taken big hits. Meanwhile, as people are spending more time at home, big tech, e-commerce, cleaning products, and companies that sell at-home-use products, have taken off.³¹⁷ Despite the recent vaccines, it seems there is no end to COVID-19 in sight, and these industry trends will continue. Though many previously growing

hospitality companies seem to be seeing a resurgence in profit, it is important to recognize that investments in these companies indirectly promote travelling during COVID, which is against CDC guidelines, so it is important to take these companies' success with a grain of salt.

The best-performing industry in the age of COVID-19 is technology. To give context, in an article from the Motley Fool regarding the best stocks to buy in 2021, over half of the suggestions are in the realm of technology and e-commerce.³¹⁸ After all, many of us shop, work, gather together, and even go to school through our elec-

tronic devices. Additionally, with less to do outside, especially in winter, many have turned to electronics for entertainment. Some of the fastest rising stocks last year include Netflix, Apple, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft.³¹⁹ In fact, in 2020, Apple was the first U.S. company to achieve a net worth of two trillion dollars.³²⁰ Additionally, Google's parent company, Alphabet, stock has risen 50%. Facebook stock went up 83%, Microsoft stock went up 57%, and Netflix stock went up 63%.³²¹ This success can be credited to a rise in users, and with COVID strong as ever, it is safe to say that these companies will continue to grow

their customer base. Zoom also grew incredibly fast last year, and its future looks bright, as it seems many people will continue to work or school from home in the coming year.³²²

With more and more people using technology, e-commerce has become the way to shop for those with access. There is no risk of COVID exposure, and more goods than ever before can be bought at the tap of a finger, increasing customer convenience. The spike in online shopping has caused a drop in traditional brick and mortar shopping, and consequently, many department stores, like Century 21 and Neiman Marcus, have filed for bankruptcy. One up and coming stock in 2021 is Etsy.³²³ The online retailer is a marketplace for small companies and individuals to sell their work. Their inventory ranges from clothing to art. As Etsy was always online, it was well equipped to face the pandemic and grew two times faster than the average e-commerce company last year. This year, their projections seem to hold steady and con-

tinue climbing. In addition to Etsy, Amazon, Mercadolibre, and Sea Limited are outperforming expectations.³²⁴ Though lesser known in the U.S., Mercadolibre is considered the Amazon of Latin America, and Sea Limited is the Amazon of Southeast Asia. All three companies, like Etsy, rely on e-commerce and have thus prospered within the COVID economy.

By contrast, the restaurant industry continues to struggle, and it is doubtful restaurant chain stocks will rise anytime soon. However, there is a food company to look out for in 2021, Beyond Meat.³²⁵ Not only is the stock successful, but the company also is socially conscious, as their goal is to replace meat with a more eco-friendly alternative.

Conversely, biotechnology is likely to boom, as the sector churns out new innovations daily. In particular, COVID vaccines could be a bonanza. One of the most obvious companies with projected gains this year is Moderna, one of the companies that created the COVID-19 vaccine.

Moderna could be a high rising stock, as the company is using the money it generates from the COVID-19 vaccine to fund drugs which battle the flu and HIV.³²⁶ Intuitive Surgical is another company projected to be successful, as it is a leader in the ever-growing field of robotic surgery.³²⁷

Surprisingly, two tourism based companies are predicted to be good investments in 2021. Walt Disney and Hilton took hits due to a halt in tourism in 2020 and one could buy shares at discounted prices.³²⁸ Though both companies are hopeful their stocks will rise in 2021 as restrictions slow, it is unclear when travel and visiting places of public gathering will be safe again. Additionally, from an ethical standpoint, investing in these stocks would lead one to profit off of the unsafe behaviors of those who choose to travel to or visit Disney theme parks during this time.

It is important to address that GameStop, despite having recent success, is not projected to continue outperforming. Its quick increase of well over 100% was an artificially simulated play by Reddit users to get back at hedge funds that had been shorting failing companies. For example, GameStop's value decreased from over 2 billion dollars to 500 million dollars in the span of just one year and was heavily shorted by hedge funds.³²⁹ (A short is when a company sells a failing stock to a customer, in hopes they will lose money and the company can then buy the stock back for less than it was sold.) Even since January, GameStop has continued to climb, for there is still a significant amount of money invested in their stock. Once again, it is important to look at the company as a whole and acknowledge that, though it's currently valued at over \$22 billion, this is far disconnected from the reality of the failing company.³³⁰

Overall, e-commerce, medical, and tech stocks are projected to continue outperforming, but it is important not to turn away from other sectors such as food and entertainment and maintain a diverse portfolio. However, as long as COVID-19 is still altering our everyday lives, it seems tourism and hospitality stocks will not perform well. It is important to invest in a socially conscious way; no one wants to contribute to the success of a company that is hurting society. Lastly, and most importantly, the stocks above are just some possible blockbusters, and one should not base their investment decisions solely on this article. **HMR**



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The Power and Problem of Big Tech

Owen Heidings and Max Meyer

The emergence of the modern tech industry as we know it occurred not much less than 20 years ago, and because of its recency, not much legislation has been passed imposing regulations. Because of this lack of regulation, tech companies like Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and more have been able to grow to unforeseen proportions, turning into some of the largest corporations capitalism has ever known in terms of financial influence. Unfortunately, these companies have not been using their immense leverage to contribute positively to society, but are instead exploiting their power in manipulative ways, be it to silence individual voices or to quash competitors.

A significant issue posed by the great power of Big Tech is the companies' ability to censor certain individuals' voices. As these corporations have near monopolies in their fields, a decision by Twitter to ban a single person significantly narrows the scope of whatever platform they may have as individuals. For example, in January 2021 President Donald Trump was permanently suspended from Twitter. As a result, President Trump and many of his allies lost

their preferred medium of communication with their millions of supporters. Many believe that this ban was justified—that it was dangerous to allow him to continue spreading misinformation that could potentially mislead people and cause them to do dangerous things, like breaking into the Capitol, for example. On the contrary, an argument arose that even though the information the President spread could be considered deceptive, it should not be the right of corporations to silence and regulate the voices of the American people. Although these actions may not be directly protected by the First Amendment, it is argued that they still violate core American values instilled in our country hundreds of years ago—that everyone should have the right to speak their mind, no matter how impudent or foolish their statements might seem.

Another argument that President Trump and his supporters have been making relates to Section 230, a code that protects internet companies from liability for content posted by third-party users on their sites.³³² The argument is that since Twitter, Facebook, and other social media corporations have

such protections under United States law, they can abuse Section 230 by using it as a shield for partisan censorship of conservatives. Companies have no legal obligation to remove certain types of content, but they can enforce guidelines that are one-sided in nature. President Trump and his allies have long argued for the code's removal, citing the fairer enforcement of rules that would result, since the corporations themselves would become liable for all content posted on their sites.

This argument, however, has failed to gain much traction, simply because Section 230's removal might spell the downfall of many tech companies that are not named Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat.³³³ Big Tech corporations could likely survive the repeal because they have deep pockets and well-endowed legal departments. Smaller companies, including new startups, often rely on laws such as Section 230 to protect themselves from great liability they would face without it, not being able to retain high-end lawyers like Big Tech corporations. As a result, the issue of the power that Section 230 gives to Big Tech corporations

is an issue that is unlikely to go away anytime soon.

Tech conglomerates use their power to stamp out competition. The biggest tech companies in America have billions of dollars to utilize at their disposal. Because they carry this power, if any serious competition arises in a market a tech company wishes to monopolize, they can simply buy them out and incorporate them into their business structure. Google is arguably the largest user of this strategy. Take, for example, Waze, one of the largest mobile navigation apps to come after Google Maps. Google saw Waze as a threat to their product, and instead of allowing beneficial competition to occur so both companies could make new and unforeseen advancements in their respective applications, Google simply bought Waze for \$966,000,000.³³⁴ After this acquisition, Google "borrowed" Waze's traffic updating features to incorporate into Google Maps.

Google is not the only company that has adopted this sort of strategy. Facebook bought rival tech companies Instagram and WhatsApp in 2012 and 2014, respectively.³³⁵ The Federal Trading Commission (FTC) cleared these "investments" because Facebook executives argued they helped the apps grow.³³⁶ Since then, Facebook has come under greater public scrutiny, leading the FTC to launch an investigation into Facebook's potential antitrust violations

in 2019—citing laws which Facebook may have broken that are intended to regulate business for the benefit of the consumer.³³⁷ This investigation builds on findings from the US House Judiciary Subcommittee, which released millions of documents

“These companies have not been using their immense leverage to contribute positively to society, but are instead exploiting their power in manipulative ways.”

seeming to convict Zuckerberg and other top Facebook executives of engaging in discussion of buying out WhatsApp and Instagram under concerns that they could

become dangerous future competition.³³⁸

Aside from repealing Section 230, numerous other ideas have been proposed targeting ways to reduce the power of large-scale tech companies. In her 2020 presidential run, Senator Elizabeth Warren said that to limit the power of Big Tech companies, she would break up the aforementioned mergers that weaken competition, such as the ones between Google and Waze, Facebook and Instagram/Whatsapp, and Amazon and Whole Foods.³³⁹ Todd McKinnon, CEO of identity-management company Okta, says one unfair benefit tech companies take advantage of is a lack of data portability—if one wanted to move their profile from Facebook onto a different social media platform, one could not simply copy their data over, so one would be less likely to switch because of a lack of ease of use. McKinnon believes the government, or some other entity, should create a “digital identity wallet” that would make less popular services more accessible.³⁴⁰ Arguments like these raise the point: would consumers trust the government enough to have all of their information on file in a manner such as this? Although Big Tech will always have an edge over smaller businesses and startups, with new antitrust laws being introduced, more developers and engineers will be incentivized to create their own companies and change the industry as a whole.

HMR

Elizabeth Ann: The First-Ever Cloned Ferret

RIA CHOWDHRY



can then divide and be implanted into a surrogate female’s uterus.³⁴³ Cloning has been a procedure since the 1990s when Scottish researchers successfully cloned a sheep from another adult sheep’s cell. Named Dolly, this sheep was the first-ever mammal to be cloned and set forth a continuous path of cloning experimentation in various other species. Dolly “jump-started” cloning experimentation of other species, both non-endangered and endangered.³⁴⁴

In the early 1900s, black-footed ferrets could be found almost everywhere in the Midwest. However, as the Midwest became more populated, the ferret’s main food source, prairie dogs, began dying off due to poisoning, non-native diseases, and habitat loss. The ferrets faced a similar fate and were thought to be extinct as of 1981 when a dog in Wyoming brought back a dead black-footed ferret to its owner.³⁴⁵ After alerting the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, which then alerted the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), 18 remaining black-footed ferrets were captured. Only seven of these 18 ferrets passed down their genes, thus resulting in a small population of black-footed ferrets with extremely limited genetic diversity.³⁴⁶ In a population with such little genetic diversity, the black-footed ferrets are very susceptible to pathogens and genetic disorders that can entirely wipe out the species. In a way, almost all the black-footed ferrets alive today, except for Elizabeth Ann, are half-siblings. In 1988, another wild ferret, named Willa, was caught. She was not related to any of the previously bred ferrets and thus was a major potential for additional genetic diversity. Willa did give birth, but both she and her offspring died. Luckily, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department were able to send her tissue to the “Frozen Zoo” in San Diego, a location that saves and preserves cells from over 1,100 endangered or extinct species around the world.³⁴⁷

Elizabeth Ann’s genes come from Willa. While she is the first Willa clone, more clones are expected to be born in the next few years. Prior to Elizabeth Ann’s birth, the FWS partnered with Revive & Restore, a nonprofit organization that works to enhance biodiversity by restoring endangered species’ populations through new biotechnology methods. Their work together led to the birth of two other ferrets, Balboa, born through artificial insemination, and

necessary for the species’ survival. Yet, a question still remains: is cloning successful and safe enough to bring the black-footed ferret and endangered species alike back from the brink of extinction?

As a clone, Elizabeth Ann’s cells come from other living organisms. Cloning is the process of creating a living copy of another organism by taking the nucleus from one organism’s cell and placing that nucleus into an egg cell with no nucleus. This egg

On December 10th, Elizabeth Ann, the first-ever genetically-cloned black-footed ferret, was delivered by Caesarian section. Black-footed ferrets are among some of the most endangered North American species; fewer than 500 live in the wild.³⁴² Elizabeth Ann represents one of the greatest feats in the conservation and restoration of this endangered species. Her birth provides hope for increased genetic variety and population boosts that are

“ Is cloning successful and safe enough to bring the black-footed ferret and endangered species alike back from the brink of extinction? ”

Cheerio, born naturally. Revive & Restore proposed a cloning project approved by the FWS, and soon partnered with ViaGen Pets & Equine to create the cloning procedure.³⁴⁸ The Frozen Zoo sent over Willa’s cells to Dr. Ben Novak, lead scientist in this experiment, and about two months later, Elizabeth Ann was born. Without these new forms of technology, this cloning process would have taken years. It is truly amazing that these scientists were able to accomplish this task within a relatively short timeline. Since the black-footed ferrets are virtually extinct, cloning may be their only opportunity to grow the population. In this case and similar ones, cloning is entirely acceptable and even maybe suggested. Due to the cloning of Willa’s cells, there may be enough genetic variety to save the species

from disease.

This event opens gateways into conservation and de-extinction experimentation; however, there are both pros and cons to cloning endangered species and even extinct ones. First, experimentation with endangered species, cloning offers the opportunity to increase genetic variability and improve the species’ ability to survive in the wild. In the case of the black-footed ferrets, cloning may be able to bring the population back to a relatively reasonable size. Additionally, cloning allows for non-breeder individuals (those who cannot reproduce) to contribute their genes to the gene pool, thus increasing genetic diversity. These clones are also able to give birth to offspring that can continue the genetic line, hopefully stabilizing the species’ population. On

the other hand, there are some cons of this amazing technology. Cloning is the least efficient method of producing offspring, so scientists can not rely on this technology to bring back declining populations. In the long run, cloning will result in a loss of genetic diversity.

While it may seem remarkable to see extinct creatures come back to life, we have to think about the costs and implications of such experimentation. Even if all goes well and birth occurs, it is still very likely that there will be complications for the surviving animal. In 2007, researchers planted the nucleus of a Pyrenean ibex into a common goat. The pregnancy was successful; however, the ibex only lived for seven minutes.³⁴⁹ Cloning can give us identical copies of extinct species, but it seems very unlikely that the clone will survive. Despite the complications of the process, another concern is whether we should be bringing species who are already extinct back into our current ecosystems. The Frozen Zoo, which contained Willa’s cells, also holds cells of the pōouli, the black-faced honeycreeper native to the Hawaiian island of Maui. Other projects focus on de-extinction plans to bring back the woolly mammoth or passenger pigeon, both of which have been dead for centuries. New introductions of past species could potentially drive others to extinction. Though it may be cool to see a Woolly Mammoth in real life, it is not worth the potential collapse of already fragile ecosystems.

Regardless of the pros and cons of cloning, the birth of Elizabeth Ann is amazing for the fate of the black-footed ferrets. Her genetic diversity may just be perfect enough to boost the genetic variety of the species and eventually remove them from the critically endangered species list. Though cloning has its flaws, in dire cases such as this, genetic clones seem like the best option to restore and conserve dying out species.**HMR**



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