



THE EQUILIBRIUM

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

The Equilibrium aims to approach topics of disagreement with generosity and thoughtfulness. Every article is matched with another that argues a conflicting position. Hopefully, you will read this issue and appreciate some of the ambiguity, nuance, and diversity of ideas that make this world so interesting. We find that there is something exciting about saying that we don't know the answer to a question, the solution for a problem, or the winner of a debate. This magazine celebrates that process.

In this issue, we are excited to launch a new format for our Quick Takes section: the dialogue. After conducting thorough research, writers paired up to record and transcribe a conversation in lieu of a formal article. By introducing this new format, we hope to encourage readers to embrace diverse opinions in their own conversations, especially those they do not agree with.

The arguments in this magazine do not necessarily represent the opinions of our writers. Indeed, many of them wrote both sides of the discussion. They are written in the spirit of curiosity and pleasure in learning, not of competition. We hope that you will enjoy the articles, consider the arguments, and recognize that sometimes the question is more compelling and important than the answer.

We would like to thank all of our writers for their diligent work creating the articles for this issue. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Anoushka Parakh and Raghav Poddar for their dedication in assembling this issue. Additionally, we are deeply appreciative for the support of Mr. Michael Bomwell and Sr. Michael Dalo, for their continuous guidance. Finally, we would like to thank our supportive readers, and we hope you enjoy this issue of the Equilibrium.

Sincerely,

Elise Kang

Elise Kang

Oscar Shah

Oscar Shah

THE EQUILIBRIUM VOLUME II BOARD

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Should libraries c

YES.

Libraries should continue to implement late fees in order to make patrons accountable for not returning their items. Without late fees, there lacks an incentive for patrons to adhere to return deadlines. Since late fees impose additional costs against the consumer, the consumer will try to avoid the late fees if possible. Unless there is an additional benefit to reading or keeping the book after the due date, the consumer has little reason to keep the book and pay the fee. To exemplify this, I will compare consumer behavior with a late fee and without a late fee. For example, if the consumer can rent *Animal Farm* by George Orwell for free without a late fee, would the consumer feel pressure to return it on time. From a monetary standpoint, no, it costs the consumer the same amount of effort to return it tomorrow or a year later. On the other hand, if the consumer can rent *Animal Farm* for two months but pays a late fee after two months of renting, would the consumer feel pressure to return it on time? From a monetary standpoint, yes, it costs the consumer more to return the book after the late fee date.

By enforcing late fees, kids would also develop the responsibility skills needed as an adult in activities such as paying bills. Responsibility is not particularly prevalent among children. In a 2021 article for *The Washington Post*, Meghan Leahy advised one mother whose son routinely skipped classes and failed core subjects like mathematics and English. This son had a bad habit of excessively playing video games on his Xbox.

Historically, some books without late fees have remained overdue for such extended periods that the book needs to be returned to a different address. In essence, when some books that were borrowed are associated with an address that no longer currently exists, the book then has to be shipped to a different address. Late penalties encourage patrons, including children developing their responsibility skills, to return their books on time and therefore help libraries to retain their full inventory of books. In a study conducted by a

Harvard economic philosopher Michael Sandel, he studied the effects on fees on parents who picked up their children late. In his study, he observed that large late fees that were imposed on parents who did not pick up their students on time incentivized parents to pick up their children on time. Since late fees encourage parents to pick up their children on time, it promotes responsibility in society. Similarly, late fees imposed on returning books on time encourages people to return books on time and take responsibility in society. As a result of returning books on time, other people have the ability to read and utilize all the books, reflecting the key pillar of libraries: doing common good and community service for people by providing equitable access for books. As a result, many kids and teenagers would increase their literary skills and develop a love for reading. Moreover, libraries use the revenue generated by late fees to reinvest into the library system. Many libraries tend to be underfunded; they often grapple with limited resources, including outdated technology, insufficient book supplies, inadequate lighting, and limited program offerings. Libraries in poorer neighborhoods are particularly underserved and under-resourced. Thus, the funds generated by late returns are necessary to maintain high quality free public libraries.

Ultimately, libraries should charge late fees on books, because they hold patrons accountable, help children develop responsible habits, and provide funds necessary to maintain high-quality, free public libraries.



Charge late fees?

by Joshua Kang

NO.

Charging late fees contradicts one of the fundamental moral pillars of a library: to advance the common good by creating equitable access and service to materials such as books and DVDs. Most people are no stranger to late fees; they accumulate quite quickly if books are not returned promptly. In the Fort Lee Public Library system, charges range \$0.10 cents to \$1.00 per day (Fort Lee Public Library). After late penalties accumulate beyond a certain point, libraries block users' cards, effectively banning them from using the library's resources, such as computers and books.

These obstacles towards reading and learning disproportionately affect low-income families. For example, the ten branches with the highest percent of block cards are located in poor neighborhoods. In an article for CNN in 2021, NYPL President Tony Marx reported that 400,000 New Yorkers have their library card blocked for accumulating at least \$15 in late fees, and over half of those people live in "high-needs communities."

Grassroots organizations and individuals have retaliated against the policy. For example, one librarian in New Jersey named Andy Woodworth runs the advocacy website "End Library Fines." Through his work, he hopes to promote equitable access to library resources, ringing true to the mission of libraries.

Consequently, multiple libraries have removed their "late fees" policy. For instance, the NYPL, which serves 3.4 million patrons, cleared all patrons' debts and permanently waived all late fees on books in October 2021. Under the new regulations, patrons are expected to pay a replacement fee if a book is over one month overdue. Moreover, users with cards blocked due to the excessive accumulation of fees would still have access to the library's digital materials such as computers. Especially because the New York Public Library is one of the nation's largest library systems—on par with those of Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, and Los Angeles County—the NYPL's decision has a crucial significance. Following the

NYPL's model, smaller libraries, such as the Fort Lee Public Library, also decided to suspend late fees for a certain period of time.

Late fees have also been proven to be ineffective in encouraging timely returns. According to Gina Chereus's 2022 New York Times article titled "The Library Ends Late Fees, and the Treasures Roll in," the NYPL saw a nine to fifteen percent increase in book returns, depending on the borough, during the five months after they removed their late fees on April 1. Indeed, twenty-one thousand overdue or lost books were returned to Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx. Fifty-one thousand books were also returned to Brooklyn between October 6, 2022 to April 1, 2022.

One reason why late penalties might not be effective at encouraging timely returns is that they cause unwanted stress for patrons. Chereus's 2022 New York Times article provides multiple examples reinforcing this conclusion. For example, one NYPL patron, Dominique. Gomillion, stopped going to her library in Jamaica, Queens after she received fifty dollars in late penalties. Considering that she was a single parent, she could not find enough space in her budget to allocate for her late fees, so she avoided returning the book.

Abolishing late penalties has also encouraged more parents to use the library with their children, boosting the literacy of young children. One reason parents might be hesitant to use local libraries with their children is that they are intimidated by the financial consequences of late returns. After going fine-less in 2021, the NYPL saw the second-highest number of new library card registrations in their history. Thus, libraries can reach more of their local communities by going fine-free.

Ultimately, removing late fees is one of the best decisions libraries can make to uphold their commitment to equitable book access, local community education, and enthusiasm for reading.

Should indigenous artifacts

YES.

Thousands of historical artifacts have been removed from their indigenous communities as a result of colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous cultures by museums and colonialist powers. However, there has been a recent push for these artifacts to be returned. Repatriation should occur for moral, educational, political and economic reasons.

Firstly, stealing is wrong. An artifact that was obtained without consent of the indigenous owner was stolen and thus should be returned to the communities from which they came for the sake of morality. Congolese activist Mwazulu Diyabanza highlighted the absurdity and injustice of this dynamic: “The fact that “I had to pay my own money to see what had been taken by force, this heritage that belonged back home where I come from.”

Second, repatriation would honor the cultural and historical roots from which the objects originated. Indigenous artifacts hold profound cultural, historical and symbolic significance. These objects are a physical representation of connections to the past and help carry the stories, traditions, and identities of indigenous communities. Thus, colonialist powers and museums could demonstrate respect towards the indigenous people by returning stolen artifacts. Repatriation would serve as an acknowledgement that indigenous people should have ownership of their cultural and historical roots.

Furthermore, repatriation is a form of restorative justice, and signals a commitment to right the wrongs of the past and acknowledging the dignity and sovereignty of indigenous peoples. In recent history, indigenous artifacts have been bought, sold, and displayed without regard for the wishes or rights of their communities of origin. Through repatriation, museums and former colonialist countries could demonstrate respect for the cultural identity and history of Indigenous

people by allowing them to reclaim and preserve their heritage on their own terms.

In addition, several countries harbor resentment to Western nations for failing to return artifacts. In February 2020, India’s foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar spoke of his desire to see the repatriation of treasures taken to Britain during colonial rule. “I have a natural desire to see as many things which rightfully belong to India back in India,” he told a press conference in Delhi. He also praised a shift from what he called

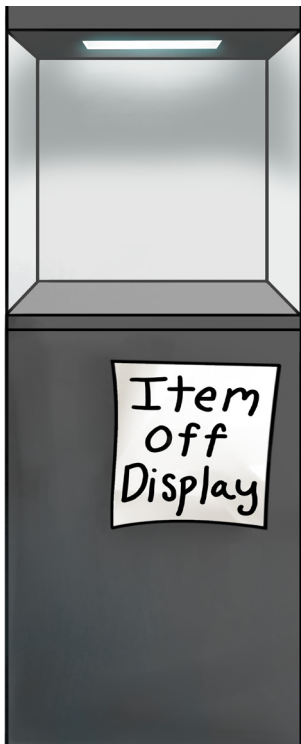
“utter denial” about how treasures were acquired. French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged this history and said “I am from a generation of the French people for whom the crimes of European colonialism are undeniable and make up part of our history,” and “I cannot accept that a large part of cultural heritage from several African countries is in France ... In the next five years, I want the conditions to be created for the temporary or permanent restitution of African patrimony to Africa.”

Moreover, repatriation could help deepen the understanding of the historical artifacts for both indigenous and non indigenous audiences. The indigenous owners of the artifacts could tell their own history, rather than the history being told through the lens of colonialist narratives. Thus, museum viewers can gain a more nuanced understanding of indigenous cultures and experiences. Furthermore, repatriation could lead to a relationship between indigenous communities and museums. They could collaborate on educational programs, exhibition that could amplify indigenous voices and promote cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Critics of repatriation often raise concerns about the long-term sustainability of indigenous artifacts if they were to be returned, because indigenous groups tend to use traditional methods—which struggle to compete with the effectiveness of modern techniques—to protect historical objects. However, many indigenous communities feel a great desire to preserve and share their traditions and knowledge to future generations. For example, tribes have created museums such as the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Mashantucket, Connecticut; the Osage Nation Museum in Pawhuska, Oklahoma; and the Himdag Ki: Tohono O’odham Nation Cultural Center and Museum in Sells, Arizona to teach indigenous history to non-Natives and Natives alike. Thus, tribal communities’ commitment to historical preservation could lead them to use modern methods in addition to traditional practices to protect their artifacts.

Lastly, critics often argue that more people visit the museums in colonist countries than museums in Indigenous communities. However, keeping artifacts in colonist countries perpetuates this as it takes away from the cultural heritage of the Indigenous countries that would draw tourists. Thus, repatriation would draw more visitors to these formerly colonized countries which would result in various economic benefits. Recently there have been several new museums and new art projects throughout Africa. For instance the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar, Senegal, was opened in 2018, with capacity for about 18,000 objects, and the Benin Royal Museum in Benin City opened in 2021.

To conclude, the repatriation of indigenous artifacts to their communities of origin to serve justice, foster a greater understanding of the artifacts, reinforce reconciliation and cooperation, and demonstrate respect towards the indigenous communities that have been historically wronged.



Should artifacts in museums be repatriated?

by Annika Bhandari



NO.

Recently, many artifacts have been removed from museums in former colonial nations and returned to their countries of origin. However, this repatriation has several negative consequences with regards to the safety of the artifacts, the education of the public, and the quality of museums.

Firstly, often artifacts staying in the museums and reputable institutions leads to a reduced risk of theft or destruction and there is a great possibility that artifacts of global significance may be safest in the relatively well-protected environments of major cities. For instance, before Isis lost a lot of its territory in the late 2010s, the terrorist group destroyed 3,000 relics in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Abdulrahman al-Rashed, a Middle Eastern commentator with MBC Group, a broadcasting network in Dubai, wrote that those recent depredations “prove we do not deserve these treasures that fill our museums and lie buried beneath our sands,” illustrating his own concern of the safety of artifacts in his indigenous country.

Second, when artifacts remain in reputable and popular museums in large cities, they can lead to a better understanding of colonial history and global civilizations. Tristan Hunt, the director of London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, said that returning objects from Western collections risks limiting Western visitors’ understanding of history: “The empire is embedded in its meaning and collections, and the question is how that is interpreted.” He wrote that it should be the museum’s goal to detach itself from its colonial preconditions and “reimagine it as a new medium for multicultural understanding.” Furthermore, since artifacts hold educational value, repatriation undermines their value as objects of research and scholarship at universities and museums. Holding such objects at universities and museums puts them in an ideal position to be studied, and so to contribute to add value to society.

Moreover, removing artifacts from museums could lead to incomplete exhibitions and collections. Hartwig Fischer, the director of the British Museum affirmed the importance of protecting historical sets: “the collections have to be preserved as whole.” There is an undeniable power in artifacts from all over the world being brought together in one place to tell a story, and that could not happen to the same extent if repatriation were to occur. This would mean that museums would be forced to teach an incomplete, or inaccurate history to its visitors. Art curators have recently warned that repatriation, as the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle put it, will “eventually empty museums and galleries in Western countries.”

Lastly, some critics of repatriation argue that the artifacts now belong to the countries and museums in which they reside. A large amount of artifacts are located in countries that they were not created in, and thus the story of their place of origin is often unclear, complex or contested. Hartmut Dorgerloh, general director of Berlin’s Humboldt Forum said “How far back will you go? Until Roman times? Because many items in Rome were stolen somewhere in Greece or in Ancient Egypt.” Demands for repatriation force museums to make potentially dangerous qualitative judgements to determine which communities have a right to artifacts, and which do not.

To conclude, the repatriation of indigenous artifacts can not be done without sacrificing their educational value, the wholeness of museums, and safety of the objects.

Is ecotourism *good* for local eco

YES.

Following the Second World War, the emergence of jet airliners as a cheaper and quicker way to travel sparked a surge in tourism worldwide. Among other things, the rise of jet travel made previously inaccessible locales into popular tourist hubs. Especially, it made it easier and more attractive for Americans and Europeans to visit places in order to see nature. This article argues that nature tourism is beneficial to local communities, natural places, and the world.

Take Central America as a case study. Costa Rica and Panama stand out as two of the most popular countries for ecotourism. Both countries came to rely heavily on tourism during the 1990s, and continue to today. Costa Rica, for example, receives between 1.6 million and 3.4 million tourists every year, as reported by the Costa Rican embassy. The Costa Rican tourism industry earns more than 1.7 billion dollars annually, and accounts for nearly 13% of the country's total employment according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The growth of the nature tourism industry maps closely onto a 20% reduction in poverty over the last 30 years, as reported by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) of Costa Rica. Similar relationships occur in Panama, and elsewhere. Tourism and implicated industries are a significant factor in those numbers.

The tourism industry also empowers historically marginalized groups. For instance, the service sector creates employment opportunities for women who would otherwise be confined to domestic roles. Additionally, local tourism industries provide opportunities for self-determination. Local communities can control their own tourism sectors, and so have opportunities for more than just wage labor. Opponents of ecotourism will argue that much of the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica, for example, is owned by large foreign businesses. However, in those regions, land was historically controlled by a small fraction of the people. When Costa Rica was a primarily agricultural economy in the postwar 1900s, 62% of the land was held by 11% of the population. The shift to ecotourism was a lateral move in the worst cases, and a positive move in the best.

Ecotourism provides incentives and funds for environmental conservation efforts. For example, due to the economic value of tourism, Costa Rican rainforests are recovering faster than they are being felled. Nature tourism incentivizes landowners to preserve as much forest on their properties as is possible. The opposite is the case for alternative industries like cattle ranching and rice farming.

As Central America demonstrates, ecotourism is good for the economies, people, and environments of developing countries.



nomies, communities, and nature?

by Oscar Shah



Ecotourism has historically privatized lands that were previously shared by local communities. In much of Costa Rica, pressures by the tourism industry have forced people into ways of life that they did not choose. Prior to the ecotourist boom in the late 1900s, many Costa Rican communities were composed of people who used the forest as their primary source of meat, fruits, fish, and leisure activities. When foreigners and local elites turned sections of forest into tourist destinations, the people who once used it in their regular life were forced to work in the tourist wage-labor system. First hand accounts collected by Ana Isla reflect a sentiment that the quality of life in such regions dramatically worsened. Those same interviews record a loss of biodiversity.

While ecotourism can be beneficial in some cases, it does not make up a majority of the tourism industries in any country. More than half of tourism in Costa Rica can be classified as “soft ecotourism”, a mode of tourism which includes studying nature alongside such activities as beach sun-bathing and zip lining. True ecotourism makes up a minority of tourist activity in even the most popular ecotourism locales. In that context, the benefits of ecotourism are not as significant as the social and environmental cost of the infrastructure and economic systems that are necessary to maintain a tourism industry.

NO.

Ecotourism can be bad for local ecosystems, and it further disadvantages marginalized people. Historically, it has primarily served the interests of tourists and local elites, often at the expense of nature and the broader local populace.

Human development poses significant threats to fragile ecosystems. Since the early 2000s, a fungus called *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Chytrid fungus) has infected amphibian populations around the world. These outbreaks can be linked directly to human activity in those areas. Hotels in the middle of Elfin cloud forest might have been the source of a chytrid outbreak that rendered the once-abundant Golden Toad (*Incilius periglenes*) extinct in only a few years. Other populations of amphibians face similar threats around the world, especially in Central and South America. A number of frog species, most famously in the genus *Atelopus*, have seen the same fate.

Similar stories can be found in many ecotourism hotspots. For example, the introduction of black rats (*Rattus rattus*) by foreign ships to the Galápagos Islands poses a serious threat to the archipelago's endemic biota. Although today's tourism industry in the Galapagos is better regulated than the whaling industry that introduced rats, the thousands of tourist boots that land on Galapagos soil every year pose a legitimate threat. Likewise, in Rwanda and Uganda, there have been multiple reported cases of mountain gorillas being infected with, and dying from, pathogens that were transferred from encounters with tourists.



Is CRISPR tech

AN INTRODUCTION:

by Sofia Monterroso-Rodriguez

CRISPR-Cas9 is a defense system used by prokaryotic bacterito prevent foreign microorganisms such as bacteriophages from harming the prokaryote. If a bacteriophage were to enter the cell, a Cas protein cuts a portion of the viral DNA and inserts it into the CRISPR sequence. From there, the Cas9 protein binds to the RNA copy of the viral DNA sequence and begins to search for a match to the virus. If the bacteriophage returns, Cas9 will identify it as a match to the RNA sequence it is attached to and eliminate the virus swiftly. It was later discovered that this same CRISPR-Cas9 protein could be used in the gene editing process to eliminate undesirable DNA segments.

YES.

by Lauren Butler

Gene editing technology is ethically defensible because the good that can be done using it greatly outweighs the perceived costs. CRISPR/Cas9 is the first technology that can use RNA “guides” to easily and cheaply edit DNA. It is an ethical way to modify embryos in utero.

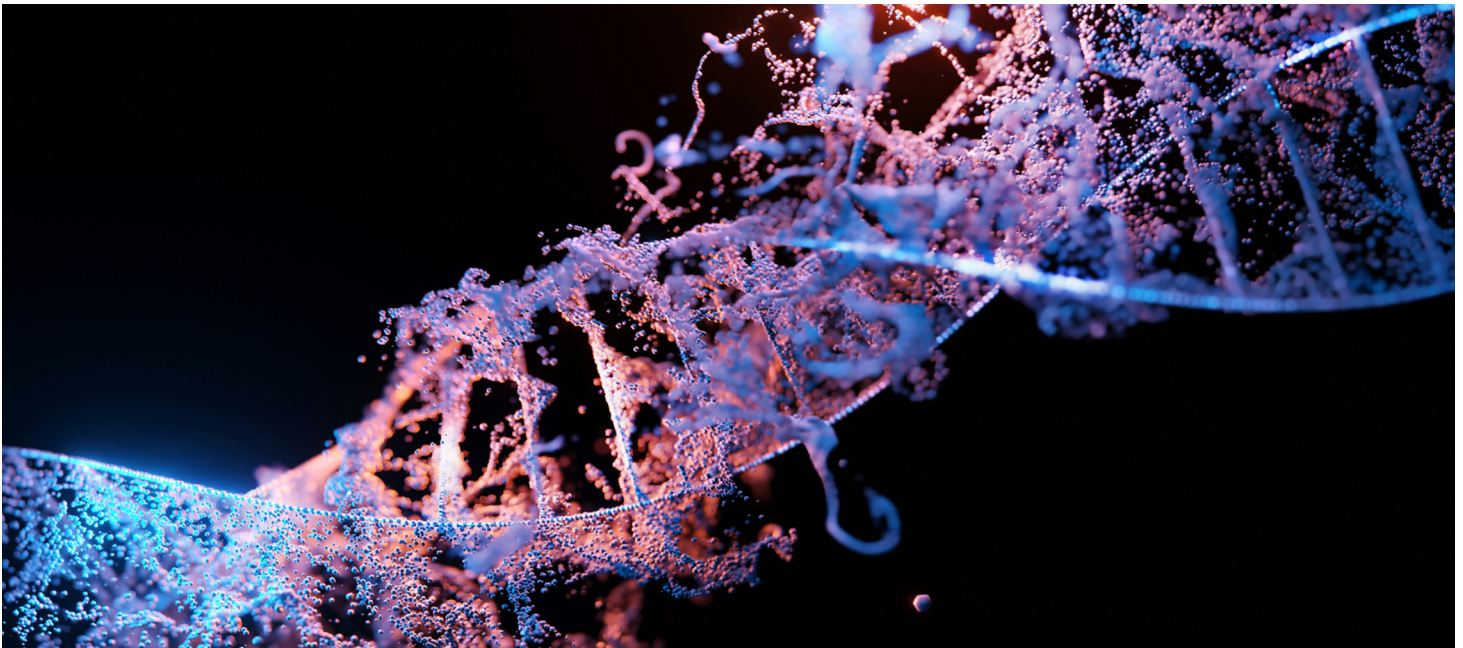
CRISPR can significantly lower the chance of children having birth defects and diseases. In the case that two parents both have a recessive gene for a hereditary disease such as sickle cell anemia, CRISPR can remove the disease from their baby’s genetic makeup, allowing the child to have a better quality of life. CRISPR would give their child the opportunity to grow up without the effects of being born with certain harmful genes. This both treats embryos with unexpected genetic diseases, and allows parents with underlying conditions to safely and ethically conceive a healthy baby.

Gene editing can also be used to enhance the traits of a child. This remains a concern for those against CRISPR

technology, who worry that gene-editing will be used in non life-saving contexts. However, people should have the liberty to employ the technology in whichever way they see fit. For example, if the parents prefer a child with brown hair, then that is their choice to make. Since many physical features can be changed during one’s lifetime, decisions like choosing a child’s hair color do not have a dramatic impact on the child’s life.

Another major concern regarding whether this technology is ethical or not is the bodily autonomy of children. However, with or without CRISPR technology, an unborn child has no agency over their genetic makeup. Furthermore, the option of gene editing remains open to the child if they grow up and prefer to have children with a different genotype.

If we focus on the benefits that CRISPR provides, whether to unborn children, to parents who dream of having children, or to parents who have aesthetic preferences about their children, we can make sure that it maintains ethicality and morality while decreasing the prevalence of diseases that many people have to suffer with simply by cause of their genetics.



Technology ethical?

NO.

by Sofia Monterroso-Rodriguez

For several years, molecular biologists have been changing human DNA sequences through genome editing using Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats technology (CRISPR-Cas9) to correct mutations; However, in recent years, certain concerns regarding the bioethics of this technology have become more prominent. These include its potential to reignite or perpetuate eugenics, and its use in producing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the food industry.

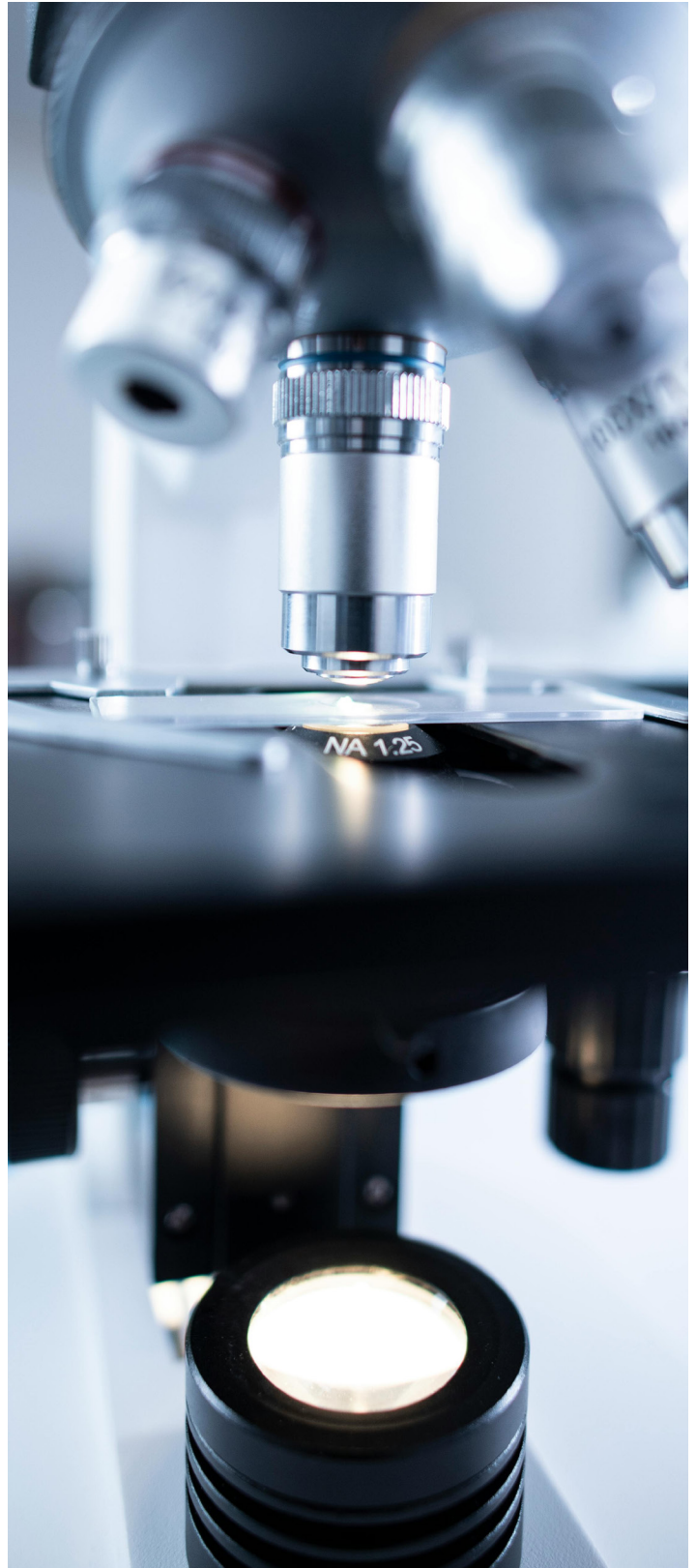
As of now, CRISPR-Cas9 technology is primarily used for the treatment of diseases such as the prevention and treatment of AIDS, cystic fibrosis, and more recently, sickle cell anemia. Its average effectiveness in permanently eliminating and preventing diseases caused by mutations is much higher than most alternative treatments. However, since CRISPR-Cas9 technology allows the user to remove an undesired trait from the DNA sequence, many people are concerned with the future use of this technology.

Ethical concerns arise when socially-deemed undesirable traits are removed for non-health reasons. If future laws allow

it, parents and guardians may soon be able to make decisions for minors and their unborn children about non-life-threatening traits. For example, if a child does not possess a certain athletic gene, access to CRISPR-Cas9 technology allows parents to permanently alter the child's DNA to possess the desired athletic trait. This can also be applied to their complexion, eye color, hair color, height, and any other physical features that are inherited.

Attempts to control human reproduction with the goal of increasing the frequency of certain heritable characteristics regarded as "desirable" veers dangerously close to eugenics. This is a possible outcome if CRISPR-Cas9 technology is granted to parents for use in non-health-related reasons. The potential use of CRISPR-Cas9 technology in the name of eugenics poses major moral and social concerns. For this reason, it is important to establish regulations on the use of CRISPR-Cas9 technology.

It is important to consider whether situations employing CRISPR-Cas9 technology have crossed the standards for ethics in medicine. Since its potential applications would cause significant bioethical issues, gene-editing technology will foster a culture of unethical medicine. Due to its dangerous potential, CRISPR-Cas9 technology is not ethical, and should not be used.



Do GMOs do *more*

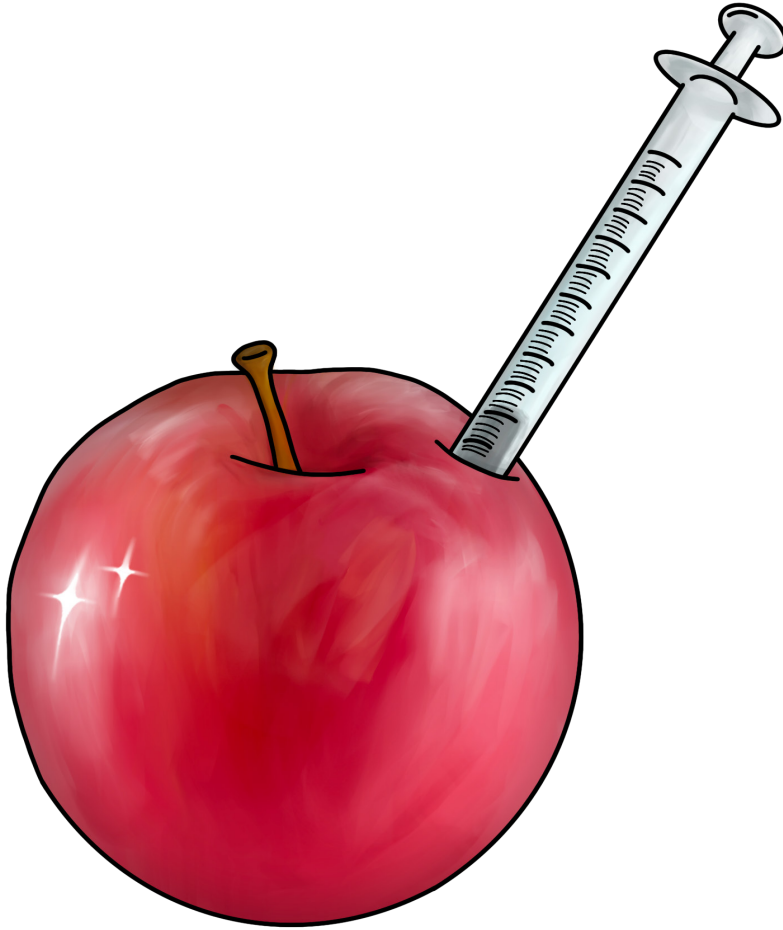


Illustration by Sarah Aaron

YES.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are plants, animals, or any living organism whose genetic information has been altered using various genetic engineering techniques such as gene cloning and design. The production of GMOs is more targeted, which involves inserting a gene or two into a cell instead of the traditional mixing of all the genes from two separate sources. In recent years, there has been disagreement about the use of GMOs. However, amid those debates, it is essential to recognize GMOs' nuanced benefits in food production, the medical field, and the environment.

In 1994, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved and regulated GMO foods for human consumption. Since then, the majority of corn, cotton, and soybeans in the US have been genetically modified. GMO foods have the benefits of added nutrients, cheaper prices, and fewer pesticides. As the price of living increases in many urban areas, access to nutritious food is crucial. GMO foods can be an amazing alternative to their more expensive organic counterparts. Genetically modified crops make up over two million square kilometers of land in over 20 countries globally. Currently, the FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) are collaborating

to ensure the safety of GMOs through rigorous testing and monitoring of their effects on human health and the environment.

GMOs also positively affect the medical field as they can be used to produce pharmaceuticals at cheaper prices to make pharmaceuticals more affordable. These pharmaceuticals include vaccines, antibodies, and therapeutic proteins that can be made in larger quantities through the use of GMOs. In addition to pharmaceuticals, GMOs are also utilized in the production of biopharmaceuticals like insulin, growth hormones, and monoclonal antibodies.

Moreover, GMOs have the ability to impact the environment positively. Farmers using GMOs were able to use fewer herbicides on their farms and produce more crops. As global warming becomes more dangerous, the same benefits will occur for environmental implications. GMO plants can be modified to withstand high temperatures and require less water in areas where there might be droughts or changes to the water supply.

GMOs represent a new innovative tool to aid society in the pursuit of sustainable agriculture, food security, and environmental protection. Genetic engineering can make crops more resilient, nutritious, affordable, and productive. Embracing GMOs with a balanced perspective will create various benefits for humans and the environment.

good than harm?

by Madison Mitchell

NO.

Scientists Rosalind Franklin, James Watson, and Francis Crick made groundbreaking discoveries of DNA structure in 1953, leading to the FDA approving the first consumer Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) product in 1982. The GMO product was insulin, which was a significant development in diabetes treatment. Since then, the applications of GMOs have seen an extensive expansion, reaching far beyond their initial uses. While GMOs are frequently associated with processed foods, they are living beings whose genetic code has been altered in some way. Despite their overemphasized benefits, GMOs present significant risks that outweigh their potential advantages.

The principal negative considerations surrounding GMOs include allergies, sicknesses, and environmental concerns. An example of research linking GMOs to allergies is a New England Journal of Medicine study, conducted in 1996. The researchers in this study tested if a gene from a Brazil nut that was engineered into soybeans would cause people allergic to nuts to have serious reactions to the engineered product, and they found that it did. At least one genetically modified food, a Pioneer Hi-Bred International soybean, was abandoned because of this problem.

Despite the risks associated with GMOs, many consumers are somewhat in the dark about the presence of genetically modified ingredients in their food. In many countries, laws regulating GMOs are either nonexistent or insufficient, making it difficult for consumers to make informed choices about the products they purchase. According to a New York Times article, the United States Department of Agriculture requires that companies label genetically modified foods as “bioengineered or BE.” In addition to that, food makers in the US are given a choice of three disclosure methods: spelling out the information, using a standard icon, or using a QR code that directs consumers to a website with more information. These measures attempt to conceal the presence of GMOs and do not allow consumers to have enough information to make informed decisions about the products they bought.

GMOs are a risky and shortsighted solution to the complex challenges facing agriculture. It is crucial to demand greater transparency, accountability, and regulation of GMOs. Further research on the long-term effects of GMOs is needed to ensure that they do not pose severe risks to consumers.



Is decriminalizing drugs to promote better outcomes potential outcomes

https://www.rawpixel.com/search/prison?page=1&path=_topics&sort=curated

YES.

With drug offenses being the leading cause of arrest in the US, decriminalization has been a topic of intense debate among both Democrats and Republicans. Advocates for legalization argue that it would promote healthier outcomes for current and potential drug users, whereas those against discuss societal and social harms to drug intake. Despite the caveats, however, it is clear that legalization allows for a variety of benefits which outweighs the policy's drawbacks.

Despite living in a world where most drugs are entirely illegal, teenagers and young people are not going to change their outlook on drugs. As drugs are highly addictive and easy to get pressured into using, adolescents will continue to experiment with stigmatized substances. With decriminalization, the only aspect that changes is teenagers' access to safer drugs. Instead of buying drugs from an unsafe outlet where toxicity is never monitored and maintained, young people lose the incentive to buy drugs from an illegal dealer, who may lace the drug with more addictive substances. This trend is increasing all across the world. Because of the United Kingdom's strict drug policies, the purity of opioids in the UK has fallen steeply with over 70 people in the UK dying from a single dose of bacterially infected heroin.

Individuals will always experiment with different substances. In a world where drugs are illegal, seeking out treatment is much harder. Criminalization perpetuates

stigma against drug users, often preventing individuals from accessing the care and support they need. Adolescents with severe addiction often experience a large amount of stigma regarding drug abuse, as society views drug abuse as a moral failure rather than a public health concern. Individuals are more likely to seek treatment and support services when the fear of penalization has decreased, leading to improved health outcomes and reduced rates of overdose. For instance, JAMA Pediatrics in a 2019 study analyzed the effects of marijuana legalization on adolescent treatment rates in Colorado, where recreational marijuana use was legalized in 2012. The researchers found that the rate of adolescent admissions to substance abuse treatment facilities for marijuana use increased significantly following legalization.

Finally, legalizing drugs not only impacts one's safety on an individual level but can also improve structural governmental reforms within communities. Because police forces no longer need to focus on prosecuting drug offenses, they can redirect their efforts into public safety issues that are more pressing. By doing this, they are able to focus on more violent crime, and build community within neighborhoods.

Ultimately, as trends among current and future drug users remain constant, it is important to consider how criminalizing drugs increases crime rates, harms individuals, and ultimately wastes government resources. Because of these reasons, individuals will be much safer under a system of drug legalization.

Drugs an effective way comes for current and drug users?

by Sarina Shah

NO.

With drug use increasing drastically in the US, concern is already mounting over a potential surge in drug overdose, abuse, and addiction. Hence, the public continues to debate how best to respond to the drug problem, making it a large topic of contention in the 2024 election. Many observers believe that the solution is to enforce tougher penalties in deterring suppliers and consumers of illicit substances, while others believe that the solution is less regulation. Considering the current trend of adolescent drug abuse, however, it is much safer to increase regulation on the sale of illicit drugs.

While marijuana has already been legalized in different states across the US, opening up the policy to more dangerous drugs—such as heroin or even fentanyl—would have devastating consequences. The prices of these toxic drugs would be reduced significantly, with needles and powders being available almost at every store. Companies, with their main goal to maximize profit, would no longer avoid using illicit contents in their products. For instance, a study published in the journal *Health Affairs* in 2017 found that the prices of medical cannabis fell after states decreased regulation on marijuana. The study found that prices decreased by an average of 1.1 percent per month after the implementation of this policy.

Due to the perceptual expansion of the market, more teenagers are beginning to believe that using drugs is safe or normal. Decriminalization may send a message

that drug use is acceptable or less risky, leading to higher rates of experimentation and addiction. Moreover, increased availability of drugs could exacerbate public health risks, including overdose deaths and the spread of infectious diseases. Since decriminalization removes the legal consequences for possession and consumption, users believe there are no repercussions to their actions, thereby abusing illicit contents even more. For instance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) finds that the legalization of cannabis in certain parts of the world has actually accelerated daily use and health related impacts.

Moreover, while the common narrative and argument to drug legalization is often prevention of black market sales, passing this policy would only expand the black market. While the prices of traditional drugs will go down due to legalization, the black market will continue to sell the same products at a cheaper price, laced with more dangerous products—only now, the government will not allocate resources to address these black market sales. In fact, even many consumers who know that legalized drug vendors are safer will most likely continue to shop on the black market, simply because the vast majority of users will look for the cheapest drugs. Ultimately, because legalization of the drug market only results in less governmental action and regulation—regulations that are necessary to deter a drug epidemic—it is important that we strengthen, not decrease, regulations surrounding illicit drugs.

SHOULD THE US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REGULATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

YES.

The US federal government should regulate speech on social media platforms. In recent years, social media platforms have become many people's primary avenues for communication, information dissemination, and public discourse. However, with this rise in digital connectivity comes a host of challenges, including the proliferation of harmful speech, misinformation, and online harassment. In light of these concerns, the United States federal government must intervene and regulate speech on social media platforms.

Social media platforms, despite being private entities, hold significant power in shaping public discourse and influencing societal dynamics. With billions of users worldwide, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube serve as virtual "town squares" where individuals exchange ideas, engage in debates, and express their opinions. Consequently, the unchecked spread of hate speech, incitement to violence, and misinformation can have far-reaching consequences for democracy and social cohesion.

By regulating speech on social media platforms, the federal government can fulfill its obligation to protect the fundamental rights and liberties of its citizens. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, but it is not an absolute right. Regulation would establish clear guidelines and boundaries, ensuring that while individuals can express themselves freely, they do not infringe upon the rights and safety of others.

Moreover, regulating speech on social media platforms is crucial for safeguarding public health and safety. The spread of misinformation, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, poses significant risks to public health efforts and undermines trust in sources of authority. From false claims about vaccine safety to conspiracy theories about the origins of the virus, unchecked misinformation can have deadly consequences, such as encouraging citizens to stay unvaccinated, which can be deadly in a pandemic. Government intervention is necessary

to hold platforms accountable for mitigating the spread of false information and promoting fact-based discourse.

Furthermore, the absence of government regulation has allowed social media platforms to operate with impunity, often prioritizing profit over public good. Because misinformation often results in more clicks and engagement, platforms profit more from misinformation. By establishing clear regulatory standards, the government can hold platforms accountable for their content moderation practices and ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. This would foster greater trust among users and promote a healthier online environment

conducive to robust debate and civic engagement.

Critics of government regulation often argue that it would infringe upon free speech rights and stifle innovation and expression online. However, it is essential to recognize that regulation can be implemented in a manner that balances these concerns while prioritizing the protection of individuals and society. By working



Illustration by Sarah Aaron

collaboratively with stakeholders, including tech companies, civil society organizations, and legal experts, the government can develop effective regulatory frameworks that uphold free speech while addressing the harms associated with unchecked online speech.

In conclusion, the United States federal government has a responsibility to regulate speech on social media platforms to protect the rights, safety, and well-being of its citizens. By establishing clear guidelines, promoting transparency, and holding platforms accountable, regulation can mitigate the harmful effects of unchecked online speech while upholding the principles of free expression and democratic values. It is time for policymakers to act decisively to ensure that the digital public remains a space where all voices can be heard without fear of harm or discrimination.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

By Gillian Ho

NO.

Governments worldwide are grappling with the question of whether to regulate social media platforms.

While there are valid concerns about issues such as misinformation, hate speech, and privacy breaches, regulating social media without due consideration of free speech can have serious consequences. The government should approach social media regulation cautiously and avoid infringing on free speech rights.

Firstly, imposing excessive regulations on social media platforms can stifle innovation and creativity. These platforms have been instrumental in fostering new forms of communication, business models, and artistic expression. For example, YouTube has empowered countless content creators to build careers and communities around their passions, from educational channels to music and entertainment. Overregulation could hinder these opportunities and limit the diversity of voices online.

Second, strict government control over social media content can lead to censorship and the suppression of dissenting opinions. In countries where social media is heavily regulated such as China, where platforms like WeChat and Weibo are closely monitored, content deemed politically sensitive or critical of the government is often censored. This restricts citizens' ability to freely express themselves and engage in open discourse, undermining democratic principles. Government regulation can create a chilling effect on free speech, discouraging individuals from sharing controversial or unpopular views. People may self-censor out of fear of facing social repercussions. This limits the diversity of perspectives and hampers the exchange of ideas crucial for a vibrant and informed society.

Additionally, regulatory measures aimed at curbing specific types of content, such as hate speech or fake news, can be challenging to enforce effectively without infringing on legitimate speech. The definition of what constitutes hate speech, for instance, can vary widely depending on cultural, social, and political contexts. Implementing blanket restrictions without nuanced consideration can result in arbitrary censorship and undermine the principles of free expression.

Moreover, government intervention in social media regulation raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and potential abuse of power. Decisions about what content should be allowed or removed can be influenced by political agendas, corporate interests, or

biases inherent in moderation algorithms. Without robust safeguards and oversight mechanisms, there is a risk of unfair or discriminatory practices that undermine users' rights.



In conclusion, while there are legitimate concerns about the impact of social media on society, governments must tread carefully when considering regulation. Balancing the need to address harmful content with safeguarding free speech is essential to preserve the openness, diversity, and democratic values that underpin the digital landscape. Collaborative approaches involving stakeholders from government, industry, civil society, and academia are crucial to developing effective and ethical solutions that protect both users' rights and the integrity of online platforms.

Which is better watching movies in the theater



Valeria Huerta: Aashna—do you think that watching movies in theaters is a better experience than watching movies at home?

Aashna Hari: I think there's no question that watching movies in the theater is better than watching them at home.

Valeria: Why is that?

Aashna: Think about all the different options you have in theaters. You can watch a movie normally, or in 3D, or even 4D. You can feel the effects of the movie. You feel more immersed in the movie when the sound makes your seat shudder. You can't get that from a home movie experience.

Valeria: That's true, but I think watching movies at home gives you a certain comfort that isn't possible in a theater. For example, your couch is probably more comfortable than most theater seats. Also, you can pause the movie and get up anytime to get your snacks of choice without worrying about

missing a key moment. And what if you need to use the restroom? You can't get up in the movie theater without disturbing the entire audience. It's embarrassing! But at home, you can get up anytime you want without worrying about tripping over someone's feet, making too much noise, or missing an important part of the movie. From your sofa, you have full control of the experience. You can skip, rewind, or pause it whenever you want. Also, you can put captions on movies. Sometimes I find it difficult to understand what the characters on screen are saying, but in movie theaters you just have to deal with it and hope you can figure out what's going on from visual cues. At home, you can put subtitles on. It just makes movies more accessible for everyone.

Is better: the theater or at home?

Aashna Hari and Valeria Huerta

Aashna: I mean, yeah, that's definitely true. I understand why captions can be a problem, but I think that the atmosphere of watching a movie at home is just not the same as watching it in a movie theater. Consider: the screen is the size of a wall; the sound is a lot louder and has much better quality than what a home television is capable of. And it's also just a nice social activity to go out and watch a movie. You don't get the same communal experience at home.

Valeria: At the same time though, I think that by watching a movie at home, you can get a different type of experience with your friends. You can even talk during the movie! (Heaven forbid you so much as cough in the theater.) It can sometimes be more fun to have the movie playing in the background. It

can serve as social scaffolding. Also, you have to pay 20-30 bucks if you want to watch a movie in theaters. Streaming services offer better value.

Aashna: Yeah, sure—I agree with that. But streaming services usually don't have recent movies. If you only watch movies at home, you might miss out on the period when the movie is most popular and culturally relevant.

Valeria: Wow! Look at the time. Well, I'm going to go watch something on Netflix.

Aashna: And if you need me, I'll be at the movie theater.



Was it wrong for the director to not get a “Best Director” nomination?

Nikita: Clara, what do you think about Greta Gerwig not receiving an Oscar nomination for “Best Director” for her work in the “Barbie” movie?

Clara: I think that Greta Gerwig not being nominated as “Best Director” for the “Barbie” movie is a complete snub. It undermined the work that she did in “Barbie” and how it tackled complex themes of misogyny within our society.

Nikita: Interesting. Is the “Best Director” award supposed to go to the director that best directs the movie or is it supposed to be about the content of the movie?

Clara: It's supposed to be a mix of both, and I think Gerwig excelled in both areas. First, Gerwig did a wonderful job casting Barbie and Ken as Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling. She really brought the Barbie world to life, and produced the “Barbie” aesthetic, through costume and set design, in a way that really brought the Barbie world to life. She did this while staying true to the “Barbie” theme. She was able to develop a covert theme of feminism behind the simple pink world of Barbie Land.

Nikita: All the things you're mentioning don't seem like director-specific criteria. For example, you mentioned casting. That's not a director's job. That's a casting director's role. You mentioned costumes. That's a costume director's role. You mentioned the actual content of the movie and the themes it produces. Those are all the roles of a screenwriter and playwright. The director themselves is closer to the executive to ensure the movie actually gets off the ground. So while I agree with you that the movie excelled in some areas, it didn't seem like it excelled directly in the area which Greta Gerwig would be nominated for.

Clara: Yes, there are smaller positions that carried out those aspects, such as set design and costumes. However, Greta's vision

launched this movie off the ground. The people in the smaller roles carried out her vision. So, it was really her idea that reigned throughout.

Nikita: I see. I still doubt the “Barbie” movie was revolutionary in terms of feminist media. I don't see it as spreading awareness for an issue that isn't already talked about. If anything, it was just a very surface-level introduction to what misogyny is, and I don't think that it even tackled that. It pitted women and men against each other through the conflict of Barbie Land versus Ken Land. At the end of the movie, the Barbies didn't even allow one of the Ken to be on the new all-female Supreme Court. So, if anything, it almost painted feminism in a negative way, like a zero-sum game.

Clara: First, to address your comment about how “Barbie” tackles feminism on a more surface level, a lot of people are not fortunate enough to be educated in that sense. Many are thoroughly against the feminist movement, because they don't think that women are oppressed. So bringing out the surface level feminist movement to mass audiences is essential to tackle deeper feminist issues. And because it was advertised as the “Barbie” movie, it was also able to generate a wider range of audiences. And that in itself is a good way to spread the message of feminism and introduce the public to the topic of feminism, because a lot of little girls are not even aware of what feminism is.

Nikita: So is it more important for the director of the “Barbie” movie to get nominated over other directors that directed movies about other issues? For example, one of the directors that was nominated was Martin Scorsese, the director for “Killers of the Flower Moon”, a film that discussed colonialism and how settlers intruded on indigenous lands. Do you think the “Barbie” movie deserved to be nominated over other

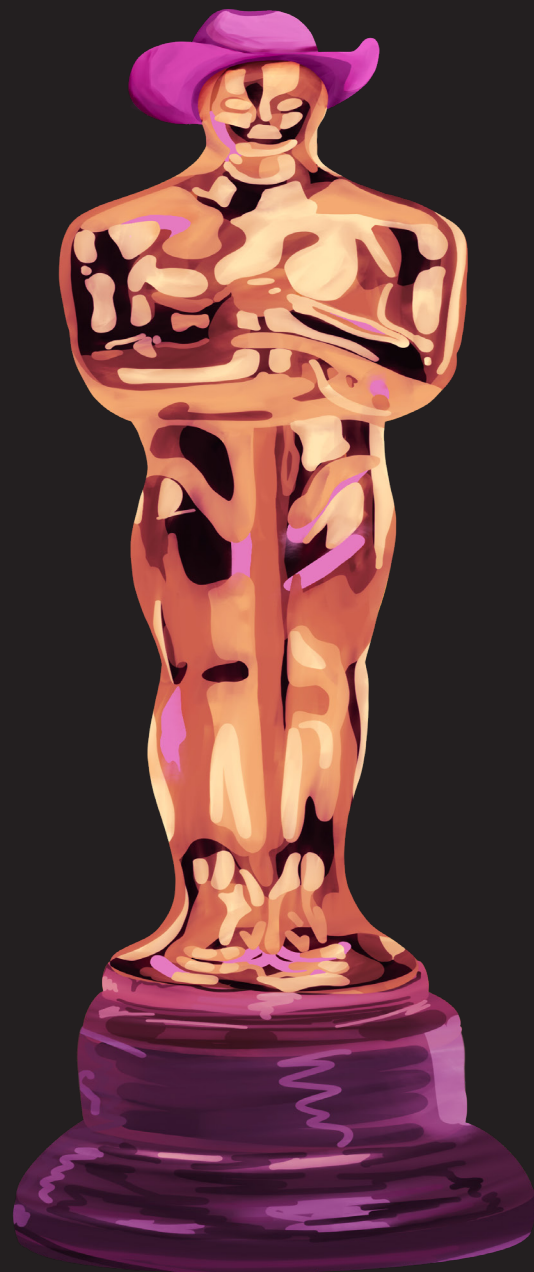
Director of Barbie to not win Oscar nomination?

Clara Medeiros and Nikita Pande

Clara: I don't necessarily believe Gerwig should have been a replacement for any of those directors as they also did a great job in their respective movies. But, I do think that the "Barbie movie" should have been part of the conversation and that Greta Gerwig should've been recognized as Best Director because it was titled as the "Barbie" movie and because the public saw it as part of the feminist agenda. People dismissed the movie as something that didn't tackle an issue serious enough to be considered for an Academy Award. For example, the comedian Jo Koy made a lot of jokes about "Barbie," which undermined what the whole message was about, and overall proved the movie's point about how men don't really take women seriously in any industry.

Nikita: Do you believe the Academy Awards should support a feminist agenda or should they mostly reflect on general public reception? The "Barbie movie" had a huge mixed reaction, and not everyone enjoyed it. Not even a lot of women enjoyed it. So, do you think it's more important for the Academy to support more progressive agendas or to just reflect what the public liked?

Clara: It's not the Oscars' job to consider any of those things. It's their job to consider how the director carried out their vision. Greta Gerwig explicitly said what her original vision for her project was, and she ultimately carried it out. She got people talking about feminism and the underlying themes within "Barbie". That was something that Greta Gerwig achieved herself, and that was something she should have been recognized for. But the Academy Awards nomination completely undermined her job in doing that.



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